

Oh my God!

A pew-sitter gives up on the "Organizational" God
and starts from scratch:
"Are God and the Bible understandable for ordinary people?"

The most astonishing expose on God in terms
your fifth-grader can understand
that's ever been published.

by Paul Cinquemani



What a treat! Get Ready Readers! "OH MY GOD!" is an extraordinary update of the long forgotten story of God as taught in the 19th century! "Sounds boring..." , you say? It's anything but boring! How prominent theologians, TV Evangelists, members of the ministry, priests, etc. have missed and lost such an important view is scandalous! Mr. Cinquemani's familiarity with the Bible and his ability to relate the hardest, most disgusting passages contained in it to the constant, unchanging love of God is astounding! "The Gospel according to a CPA!" A simple, humble laymen lays out in these pages the God we're all looking for! Of course, he fails in making his work readily "understandable by a fifth-grader". But his approach is based upon a simple premise and his presentation is direct...in mostly common everyday language...making the topic fun and retentive. The reason it seems so hard in the first going is because of the preconceived ideas put in our heads by our early acquaintance with religion.

This book is amazing! If you are in pursuit of "the truth about God"; if you can keep an open mind to use common sense in your approach to spiritual things...whether you're churchied, free-lancing it, or looking for something you can buy into...**Give This a Try!** This view of God is refreshing, I want so badly to believe it...it's too good to be true! But it makes so much sense! Why didn't someone show this to me sooner?

- Ruthie Cinquemani
(Paul's mother)

"Nice book. I really like this guy's first name! But if you're after the truth about God, just read my letter to the Romans already."

- The Apostle Paul

"Pretty simple. It seems to miss a lot of the imagery though. I liked my stuff better, what with Seraphims with four heads each facing a different direction and wings on all sides. And the throne that moved around with wheels within wheels that had eyes all over them. I think that was more exciting."

- Ezekiel

"Not bad."

- Moses

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**The most astonishing expose on God in terms
your fifth-grader can understand
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(ok...maybe that your 8th-grader can understand)

by

Paul Cinquemani,
who gives all the credit to a friend and mentor

Special thanks to Ann Kleinhans for
the cover design

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Paul Cinquemani

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*“The pages of truth! If you belong to a church, are a free spirit and
are searching for meaning...give (this) a try!”*
Katy Vopal, The Waukesha Freeman

“ Pat Robertson “

“ Billy Graham “

“ Robert Schuller “

“ “ and “ “

Pope John Paul II

I wish I could say almost everyone was speechless! Fact is...hardly
anyone of any influence has read this book yet.

Warning---Warning---Warning: Read Before Going Further!

Alright, alright: it's not an FBI warning like you get at the front of your video tapes and DVD's. But it is intended for your own good.

This is an unusual book that will take you to an unusual place. How long it takes or whether you will arrive at all, for that matter, depends on your patience and perseverance. Please follow these guidelines:

- Read the preface, don't ignore it. It's important.
- Each chapter builds on what went before it. You won't understand a future chapter if you haven't read what precedes it.
- There's a theme to this book that you may not recognize until seven or eight chapters have gone by. You may wonder where on Earth this is going until then. Stick with it. When you get the "big picture", it will put a smile on your soul.
- This is different than what most, if not all, organized religions teach from the Bible. Stick with it please! When you get the "big picture", it will put such a smile on your soul.
- This book has been tested on a variety of groups. Those having read it all have been astounded. Most aren't willing to build the foundational chapters to get its full benefit. Those that have are extremely pleased with the investment...so
- DON'T BUY THIS IF YOU'RE NOT GONNA READ IT ALL!

"You shall know the truth; and the truth shall set you free!"

John 8:32

“Oh, my God!” –

God’s character and the way He runs His Universe

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PREFACE

No matter how I try...I can't exactly pinpoint the beginnings of this book. I know that a great many people had an influence on it. I came up the "usual" way as a kid of the fifties and sixties. Talk about the age of "innocence" meeting up with the age of "anti-establishment". From the first of my memories until now, I've always been influenced by a form of spirituality. My mother took me to church almost as a toddler. I was fed the same stuff most my peers were by their churches. As I got a little older, I sampled some of my peers' churches. For the most part, I confirmed we were pretty much getting the same stuff. We differed on some issues, but in general we were taught to be good or we'd go to hell...or be punished in some other way by a God that got a lot angrier than my father ever did (and dad could get pretty teed off).

My parents mustered the money to send me to a church-based high school and then on to a church-based college. There I learned more of the same...only deeper and more convoluted. Along came marriage, two kids of my own and the military draft and then another kid! The specter of Viet Nam scared me more than the "hell" of religion did. I got fortunate in being stationed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. That's when the "enlightenment" period of my life started. I investigated dope and eastern religions. They seemed to go together somehow. I also restarted my MBA at George Washington University. Upon release from the Army and graduation, I started a career in accounting at Arthur Andersen and Co. as a tax guy. Ah yes...yet another religion.

The religion of "work" lasted me a lot longer than any I'd tried up to that point (quite a few I might add). I finally found "truth". Work hard, get ahead, get stuff and die happy. I really enjoyed being a CPA...but it really didn't bring me any closer to God. "Why did I have to get closer to God?" you ask. I don't know really. It was something inside that drove me. No matter how hard I worked...how far I'd go...how much stuff I had...something was missing. I suppose I ought to mention my wife in all this. She hung with me while I went through all my "phases". She never had any phases. She just loved me to pieces and remained the constant in my life. I came to admire what she had going for her...so I decided to give it another try. I joined my wife's church. I studied the Bible with a friend who was an engineer. Let me tell you something: this guy had a steel trap for a mind. He

knew the Bible inside and out. It was doing something for him too. I knew him for many years and I saw the way his life changed...how contented he had become...at peace. So I learned what was in the Bible and I signed on. It made for a good scene for my family. We all went to church together...typical Mid-American value system. But something still was missing. I didn't know what.

Guilt and an internal need for penance drove me to give up my career in public accounting...to "dedicate my talents" to the church. I went to work for the church's healthcare system. I thought that if I could contribute to profitability in this way I could somehow advance Christianity. I discovered an entire subculture within the church...quite the opposite of what I was expecting. There were all kinds of controversies and factions there. I read numerous authors about varying theological issues. I attended the church's high committee meetings and mingled with its leaders. Some were inspirational. Others weren't exactly (if you've seen and remember the old Hertz commercial). I left that work and joined similar work for other denominations, only to discover the same general thread of disappointment that existed in my own church.

Now we come to the general time frame for the inspiration for this book. I returned home to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to put down some roots. Joanie (my wife) and I had lived in about 14 different places by this time (from San Antonio to Washington, D.C. to Seattle to Chicago and points in between). She wanted to spend time with our parents while we had the chance. So I'd come full circle and started attending the church I had first attended when I was nine years old. A lot of water had gone under the bridge by that time. A little wisdom had settled in, but there was still something missing. My baby sister (now a physician in Cleveland) started it all. She started asking me questions about my beliefs. When I answered her (if I could), she showed me where my ideas or concepts didn't make sense. It frosted me at first. I thought I had come so far. For her to poke holes in my religion...in my spiritual beliefs...was not a little mortifying! OK, ok... she was a pretty sharp kid...woman. I had to give her that. I found myself asking her more about how she thought and where she'd learned it. She "turned me on" to a minister in California that she had come to respect during her days in medical school out there. I discovered that he narrated some tapes weekly from what you might call his "Sunday School" classes. I ordered some and drank it in.

Turns out this minister was one of several sons of a guy renowned in the 1940s and 1950s as "Uncle Arthur". Uncle Arthur

wrote a whole series of Bible Stories for kids. I remember my mom reading them to me a long, long time ago. Well this minister, like Jesus, discovered God the Father through these stories. It is knowledge unlike any I've heard. I waited for him to put out a book about it. He lectured all over the place on the topic. His own denomination didn't particularly "honor" him for this knowledge nor encourage him in his promotion of it. He's an English guy...very prim and proper if you know what I mean. He doesn't exactly connect with today's secular person. But he presented a picture of God that lit up my life! Somewhere in there, I decided to put this book together. But I have to tell you, dear reader, that I'm "borrowing heavy" from this man. At least seventy-five to eighty percent of this book is material that he has brought to my attention...as well as to the attention of a great many others. Most all the people he has reached, however, have been people in his denomination. This knowledge is way too important to hide within denominationalism. Even if he had come out with a book of some sort like this, it's likely to have been circulated just within his own denomination.

So...here it is. Your life will be changed after reading this book. I'm not being arrogant or pompous when I say that. I take no credit for or property claim to this revelation. I'm just a MBA/CPA with no particular credentials in religion. My only qualifications to bring this to you are as follows: 1) I am a student of the Bible; 2) I am a seeker of truth; 3) I realize that everyone is responsible for his/her own relationship with God; 4) I'm coming to love people as Jesus did...although I have a long way to go; 5) I want the world to have and know what I have and know that has made such a difference in my life; and 6) I have the ability to spread other people's ideas that have been a blessing to me. Lest you think I'm in this for the money, let's all have a ripping good laugh at the idea that this will become a best seller! It took 8 months to market the first printing (500 copies)! Do you know how hard it is to even talk about this stuff to people? People in the United States don't need God. They're doing just fine without Him...on their own. To reinforce the point, however, you can xerox this book and hand it out to whomever you want with my permission and admonition. For those of you that want to pay, I'll try to price this as reasonably as I can. The more people that know this, the better off we'll all be. Welcome to the thrill of a lifetime!

Welcome! Glad you decided to give this a read!

This book is written for those in search of truth, whether Christian, Jew, Muslim, Mormon, Hindu, Jehovah's Witness, Spiritist, Buddhist, atheistic, or agnostic (not sure what you believe). You should be warned that it is based upon the Bible as evidence or a testament of Who God is. There are many difficult passages in the Bible that have caused many to reject it as a credible source about God. Many see a wide disparity in the God of the Old Testament compared to the God of the New Testament. Many have gone through some pretty weird mental gymnastics to deal with these problems. Even more have just plain given up.

A wise mentor by the name of Graham Maxwell once said to me: "If your religion doesn't make sense...it's the wrong religion". That statement was probably the single most welcome challenge I ever considered in my quest for truth. Everyone has a religion they follow, whether they admit it or not. Webster defines it as "a personal set of attitudes, beliefs and practices". Everyone has those. Everyone believes in God too...though the god varies. Some believe they themselves are god. A great many people believe this even though they're unaware of it.

This book will provide you with the tools necessary to put any and every Bible story or passage into a context that will make sense and harmonize with the theme of God's character as one of love throughout the Bible. It does require some block-building, so let's get underway.

For many, if not all, of you...this adventure will require more than an open mind. It will challenge you to "unlearn" a great many things you were taught about God and the Bible in the past...if you learned anything about it at all. Those of you with a minimal, if any, acquaintance with the Bible may have the least trouble grasping these concepts. That may irritate some of you "long-in-the-tooth" Christians that have read the Bible many times over, but you'll know what I'm talking about in a few chapters. It may encourage those of you who never read the Bible or don't think you know much about it. Good!

One more caveat: this book makes an effort to simplify things. The way to God IS simple. Theologians have made it far too complicated. That was Jesus' message when He was here. Having said that, we will try to use verbiage and explanations that a fifth or sixth-grader can understand. This is in no way meant to insult anyone. It's just a barometer. If we get that wrapped up in it...we're getting too complicated and we risk coming full circle. With that in mind, and to set the stage, we'll only use one simple definition for "sin" in this book. It is nothing more than to be separated from God. Got that? Memorize it! Even Webster agrees with that! All the other gobbledygook, the lists of what is a sin and what isn't...or what is a mortal sin and what is a venial sin, etc. we'll leave behind. Those are just activities that lead you to separate yourself from God.

OK, then, let's go!

Chapter # 1:

The War That Started It All

Let's start by taking another look at the Biblical basis for understanding the "plan of salvation" as God's provision for restoring peace in the universe. That statement implies that peace in the universe was somehow interrupted or interfered with. Did that happen? When? Where? Under what circumstances?? Sound intriguing? It's in the Bible, and we'll look at it. Everything in this book will be approached from this perspective: examining God in light of the UNIVERSE-WIDE controversy over His character and the way He runs things.

I wish God Himself could bring this to us in person and answer all the questions we'd be so anxious to ask. Where might we get insight into what that would be like? Might as well get you thinking in these terms right now. The Bible has reference to how God would bring this to us in person because He was here in person! As a matter of fact, the very same God who came in person in the New Testament was the same God of the Old Testament who created the earth:

John 1: 1-4; 10-14 (Good News Bible – GNB): "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; He was with God, and He was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through Him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without Him. The Word was the Source of life, and this life brought light to mankind...The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own country, but His own people did not receive Him. Some, however, did receive Him and believed in Him; so He gave them the right to become God's children. They did not become God's children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a human father; God himself was their Father. The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw His glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only son."

It is interesting to note here that the Greek word for "glory" as used above is "doxa". It refers to a person's dignity and honor by reputation, his character. We'll refer to this often in this book.

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So then, as with so many questions we have about God the Father, a hint as to what He might be like or the way He might act may be obtained by looking at the example His Son set. We'll refer to this a lot too!

How did God approach issues and questions like this when He was here in person for 33½ years? Did He make an entry with pomp and circumstance, commanding respect through His regal bearing and majesty? Did He intimidate people with a display of His power? Did He harangue crowds with dictatorial pronouncements? Did He make any claims of infallibility?

If we let our imaginations run a little, we might picture God sitting us all down for a talk, just like Jesus did when He had talks with people. He sat and talked or lectured, as was the custom of the teachers of the day. He might begin with the words from an appropriate and popular film that many of us could relate to – STAR WARS: “Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away there arose an evil knight who grew in power so great that he eventually presumed to challenge the Force.”

Yes, this God...so gracious to us who have misbehaved...went through an incredible turmoil in His family...a conflict that grew into a WAR! The Bible recounts this for us in REV. 12: 7-12:

“Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, who fought back with his angels; but the dragon was defeated, and he and his angels were not allowed to stay in heaven any longer. The huge dragon was thrown out—that ancient serpent, named the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, ‘Now God’s salvation has come! Now God has shown His power as King! Now His Messiah has shown His authority! For the one who stood before our God and accused our brothers day and night has been thrown out of heaven. Our brothers won the victory over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the truth

The War That Started It All

which they proclaimed; and they were willing to give up their lives and die. And so be glad you heavens and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left.” (GNB)

Quite a number of things jump out at you here: Michael; Dragon; War; Serpent; Deceived the whole world; Thrown down to Earth; God’s power shown; Accuser thrown out of heaven; Brothers won the victory! Talk about a family feud! A quick check of the concordance shows us that the Greek word for “world” above (oikoumene) is a derivative of the word for “family”...as is the reference to us as brothers in this passage.

This reference to a “war” in heaven was, at one time, popularly taught throughout all Christian faiths. Books, such as Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and Dante’s “Inferno”, were considered popular reading. Over time we have become more “sophisticated” as a society. The concept of a “devil” in conflict with God came to be treated as a fairy tale. The role and perception of God and Satan as a reality has changed dramatically. People in general question the existence of the devil and therefore blame God for all the difficulty in the world (check your homeowner’s insurance policy for example). Such “advancement” and “developed thinking” has also called the Bible itself into question as an authoritative documentation on the history of God’s interaction with people. We will talk about this more later.

It is well to consider what heaven was like BEFORE the war referred to above. There was peace...perfect trust and freedom. But something happened...a breach in the trust...and sin (separation from God) entered the universe. Isn’t it interesting to note that this happened long before Earth or mankind was created? “Original” sin occurred in heaven itself! So, this is not all about US! We’re involved in something cosmic here!

The Bible speaks of a great angel, moved by jealousy and pride...the most brilliant of all God’s creatures...the one described in Ezekiel 28 as standing in the very presence of God...the one described in Isaiah 14 as a bearer of light (hence the name “Lucifer”), teacher of

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truth...who thought he could get along just fine, even do better, without God. He was called “Daystar”...one of the very names of Jesus Christ Himself. This revered angel set out to spread misinformation and lies about our Heavenly Father...thus he became the “bearer of lies”...the Adversary (meaning of the name “Satan”, also means “accuser”). He’s not to be called “Lucifer” any longer. His work and charges against God in heaven were as follows:

- He used his influence to insinuate God is an untrustworthy liar
- He charged that God was arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe (A.V.E.U.S.)
- He hoped by these deceptions to win the loyalty and worship of the universe to himself!

SOUNDS PRETTY INCREDIBLE DOESN’T IT??

A creature presumes to think of himself as God and suggests that angels worship him!! Satan IS capable of this insanity. The Bible alludes to it in Isaiah 14: 12-14. He is called Lucifer or Day Star depending on what version you are reading. In Revelation 2:28 he’s called the morning star.

He even had the temerity to ask his Creator to get down on His knees in the wilderness of temptation and worship His own creature! The story is in Matthew 4: 8-11. The angels were watching that whole thing! They must’ve been stunned to see one of their own ask God to do that!

As to Satan’s charge that God is selfish and an untrustworthy liar, as he represented to the angels, he wasted no time impressing this on our first parents...Adam and Eve. That story is in Genesis 3: 1-5.

God bore long and patiently as He watched this uprising take place in His family! He watched until fully one-third of His brilliant and intelligent angels took sides with Satan! These all agreed that God was not worthy of their trust!

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GET THIS NOW...AN IMPORTANT AND FOUNDATIONAL POINT:

Even God...though infinite in power...could NOT persuade a third of His brilliant Angels that Satan's charges were FALSE!

Think about that one a bit...it deserves a little time in your mind.

And so...War broke out in heaven. Like it or not (believe it or not for that matter), you're involved! **EVERYTHING** depends on the outcome of this War! **EVERYTHING** depends on the successful resolution to this conflict of distrust. Compared to God's solution to THIS problem...our own personal salvation (as important as that is) is relatively inconsequential! That's a startling statement, I know, but if God doesn't win this War...who'd WANT to be saved? Just what would salvation mean if God should lose the conflict of distrust?

HOWEVER: it doesn't leave out our salvation for God to win this War...because THE WAY in which God has worked to win you and me is THE WAY in which He has won the War! These "cosmic" or "larger view" concepts are a bit difficult to get at first, but it will all come together as we go along...please trust me on it.

Even if God should fail to win you and me, the methods that He has used to persuade us that He CAN be trusted...and to win us back to repentance and faith...are what have led the universe to tell Him that He is

Absolutely Trustworthy!

This praise is found in the great celebration after Christ's death on the cross contained in Revelation chapters 4 & 5. As much as God wants to save ALL of us, He could fail...and He's still won that War!

But all that happened two thousand years ago...why are we still here? The answer to that is all over that mysterious book of Revelation and the conclusion is woven throughout the entire Bible:

WE MATTER!

God had yet to reconcile us back to Himself! Satan has been ferociously working against this, and we'll find out exactly why later.

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That last book God sent was meant to be an encouragement to the early Christians and to us. The invitation in the book of Revelation is to join the winning side!

The highest privilege we can have as friends of God’s is to stand up for His Character and Government in the face of all opposition on this earth: LIVE RIGHT BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE IT !!

As new citizens...we tend to be pre-occupied with what God has done for us...that we might be saved. But as we grow, we learn to view the Bible as a whole. It becomes apparent that our own personal salvation is only a small part of a much larger plan that involves the peace and security of the universe: **the confirmation of the truth about our God Himself!**

Not all Christians have understood the plan of salvation in this broader perspective...it’s the last great message of love and mercy to go to the world!

- Great theologians of the Reformation didn’t see this concept:
- Luther, for example, was pretty preoccupied with what God did for us...so much so that
- He threw out Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation;
- He claimed to be “sola scriptura”, but he was unable to use the book of Revelation

As a result of Luther’s inability to use the book of Revelation...he missed this perspective, as have many theologians today. If Luther were alive today, I think he would rejoice in this broader view.

In the course of my Bible reading...(only 7 times straight through) I am convinced more each time that the Bible is an inspired record of God’s handling of the crisis in His family...as opposed to “His rulebook”.

There are NO shortcuts to re-establishing trust...or there would be a much shorter Bible!

The War That Started It All

I'm going to give you a preview of chapter eight concerning "Why Christ Had To Die". My understanding is that Christ died to re-establish peace in God's family! It's not just my understanding either; St. Paul talks about this at length! Again, we'll visit that in an entire chapter down the road. Here's some evidence to last you until then:

Colossians 1: 19,20
Ephesians 1: 9,10
Ephesians 3: 9,10

The WAY God has worked through His church, His people is the WAY He has demonstrated the truth about Himself...and won the War! That He has done this is demonstrated in the following Bible reference:

1 Corinthians 4:9

The Greek word for "spectacle" actually means "theatre"! This comes as a startling realization to many...this notion that we play only a part (albeit significant) in the Cosmic Dilemma over who's telling the truth and whose side do we want to be on: God's or Satan's. Satan has deceived us into wondering whether he even exists! That he does exist and that he lost in the War with God cannot be in question to the Bible student. Here are some other references or passages that speak about Satan and his angels:

Job	Chapters 1 & 2
Zechariah	3: 1, 2
Matthew	25: 41
2 Corinthians	11: 14
1 st Peter	5: 8
Jude	6

It would seem that a concept as important as this would receive more "coverage" in the Bible, wouldn't it? And yet, there is "coverage" enough such that we can adequately get to the truth about God and the fact that we're involved in this great controversy. Our ancestors have long known this truth, it's only the present few

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generations that have lost sight of it. I’ve often wondered whether the relative scarcity of information on this topic is due to some provision of the “Geneva Convention” of this War. You may well wonder what I mean by that, and I’ll tell you frankly that it’s my “own theology”...so have your antennae up and be alert! I could be leading you down a strange path! Search the Bible on your own and make sure you agree that I’m on the right track. You’ll hear me reference this “Geneva Convention” again as we go through this book. I may as well introduce how I came up with it.

The whole idea of a War overwhelmed me one day while I was thinking about what happened so very long ago. I wondered if anyone was killed...or if they used “nukes” or weapons we likely never heard of. The more I thought about it, the more I thought, “Wait a minute! God is all powerful. A War with Him would be “no contest”. The Bible tells us in James 2:19 that the devil and his followers believe in God and tremble! It got me to thinking that the War couldn’t have been over power...who’s the more powerful. God would win that hands down. After some study I realized that the War was a battle for the mind. Not exactly a popularity contest, but a political campaign. We’ll discover some rules to this War later on. One you can’t avoid discovering on the surface concerns the idea of power. Satan must have complained and insisted that God was a bully, forcing His subjects to conform to His will and against their will. Hints of this are contained in Job 1&2 where Satan challenges God: “Sure your servant Job follows you no matter what. You protect him and bless him with plenty. Let me have him for a little while and you’ll see...he’ll curse you!” And so the challenge has been throughout the ages. Satan is the one to use force and coercion, smoke and mirrors, torture, flattery, deception, duress, chicanery of every sort, miracles, pomp and circumstance. God, on the other hand, uses evidence to demonstrate the truth. God is the accused in this War.

In this great battle for our loyalty, God doesn’t stoop to cheap “he said, she said” kinds of arguments. He couldn’t be drawn into that anymore than Jesus was when His adversaries tried to trap Him with words here on Earth. God has given plenty of evidence of this ongoing War in the recorded history that comprises His book...the Bible. That He doesn’t have a specific book or two within it called “StarWars 1”

The War That Started It All

and “StarWars 2” is of no consequence. This Great War and the part we will play in bringing it to an end is the theme of the Bible. I know you’ve been told otherwise, but we’ll talk about this again at the end of this book.

The last reference to the Bible in this chapter is contained in John 12:32:

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (GNB)

It is put here because it points out that the “whole family” of God is included in the results of this demonstration: “All” will be drawn back to God,...not just people on this planet! Some versions, like the KJV, say “all men”, but that’s not an accurate translation. The word “men” is not there in the original Greek! Later versions correct this.

So let’s briefly recap: The Bible speaks of a War that began at the very center of God’s family, and all of us have been caught up in the consequences of this revolt. The future of God’s family depends upon the outcome of this War, upon God’s successful resolution of the crisis of distrust. The Good News is that God has already won this War! It’s just that the enemy has been confined to a small area. Yet, he hasn’t surrendered. His propaganda machine yet deceives the occupants of this area.

Next, we’ll look at what went wrong in God’s universe.

Chapter # 2:

What Went Wrong Up There In Heaven?

Now let's examine sin and its consequences in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character of God and the way He runs His government. The Bible describes sin as more than mere breaking of the rules. One of Webster's definitions of sin...one we'll reference often...the one supported by countless stories in the Bible is: "Separation from God". It's no more complicated than that. Sin involves a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness, a stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen. Left untreated, sin makes peace impossible. To set and keep things right, trust must somehow be restored. God sent His Son "to deal with sin". God sent His Son to reunite His creatures with Him. That's a brief summary of the entire chapter! So let's get to it!

What went wrong?? Not how did it go wrong...but WHAT??? Remember now, we're examining teachings or doctrines in the setting of the great War in heaven. So...what went wrong to cause such a war? To understand this may help us understand the reason for the methods God used to put everything right again. These methods we often call the Plan of Salvation. We usually focus on this as what God did to save us. You might observe this at communion services when people practice the last supper symbols and hang their heads because of the death of Jesus.

So...*what went wrong anyway??* We'll get a better feel for this if we look first at what *was* right. How did perfect peace exist? All the members of God's family trusted each other! Try to picture it...can you? They trusted God and He trusted them...no worries. As we discovered in the last chapter, a crisis of distrust broke out. God was accused of unworthiness. Moreover, Satan accused Him specifically of being arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe. We'll refer to this often...so much so that I've abbreviated it: A.V.E.U.S. Now when you see that, you'll know what it means.

And so SIN entered the universe for the first time. The Bible describes sin in its essence as "a violation of mutual trust". It's so much more than a breaking of the "rules", as serious as that may be.

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But wait a minute here...doesn't the Bible itself specifically state that sin IS breaking the rules? That's the first verse for us to look at in this chapter: 1st John 3:4. It's a famous "proof text":

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (King James Version – KJV)

Do you know what a "proof text" is? It's a verse that fundamentalists camp on to "prove" their point. Notice I said "verse" or "text" as opposed to "passage". Often a verse is lifted, even out of context, without reading around what led up to it, to demonstrate or "prove" a point in the "proof text" method of studying the Bible. The fundamentalist response is typically: "God said it...He meant it...and that's good enough for me!" Now don't get me wrong. I'm a fundamentalist myself...though somewhat "reformed" now in terms of what I understand it to be. It's just that I wouldn't want to misquote or misunderstand the Bible by making it say something it doesn't mean.

An example of it might be quoting from the book of, say, Job. Bildad, one of Job's friends, said to him in Chapter 8, verse 4: "...*your children must have sinned against God, and so He punished them as they deserved*". It appears here that the Bible teaches us that God will punish us as we deserve if we sin against Him. That seems to fly in the face of another "proof text" in Ezra 9:13 that says, "*Even after everything that has happened to us in punishment for our sins and wrongs, we know that You, our God, have punished us less than we deserve and have allowed us to survive*". Still, this seems to support that God punishes if you sin. David, who knew God so well, paid him such tribute in Psalms 103: 8-14: "*The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love. He does not keep on rebuking; He is not angry forever. He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us according to our sins and wrongs. As high as the sky is above the earth, so great is His love for those who have reverence for Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our sins from us. As a father is kind to his children, so the Lord is kind to those who honor Him. He knows what we are made of; He remembers that we are dust.*" So then, how do you solve this conundrum? Does the Bible contradict itself? No it does not. The

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answer to the problem may be found in the last chapter of the book of Job. There we discover that God was upset with Job's friends for not speaking the truth about Him and the way He cares for us. To quote Bildad as “proof of the truth” proves, instead, a great error. The “proof text” method of study is “ok” for a beginner...to obtain the “milk” of the word. But quickly the mature Christian must graduate to using his God-given ability to think. Now how did we get way out here? Back to the chapter. Ah yes, we were talking about sin being described in the Bible as a “breaking of the rules” in 1st John 3:4.

The Greek work for “transgression of the law” is *ANOMIA*. The King James' Version used a pretty “free” translation of that word. It really means “Lawlessness” or “Rebelliousness”. In other words the Bible here describes sin as *a state of mind*. Isn't that what rebelliousness is? Isn't that what Jesus taught in Matthew 5? You may want to read that chapter and be reminded of the examples there. I'll refer to one: we often say to break the 7th commandment is a sin. Jesus taught here that if a man looks at a woman and wishes to himself that he could “bed” her, he's committed adultery. Think about that...it's a state of mind!

This state of mind is a continuing threat to the peace and security of the family of God. Sin will not have been dealt with until our “lawlessness” (state of mind) has either been changed or eliminated! Mull that around a little...what is the traditional teaching for how sin will be eliminated? We're told that God is going to eradicate sin...but HOW is He going to do that? Some think by Hellfire! Concentrate now...this is a simple but *profound* revelation: God is going to eradicate sin by changing our minds about it! Those who won't change their minds will reap the natural results of anarchy and lawlessness. God won't need to destroy them; they will destroy themselves! That's not hard to fathom is it, especially in this age of uncontrolled nuclear weapons?

The danger of regarding sin as a breaking of the rules is that it tends to encourage an impersonal (even fearful) relationship with God. And you know what?

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HE WISHES TO ELIMINATE!!!

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If you regard sin as a breaking of the rules, God's commandments may regrettably be misunderstood as arbitrary regulations designed to show His authority and test our willingness to obey! This is good fundamentalist teaching:

Obey and be rewarded;
Disobey and be destroyed

Since ALL have sinned, should we be fearfully awaiting execution of the sentence? Unless, perhaps...God should find some *legal* way of giving us a second chance. But if we blow the second chance...BOY are we in for it! Tell me...does this understanding promote the peace God wants?

Properly understood, you *might* consider sin to be a breaking of the rules...IF you look into the rules as Christ revealed them:

"Love God and love each other as you love yourself!" Mat.22:37-40

If we really *did* this...we would have true peace and freedom! Note that the tenth Commandment says we shouldn't even want to sin. Why would someone want to separate themselves from God? Their picture of Him must be pretty distorted! Imagine the world in a state of mind where no one would want to do anything unloving! That's pretty hard to comprehend here on Earth!

Now, let me ask you this: Can love be commanded...or produced by force or fear? 1st John 4:18 is pretty clear on this: *"There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment."* This verse is contained in the passage that says in verse 16 that "God is love".

Has God ever said to His children: "You either love Me, and each other, or I'm going to have to kill you. Do I make myself clear?" He's been accused of that. Try it on your wife or kids or significant other once. Would it work? If you saw your wife and kids standing in front of you trembling and saying in unison: "Oh yes, Daddy, we truly

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love you very much!” Would you be pleased? Would you be satisfied? Do you really think God would settle for that? Do you think He’s such a brute? We must admit, though, that the Bible is full of references to law, discipline, rewards...even final fiery destruction!! If we’re going to be honest and forthright in our study, we must look at all these passages...and so we shall. The purpose of this book is to take the Bible as a whole (the forest...not the trees); not use proof-text methodology...here a little...there a little.

We will spend a few chapters on God’s wide use of LAW...and just why Jesus had to die...why law is NOT a threat to Freedom! To understand this is really to learn the *truth* that sets us free!

Once again: Back to the beginning now...Sin entered when Angels ceased to trust...as a *consequence*, they themselves became untrustworthy! Hence the following verses in our examination:

James 4:17 – “*Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it...for him it is sin!*”

Rom. 14:23 – “*Any action that is not based on faith is sin*”

(Moffat’s Translation)

“*Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin*”

(Revised Standard Version - RSV)

“*When we act apart from our faith we sin*”

(Phillip’s translation)

Substitute the word “trust” for the word “faith” above. It’s the same word in the Greek: “Pistis”. You can’t trust people that behave like that! Look at how the Israelites described sin in Ezra 10:2...a breaking of faith (trust) with God. Consider the definition we used at the beginning of the book: “separation from God”. It’s easy to see that theme, isn’t it?

A great illustration of breaking faith is contained in the story of Moses. It stretches from Exodus to and through Deuteronomy...four whole books! At first blush it appears that God is being unduly harsh with Moses here. Let’s recap:

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Remember when the “chosen” were complaining to Moses about the lack of water? They came to him grumbling and said they wished they had died in the wilderness. They behaved so badly that Moses ran to God and prayed, “What shall I do?” God said to him: “Give them water. Take your rod and go and speak to the rock this time...don’t hit it! Don’t make a scene, don’t be angry with the people...don’t even condemn them. Just speak to the rock and they’ll have all the water they want. So Moses, in the heat of the situation, went to the rock. He wound up and gave it a good whack! He said to the people: “You ungrateful rebels, must we bring forth water from this rock?” He was plainly getting out of control here. So God said to him what you see in Numbers 20:12: *“Because you did not trust enough in Me to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”*

Wow! Isn’t that being a bit arbitrary and severe? All the old man had done was get a little excited...lost his cool, so to speak. He got a little irritated and impatient. He disobeyed God...and he smacked that rock. Is that enough to keep him out of the promised land? What was the big deal? Let’s examine the situation with our new-found view. Let’s look at it from the perspective of the battle between Satan and God, instead of the way we usually do: from our tiny individual perspective...wondering what it means for mankind on this earth.

What did God want to accomplish with this people? These were His chosen, the group He wanted to use as an example to the rest of the world whom He was also after. He wanted His chosen to be the most blessed, kind, caring, loving, prosperous on the face of the earth. He wanted the others to wonder what it was that made them this way. He wanted His chosen to demonstrate that it came from trusting God again. Before He could do this, however, He had to win back the trust of His chosen! They had, for 400 years, been in the captivity of a pagan empire. Almost that entire time they had abandoned the God they knew for the gods of the Egyptians. So He was trying to win them back. He was trying to get them to trust in Him again...completely.

Did Moses have credibility with this people? I should say he did. They trusted Moses to intercede to God for them. They came out of a culture that feared their gods...they wanted a little awe and

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excitement in their worship, so God spoke to them in a language they understood at the time when God thundered to them from Mt. Sinai. They liked all that “big smoke” stuff; they wanted to “tremble” before their God as they were taught by the Egyptians. A god was weak, they were taught, if he(she) didn’t cause fear. They thought that a man shouldn’t even be able to live in the sight or presence of a god...and so they wanted it to be with their God. So, initially, God gave them what they wanted. Read about it in Exodus chapters 19 and 20. Note also that Moses tried to get through to them that there was no need to be afraid of God (Ex. 20:19). Eventually the people trusted Moses, and they asked Moses to be their ambassador to God. You can see their childlike fear and the worship they offered to God and the way they asked Moses to help them in Deut. 5: 23-27. Moses here became symbolic of Christ for his people. Yes, he had credibility!

Did Moses do what God would’ve done in providing water for this people after they complained so? Well, that’s apparent. He disobeyed God in this instance. God told him not to have a hissy-fit or make a scene...not to lose his temper. That’s NOT what God would’ve done, even though the people might have expected it. That brings us back to the original question we asked about this then:

What *GRAVE* error did Moses make when he got teed-off and struck the rock in a fit of temper...berating the people? **He misrepresented God!** That’s right, and Numbers 20:12 bears this out: *“But the Lord reprimanded Moses and Aaron. He said “Because you did not have enough faith (or trust) to acknowledge My holy power before the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land that I promised to give them.”* What does “holy” mean? It means “without sin”. And what does “sin” mean? Remember? It means “separation from God”. So “holy” means “without separation from God”. God had been working with Moses for 40 years to win this people back to trusting in Him...wooing them in language and behavior that they understood. In that one act of misrepresenting God, Moses blew it before the people. He, like Christ, was to show people what God was really like! Christ was successful, Moses was not. 40 years worth of education in trust...SHOT! Moses misrepresented God when he was under pressure...but Jesus made it through the pressure cooker!

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Is that so bad...to misrepresent God? Well...YES! Misrepresenting God is what Lucifer's sin was!! It's the most dangerous thing you can do...and the biggest responsibility you have!! We'll come back to this in a minute, let's get back to Moses. Despite this grave error, how did God treat Moses thereafter? The tribute given Moses by God is so tender! God himself buried Moses! Read about it in Deut. 34: 5-8.

This whole thing really put God in a tough spot. God *had* to go on record before the eyes of the on-looking universe as to the seriousness of Moses' sin:

- It wasn't just that he disobeyed...
- Or by smiting the rock...he spoiled a symbol

Moses broke faith with God...showing that he was not a trusting friend, which is the essence of sin!! This was a lesson for the universe! Not just for earth or for the people of Israel.

How many of us have committed this sin? How many of us do it on a regular basis without hardly so much as a thought? How many of God's shepherds (ministers, priests, church officials, etc.) have done it? Have you ever apologized to God for putting Him in a bad light? I think every insurance company should!

Now - what happens...what are the results (NOT what are the penalties) of centuries of rebelliousness and distrust? Have a look around you...think about the world you live in with all its injustice, wars and deceit. St. Paul had a lot to say about this, Read Romans 3: 10 – 18 for example. This is what happens! Look also at the beginning of this letter to the Romans, chapter 1: 21-24 and 28-32. It is a law, like any other natural law in the universe, that we become like the god we worship. For some the god is money...for some the god is competitive sports...for some the god is themselves...and for a very few, God is El-Shaddai (the one and only God). The Bible upholds this in a variety of places: see Hosea 9:10 and Psalms 135:18 for example. We'll look at this again later.

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God has been so willing to “keep in touch” with us, but we’ve been so unwilling to listen! Just look at some of these passages that show the consequences of breaking trust with God:

Romans 1:25(GNB) – *“They exchange the truth about God for a lie! They worship and serve what God has created instead of the Creator himself, who is to be praised forever! Amen!”*

Hosea 4: 16, 17(Phillips) – *“Israel is obstinate as a stubborn heifer. How can the Lord feed them now like lambs in a broad meadow? Ephraim is wedded to idolatry, let him alone.”*

Hosea 5:4(Phillips) – *“For their spirit is steeped in unfaithfulness and they know nothing of the Lord.”*

Hosea 4:1,5,6,12(Phillips) – *“There is no honesty nor compassion nor knowledge of God...My people! Asking advice from a piece of wood and consulting a staff for instructions!”* (Asking advice and seeking instruction from a psychic is no better...that’s still worshipping the created instead of the Creator!)

Knowing God is a key to never breaking trust with Him. This is such a “coined” phrase...you must “know God”. What does that mean anyway? Who knew God better than His people Israel? This view we are taking of the struggle between God and Satan indicates that the true essence of “knowing” God in a Biblical sense is knowing Him as a friend...as did Moses, Abraham, Jeremiah and others. In the beginning the Bible speaks of an intimate “knowing” as between a husband and wife. The intent there was to hold back nothing from each other no matter what the circumstance...as true friends would. In other places God spoke of Israel saying “Thee only have I known” (Amos 3:2). Well obviously He knew all the others, but Israel He came to know as a friend! We’re told at the end there will be those who discover that they are not acceptable to the kingdom and they plead, “Lord, Lord, open unto us!” (Luke 13:25) and the Lord says, “Go away, I never knew you”. He knew the number of hairs on their heads...but He never got to know them as friends! Knowing connotes a “God First” commitment as our “best friend”. Stack up your relationship with God with that of your best friend. How near or far are you from it?

What Went Wrong Up There In Heaven?

So...what are the ULTIMATE results of not trusting God and living in rebelliousness? Let's let the Bible show us:

A popularly misunderstood passage, emblazoned in the memory of many comes from Romans 6:23. In the King James this reads: "*The wages of sin is death.*" The misunderstanding has come from the interpretation or "spin" (as we would say today) that has been put on this verse. It has been taught from many pulpits to mean what would happen to you if you displeased God. In other words it's as if God is saying "obey and live, but disobey and I'll kill you." Nothing could be further from the truth. Remember our definition of sin? It's "separation from God". Let's look at a couple of other verses to clarify what happens here:

- Gen. 2:7 – *It is from the Lord that we get life-giving breath...each one!* (GNB)
- Psalms 36:9 (GNB) – David speaks of God here: "*You are the Source of all life, and because of Your light we see the light*"
- I John 5:11 (GNB) – "*The testimony is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in His Son*"
- Psalms 73:27 (GNB) – "*Those who abandon You will certainly perish*"

This is not rocket science! If you sin (separate from God) and God is the source of life...what's going to happen? Now don't get this confused with what we traditionally call "sins"...those lists of activities that lead us down the path to ultimate "sin". If you stumble in your life, but correct it with God's help because you don't want to lead life that way, you have eternal life. But if you commit yourself to a life of sinning, and it's what you desire, God can't do anything about the natural result of it. (1John 1:9 and 1John 5:16). This may come as a startling revelation...but whose fault is "sin" in your life anyway? Look up James 1: 14 & 15.

Can God be trusted to do ANY reasonable thing consistent with His character to win us back? If mankind doesn't trust God...does that affect God's trustworthiness? "*Certainly not! God must be true, even though every man is a liar. As the scripture says, 'You must be shown to be right when you speak; You must win your case when you are being tried'*". This is from Romans 3:4 where St. Paul quotes

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Psalms 51:4 . It’s an interesting passage that points out Paul’s awareness of God’s great trial before the universe. Satan accuses...God responds with evidence. What a privilege to have the chance to play a part in vindicating God and the way He runs things! Look also at Romans 8:3. Some versions say that “God sent His Son...to deal with sin”.

What does it mean to “deal” with sin? If “sin” is distrust and its consequences that leads one to separate from God...how do you “deal” with that? Healing needs to take place, doesn’t it? Forgiveness alone will not heal the damage done! Forgiveness does NOT deal with sin! For there to be lasting peace in the universe, these things must take place:

- TRUST must somehow be restored!
- Questions must be answered.
- Satan’s accusations must be met
- God must be seen to be righteous and infinitely worthy of our

TRUST

So...Christ came to “deal” with sin...to set things right. That’s why He died! That’s the meaning of Romans 5:1. Don’t worry, we’ll spend some additional time on this concept.

There are at least three ways of considering what went wrong in God’s universe. It’s useful to look at these as a basis for continuity. God looks different in these three ways:

- A widely held view that goes beyond the bounds of Christianity is this: “Because we have broken God’s rules, we have offended Him and He is very angry with us. Can anything be done to calm Him down...to appease His “wrath”...so that somehow He can find it in His heart to forgive us and not destroy us and bless us once again?” I call this the “Pagan” view...you know...where the daughter of the chief has to be thrown off the cliff and down into the mouth of the volcano. Then God is satisfied, and everything’s all right again.

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- Another view is: “Sometimes, within the bounds of Christianity, we have broken God’s rules...and thus we are in serious legal trouble. Law and justice demand that God should destroy us...or even torture us for eternity. Can anything be legally done to make it possible for God to forgive us and not destroy us and still appear to be just in His own eyes and in the eyes of the on-looking universe?” Obviously, this is the view of the legalist.
- The third view, not widely held on this planet...(but I believe widely held throughout the universe, because if it isn’t then God has not won the War and there is no basis for lasting peace)...is this: “We have sinned...we have allowed ourselves to be deceived by Satan’s lies. So we have turned away from the true God to many substitutes. The results have been disastrous. Left alone, we all would die. Is there any way that Satan’s lies could be corrected? Is there any way that the truth about God and His government can be made crystal clear? Is there any way that unquestionable evidence can be provided to show that God is not the kind of person that His enemies have made Him out to be?...so some of us rebels may be won back to trust...and so be saved and healed? For God can and WILL save all who trust Him! That’s why all God asks from us is trust.” This, to me, is the logical view, based upon evidence...the evidence that is in the Bible and all round us in our everyday existence.

Which view makes the most sense to you?

Chapter # 3:

“Please, Trust Me!” God

“Trust me.” Heard that before? What does it bring to your mind? Is it a positive image? Does it make you think of a used car salesman’s final little persuader after he’s told you the car you’re looking at was owned and driven by a minister’s wife once a week? Does it remind you of the final reassurance you get from your stockbroker when he brings you a “hot tip”? Or is it your brother-in-law’s final repartee as he attempts to get you to ride the “tube” behind his 575 horse-powered ski boat? The entreaty: “Trust me” has come to mean something other than what was originally intended, hasn’t it? This chapter takes another look at the meaning and necessity of faith (trust) in the larger setting of the cosmic controversy over the true character of God and the way He runs things.

In Chapter 2, we considered: WHAT went wrong. If we can understand *that*, we are in a better position to understand what needs to be set right or put right again and what it would take to *keep* things right. To the extent that we can understand how *we’ve* been involved in *what* went wrong...(if we can understand what it is that went wrong,) we’d be better able to understand what we can do...*if anything*...in order to be set right and enjoy the rightness of the universe once again.

Trust is the key!...Look at what Satan has done to it! We’ve been deceived by the one who discovered deception and perfected it. Trust *must* be restored...there is NO substitute for it. Think about that. Mutual trust will assure peace. There is *nothing* more important than trust. Would you agree with that? Or would you disagree? I’ve heard it said that love is more important than trust. Now we’re not entertaining these ideas for the sake of argument. Do you suppose that God still loves Satan...or for that matter...other of His creations that have rejected Him? Does He trust them? So then the argument: which is more important...love or trust? Can you love without trusting? Evidently God can. Is mankind made that way? I will give you my stock answer to these kinds of questions: examine the evidence and make up your own mind. Don’t you hate that? Yet, who am I to tell you how to interpret life? I can only give you the benefit of my own experience, and examining the evidence is exactly the way I try to find

“Please Trust Me” – God

answers to those questions. I know that, from my experience, I haven’t come to the point of being able to love someone without first trusting them. Can you? A close friend of mine pointed out an exception to this for me. He asked: “What if your child was a kleptomaniac? You’d still love the child, but you wouldn’t leave your money out!” I suppose he’s right there, and it certainly comes closer to God’s way of looking at things. But I wouldn’t be at peace with my child around then! I wouldn’t be secure. It further demonstrates the need for “trust” and “trustworthiness”. Trust is a two-way street!

All God asks any of us to do is to trust Him. He has a reason for this: if we only trusted God enough to be willing to *listen, truly listen*,...to stand humbly and ask Him: “What must I do to be saved?”...or as I have learned to put it: “What must I do to be well?”...you *know* that God as the Creator would readily and eagerly heal the damage done! All the generous and miraculous provisions of the “plan of salvation” are of NO AVAIL whatever if we don’t *trust God* enough to let Him do for us what He is so eager to do.

Hopefully, the above concept helps explain Paul’s brief reply to the jailer in a Bible passage we will now look at: Acts 16:30,31:

“Then he led them out and asked: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your family.” (GNB)

Remember the story, how the earthquake broke the jail open? The jailer thought that everyone had escaped. In those days, being a jailer was tough. There was no union to protect them! If they let anyone get away, they were tortured in slow, agonizing ways. Because of this, the jailer drew his sword and prepared to fall on it. Paul screamed: “Wait! Don’t do it! We’re all still here!” The relief was overwhelming to the jailer who couldn’t understand why Paul and Silas didn’t “hightail it” while they had the chance. He grabbed a torch and entered the prison cell area. Sure enough, there were his two charges...and they were worried about him! He was overwhelmed with gratitude as he reflected upon how close he came to ending it all...and he was curious what made these guys this way. He wanted to know more and he gave them the opening every diehard proselytizing Christian prays for! He asked “Gentlemen...what must I do to be saved?”

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What an opening! We’d all like to drive a truck through one like that wouldn’t we? Did Paul say: “Well, look fella...we have twenty lessons here, if you’ve got the time...” No way. BELIEVE! That’s what they said to get to the truth of the matter as quickly as possible. But don’t you need to *have faith* as well as belief? I’ve heard more sermons and arguments going to great lengths to explain the difference between faith and belief.

A number of decades ago, long before Evel Knievel, a young man performed a death-defying act over the Horse Shoe Falls of Niagara. A cable-like wire was strung across the two ends of the falls. Crowds gathered at both ends to watch the boats and the cranes and winches set the scene. When all was ready, the young man took a wheelbarrow and proceeded to push it across the cable from one end of the falls to the other. Several times the crowds gasped as gusts of wind and mist challenged the man’s poise and balance. There were times when they were certain the wheelbarrow itself would be blown from his hands. After what seemed an eternity, he arrived safely at the other end and cheers went up from the United States to Canada. The young man asked the crowd in general, no one in particular, “Do you think I can do it again?” Another young man in the crowd yelled, “Sure, you can do it! Do it again!” The man with the wheelbarrow beckoned his challenger: “Get in the wheelbarrow then”. The challenger, however, declined.

I heard this story in a sermon on faith. “See!?” the preacher bellowed. “The challenger believed he could do it again...he just didn’t have enough faith to get in the wheelbarrow!” What nonsense! Sure he believed the guy could do it again...but he’s not stupid! Why risk your life over something so trivial? Perhaps he had a fear of heights! That’s got nothing to do with whether he believed the guy could get back over the cable again. The word in the Greek is “pistis” and it is also translated as “have faith” or “trust”! You can see it right in the passage on the story of Paul, Silas and the jailer. Acts 16:31 in the KJV says: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The New English Bible says: “Put your *trust* in the Lord Jesus...”, and the Berkeley version says: “Have faith in the Lord Jesus...”. Belief, faith, trust...all from the same Greek word. There is no difference between them!

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So...what is this “*faith*”? What do we mean when we say: “Have faith”...or...”You should have *more* faith”...or “We’re saved by faith”...or “Righteousness by faith”? What is this? What’s the concept?

I once heard of a young man who, when questioned about what faith was, said: “Faith is believin’ what you know ain’t so!” Is this real faith???

How about this one: “Faith is believing something for which you have insufficient evidence. If you had *sufficient* evidence, you wouldn’t say: “I accept that by faith”...you’d say: “I know that to be true!” Like that one better? Come, let us reason with this one. Does it mean, then, that the more we come to know God the less faith we’ll have? Will we one day stand in His presence and say: “God, I see you now...and that’s the end of my faith! I’ll never trust again...’cause now I know you?” Does that make sense?

How about a Biblical definition of faith then...from the famous “Faith” Chapter of Hebrews 11. The very first verse is one many have committed to memory: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Does it help to know that “faith” is a substance? Or that it is *evidence* of what you cannot or do not see? Lots of people where I live had *faith* that the Green Bay Packers were going to make it to the SuperBowl again in 1999. They didn’t. So tell me...is “faith” proof?...does *faith* make it so? Does that really make any sense? But don’t we use “faith” in this way? Doesn’t this verse encourage us to do that? OK, let’s really tear this apart:

Let’s look at the two words: *Substance* and *Evidence*. We’ll check out the underlying Greek. Ok, first *EVIDENCE* – *elegchos*...means proof, conviction...a noun that comes from a verb describing the work of the Holy Spirit. Now *SUBSTANCE* – *hupostasis*...literally “That which stands under”: “stance” for stand, and “sub” for under. That’s good latin, but not good English! It wasn’t until the turn of the century that archaeologists in Egypt discovered what this word (hupostasis) really meant. They opened tombs and discovered crocodile carcasses buried with the sarcophagus. The

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preserved crocodiles were stuffed with manuscripts. As the manuscripts were examined they were determined to be title deeds or business agreements called “hupostasis”! So, *faith* is an agreement based on a relationship! It’s evidence of that agreement! Does that help? Does that make more sense? That’s why other versions of Hebrews 11:1 read like the following:

“Now faith is the title-deed of things hoped for...” (Montgomery’s translation)

“Now faith means that we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see.” (Moffatt)

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (NIV)

Conviction, certainty...*This is the meaning of faith!*

It helps to look at the context of Hebrews 11:1. Remember that Hebrews was a letter written in Greek. There were no chapter divisions in the early texts. Go back and read how Hebrews 10:35-39 sets up the famous verse. Paul writes here: *“Don’t throw away your trust now – it carries with it a rich reward. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God’s will, you are to receive what He has promised. For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. Surely we are not going to be men who cower back and are lost, but men who maintain their faith for the salvation of their souls!”*(Phillips) Then comes the famous Hebrews 11:1. The background for this passage comes from Habbakuk 2:3,4. God says, upon the challenge from His prophet, that *“if my predictions seem slow, wait...they will come!”* Notice the suggestion of patience in this tiny prophetic book: *“My righteous ones will trust and wait”*

This famous passage: *“The just shall live by faith”* is NOT discussing forgiveness or justification as some theologians are prone to teach. The background for that passage suggests it means: *“Anyone who is right with Me and My friend will trust Me and be willing to wait!”*

“O Lord...How long?” (Hab. 1.1). Well,...how long have the faithful angels had to wait to see God’s plan unfold? When you

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reference “salvation by faith” and “righteousness by faith”...it really helps to have this understanding. You see, we’re not “*saved by faith*”...faith doesn’t save us. God saves us...but He can’t do it unless we *trust* Him! It’s like going to the doctor for healing. God can’t force us to be well! OK, ok...for those of you who object to the idea that God can be limited...that there is nothing God cannot do...God will not force us to be well. It’s not in His character to do that! He will not go against His character! He wants us to be free to choose to do whatever we want, and He’s provided this incredible demonstration of what happens when you make wrong choices in order to help us make the right ones!

But isn’t this just too simple? Isn’t it really too easy? Just to trust? Isn’t it also necessary

To Love Him
To Know Him (check out John 17:3 here)
To Obey Him
To Repent
To Be Reborn
To Be Converted
To Be Justified
To Be Sanctified
To Be Perfect
Ad infinitum

This list gets so long it’s no wonder people get discouraged from really having a right relationship with God! Don’t be scared by this list! Taken in the bigger picture of what went wrong and what needs to be set right...each of those items above is an integral part of a single, wonderful, reassuring, transforming experience made available to us all!! It was never meant to be so complicated or to be split up into so many parts.

Being a parent has given me insights into God that I never had before. I realize that forcing children to do something just makes them rebel if they really don’t want to do it. I can just imagine God saying sometimes:

“If only my children would trust Me...If only they would really know Me and how much I love them...If only they

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would really love Me...If only they would turn
around, come back to Me and stay with Me
and choose to stay forever!”

If only people would become friends with God and really get to know Him! Is there anything God couldn't do if we truly were His close friends? If we trusted Him completely...admired Him and wanted to become like Him?!?

Moses was one of those kind of people. Check out Exodus 33: 11 and 17 for example. You'll see there that being a friend is the same as being known! Such trust and such friendship with God is no leap in the dark as some people describe faith! Does God ask us to take a gamble when we trust Him? Has God ever left us completely in the dark? Does He want to be a stranger to us?

How many times as a youngster did you have your parents teach you never to trust a stranger? That's even so much more appropriate today! God doesn't ask that of us either, however. God doesn't want to be a stranger to us. Look at Romans 10:17:

*“So then faith (trust, belief) cometh by hearing,
and hearing by the word of God..” (KJV)*

Where does the faith or trust talked about here come from?

David knew what God wanted from us...not *outward* manifestations of worship (like is rendered every Saturday and Sunday)...but *inward* trust and friendship! What does it take to stand humbly before God, willing to listen? A new heart...a new spirit...**TRUST!** Read Psalms 51: 6, 10, 16, 17. This is “truth in the inward man!”

Hosea knew this too: See Hosea 6: 6 & 7. Phillips paraphrase puts it this way:

*“It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice;
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
But they, like Adam, have broken their agreement;
again and again they have played Me false.”*

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Do you remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3? What does it mean to be born again? Obviously, as Nicodemus said, you can’t go back in and come out again! That’s not at all what Jesus meant either! It’s the same thing David said in Psalm 51. To be born anew means a new heart...a new spirit. Like Billy Crystal alluded to in the film City Slickers, it’s a “do-over”. If you screw it up, you CAN do it over!

Jesus didn’t say: “...unless you be forgiven”, or “...unless you be justified”. He didn’t say: “unless you have your legal standing with Me adjusted”...He said: “unless you start over”. That’s just exactly what He said!

How can someone tell if he has been reborn? It’s pretty simple really. If he really has genuine faith and trust in God, He’s been reborn all right! There’s a lot of debate about this in theological circles, however. James wrote a whole book on it! Take a look at the second chapter of his book, for example, and examine verses 14, 19, and 21 – 23:

“My brothers, what good is it for someone to say that he has faith if his actions do not prove it?...Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe – and tremble with fear...How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the Altar. Can’t you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. And the scriptures came true that said, ‘Abraham believed God and because of his faith God accepted (counted) him as righteous.’ And so Abraham was called God’s friend.” (GNB)

It’s clear, in this passage, that trusting God makes you right with Him. The key word in this passage is “accepted” or “counted”. It also means “considered as” or “reckoned as”. *Trust* is good enough for God! Think about that! God knows you are a safe citizen for the Kingdom if you trust and are trustworthy! That’s all that’s needed. Everything else comes with it!! Trust...trust in God... is what it means to be right!

OK,...how much trust is necessary? Could we cheat, just a little? Does that make sense? Would you say to your spouse or your

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“significant other”: “ I’ll love you forever...you and only you...except for a little fling once in awhile. Not often, mind you, just once in a great while.” Can you build a lasting, trusting relationship on that? Does that work in ANY relationship? Whose side of the relationship does it really affect...the cheater or the cheatee? If you cheat and no one is the wiser...who does it ultimately affect? Would it seem that God is too demanding then? Probably not...definitely not.

God, in His word, gave us many encouraging stories on this topic as well as on others. Many are referenced in that great “faith” chapter of Hebrews 11. Look at verses 31, 32 and 39 for example. People like Rahab and Samson had eternal faith in God! No story is more encouraging in this way than the story of the thief on the Cross. You can find it in Luke 23: 42 & 43. Because the thief trusted that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, Jesus told him that day, that very moment, that he was right and therefore safe to save. What balance this is, what leverage to meet the rule makers with! What next conscious moment will that thief have? The answer is contained in 1st Thessalonians 4:16. What will Jesus say to Him?

To recap...there has been a breakdown of trust in God’s universe – even to the point of War up in heaven...even to the point of continued misunderstanding and distrust on this planet. There can be no real and lasting peace in God’s family until mutual trust and trustworthiness have been restored. No wonder all God asks is trust – even of us damaged sinners. For if only we trusted Him enough to listen, He could readily heal the damage done. God can and will save all who trust Him.

Faith is a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship will be. Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God – based on the more than adequate evidence revealed – to be willing to believe what He says, to accept what He offers, and to do what He wishes – without reservation – for the rest of eternity! Anyone who has such faith(trust) would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, we know God well enough to reverently ask

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Him:...why? I bring this up because we have been beat upon not to question God. There are so many questions to ask Him, I can't wait to do it in person. Many of our questions will have to wait until we get this chance. My continuous question has been that of a typical four year old: “Why?” “Why am I here?” “Why was I born a privileged white male in the suburban United States...and not an African American in the inner city...or a female in an Arab country or China?” “Why does a loving God permit the hateful things that go on continually all over this world...why doesn't He put a quick and frightful stop to it?” And so on and so forth. This book will reveal that God invites us to ask these questions. They do have answers. Many of them are revealed in the Bible. By asking and searching for the answers...by learning from the evidence God has already given, we learn to rebuild the trust in Him that was lost and it changes us.

Become changed...yes YOU! Become a trusting and trustworthy person...a teachable member of God's family.

Chapter # 4:

If YOU Were God, How Would You Restore Trust?

We've considered the War in Heaven and saw that it was a battle for the mind...for loyalty and trust. Lucifer looked to take over God's domain through persuasiveness so cunning that he was able to deceive one third of God's family. He misrepresented God as being Arbitrary; Vengeful; Exacting; Unforgiving and Severe (A.V.E.U.S.). Trust in God was broken! All God wants is for us to trust in Him again so that He can completely heal the damage done. In this chapter we'll examine just how He's going to accomplish that. Sound like a tall order? You're going to like this...and you're going to have a lot of respect for its simplicity and beauty. What I hope you'll also appreciate is what a predicament this whole thing has been for God...how anxious He has been for it all to come to pass. He would have accelerated it if that were possible under the constraints of fairness and freedom...but let's not get ahead of ourselves!

There will be peace again in the universe, just like there was before that awful War in Heaven. Once again, and *FOREVER*, all the members of God's family will trust each other. They will trust in their Heavenly Father too, and He will trust in them. Wherever there is such mutual trust and mutual trustworthiness, there is perfect peace...perfect freedom...perfect security.

In His far-sighted plan, God has permitted the false accusations that He is A.V.E.U.S. to spread throughout the Universe despite the fact that it led to the point of war and open rebellion. It sure seems like that's letting things go pretty far, doesn't it? So...how is He going to restore trust? Perhaps we also ought to ask: "How has He confirmed the trust of those who've stayed loyal to Him? As far as they're concerned, the war has been over for 2,000 years! An even better way to phrase it is: "How does He propose to win US over to trust Him as His loyal angels already do?"

Has He answered the charges and accusations against Him? If so, do we find His answers a sufficient basis for our FAITH? Remember what *faith* is from the previous chapter? Wouldn't it be

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something if God could be here to field these questions? Try to imagine a press conference before the entire Universe now.

A story from the Bible may help us with this. There is one where somewhat of a conference like this was held. It's in the story of what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah. In that story, God's friend, Abraham, had the courage to ask Him some stiff questions. Read about it in Genesis 18. It's a fascinating story. Note in particular verse 25 where Abraham tells God: "*Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty! You can't DO that!*" Imagine someone telling God what He can and cannot do! Suppose YOU had this opportunity...would you be satisfied? Would you be terrified before God? If you were, could you tell Him so? Driving home afterward, would you be convinced about God on the basis of your interview? That would depend on the kind of answers you think you'd get, wouldn't it?

Fear. Think God uses it? Think God likes it? How would you reconcile a God that uses fear and intimidation with the One described in 1st John 4: 8 and 15? It says that "*God is love*". 1st John 4:18 goes on to say that "*...there is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So, then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.*" Can truth be established on the basis of power?

Satan tries this. He *has* to because the truth isn't with him. In the absence of evidence he has to use other methods:

- Calling fire down from heaven
- Miracles
- Deceit, misleading people
- Seduction
- Intimidation

Since the truth is with our Heavenly Father, He doesn't have to stoop to use such methods. I think *that's one of the reasons He's not visibly here*. If He was...even in humble form...we'd worship the body He walked in and we'd follow His every suggestion without thinking. Consider that for a minute. We wouldn't think! Don't you think that's true? How much thinking do people *really* do anyway? It's precious to reason and think!! God gave us sharp minds to do this with and He

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paid a dear price to insure our freedom to do it. Ever see that bumper sticker: “God said it...He meant it...that’s good enough for me!” How do you think God feels about that sentiment? Even Jesus...after only 3 ½ years when they finally recognized Him as God said: “It’s better that I go now!” (John 16:7)

If God were in our presence right now we’d shut down our own thinking. We’d run up to Him continually for all the answers to our questions and *accept them on the basis of Who He is!* That *seems* like the right thing to do...but it’s NOT what God asks of us in the great controversy over His character and the way He runs things.

Instead, God sent the Holy Spirit as a guide...that still, small voice, as a teacher...to lead us into the ***truth***. You won’t see Him...He won’t intimidate you...He just works with *evidence*...most particularly He’ll help you understand the Bible! God does speak to us...He *does* answer questions...but He does it through what we call His Word! We talk to God and *He talks to us* as we study the scriptures. *Thoughtful* study of the scriptures is a form of prayer. We’ll look at this more in chapter fifteen. It’s conversing with God as with a friend! Some of us pray a lot but never hear God speak back...because we don’t spend time in the Bible! These miss the meaning of prayer. So let’s pick up the Bible and have this conversation!

Just what do we find in the Bible? Regarding the big questions in the controversy over God, do we find denials? In answering Satan’s accusations against Him do we find God slamming His fist on the conference table bellowing: “I am NOT arbitrary! Neither am I vengeful or exacting, unforgiving or severe!! How dare you even think that?!” Or do we find God making claims? “I’m really a nice guy! Sure I’ve blown my cool once in awhile...but everybody does that. Besides I’ve been under a lot of pressure lately. Ever try to run a Universe?” Do we even find God equivocating over the truth? “It depends what the meaning of is is” (William Jefferson Clinton, 1999).

Even when someone is *falsely* accused...is there anything to be gained by simply denying the charges? You’ve heard children do this: “Did not! Did too!...***DID NOT!...DID TOO!***” Will that establish the truth? Think of what God could’ve done in heaven eons ago if just

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denying the charges would've worked! What would the response of the Universe have been?

All right...get this big point now:

When someone's credibility has come into question...fairly or unfairly...

Only by a demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time under trying and varying circumstances can trustworthiness be re-established and confirmed.

The 66 books of the Bible are just such a demonstration! They are the:

EVIDENCE!

Would it be fair to go to the Bible and ask: "*God...why didn't you take charge more vigorously and end the conflict sooner?*" Wouldn't you expect that of trustworthy leadership? If the conflict was over power...He *COULD'VE* done it quickly! But the conflict is NOT over who has the power! Even the devil is willing to concede that! How do I know? It says so in the Bible in James 2:19 – "*Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe – and tremble with fear.*" (GNB) Remember from the last chapter that Belief = Faith = Trust! The devil and his demons believe or trust in the fact that there is only one God! They have great faith in His power and it scares them!

In Revelation 12:12 the Bible tells us that "*the devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left.*" (GNB) Satan looks forward to the soon-coming of Jesus and it terrifies him!

There is a kind of faith here that God is NOT looking for...but it is unfortunately the kind of faith that a show of power will produce. Guess what, people? That kind of faith is NOT ENOUGH!

Let's take a tough look at a dramatic illustration of how power can be misunderstood. It's contained in the story of the great flood in

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Genesis chapters 6 through 9 and 11. I skipped over chapter 10 because it mainly contains genealogy. Read it right now and then come back.

OK...some story huh? There's evidence of some real consternation (oops! Too big a word. Call me on that. Remember our rules? We should be able to explain this in language a fifth or sixth-grader could understand). I'll try it again. You can see in this story that God is pretty upset and that He's doing something that He really doesn't want to do. First He says He's so upset with mankind's wickedness that He's sorry He ever made man. He follows through on that apparent emotion and sends a flood that wipes out everybody except four guys and their wives. Was there anything special about them? Then He puts a rainbow in the sky as a sign that He'll never do something like THAT again. There's a lot to think about and chew on in this story.

It would help, at this point, to consider that all the Universe was watching these events. It would also help to remember that we've been taught that God is endowed with three special characteristics: He's all-knowing; all-powerful and all-present. If He's all-knowing, why did He create the race that wound up being so wicked in the first place? Why was He so upset with them when they turned out so bad that He had to destroy them? Could it have been for the learning and edification of others in the Universe? Well, I don't want to go there in this chapter...but I do want to plant the seed. It's one of the reasons that it's important to study the Bible from the perspective of the great controversy over God, what He's really like and how He runs things. But back to this discussion.

What a dramatic demonstration of power the flood was! But let me ask you a few questions about this exercise of power:

- Did it win people?
- Was everyone so convinced by this display of power that no one ever distrusted God again?

And now, the purpose of asking you to read Genesis 11: Just a few generations down the line we find a regenerated populace even more wicked than the one previously destroyed!! Did the inhabitants

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of Babel believe in God? You bet they did! Did they believe in His power? Did they believe He had the power to drown the whole world in a flood? Did they believe He would never do it again...even though He promised? And so they built the tower...not because they didn't believe in God, but because they did and they were afraid of Him. Are you catching on to this?

We need not spend much time on God's power...unless we don't believe He has it! The great controversy is not over His power anyway! It's over who's telling the truth and it's about God's character and governance. God is charged with *abuse of power*. If you doubt that, read your homeowner's insurance policy. He's also charged with a failure to tell the truth (we'll examine that one later, too.). These charges cannot be effectively met with **FORCE**. To resort to force would only worsen the matter and suggest that God doesn't have the requisite evidence...or that the evidence is against Him, therefore He must intimidate us with power.

So God chose the only way...the long and painful, costly...and apparently *weak* course of teaching...of explanation...of demonstration. And finally He sent His Son in the costliest of missions to expose Satan for who he really was and God for who He really is. Look at the way Jesus treated people...at the things He taught about His Father...at the unique and horrible way He was executed at the hands of His enemy. Jesus said in John 14:9 "...*whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*" This was the clearest demonstration about God and His government that the Universe would ever see...or need.

Sadly, religion usually fails to use God's methods...and thus it is religion that often most seriously misrepresents our God!! Religion through the centuries has used:

- Claims
- Pronouncements
- Force
- Persecution
- Pomp and power

Clearly methods God does not use.

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A popular concept throughout Christianity is that God expects us to trust him without evidence...and this is called faith. It's even considered a virtue! Religion teaches that for God to expect our faith and trust without evidence...just based on His claims and authority...is His perfect sovereign right! Therefore it shouldn't be regarded as arbitrary! God can do whatever He wants to do! If you doubt this, spend a Sunday listening to the televangelists you'll find on the tube. You'll run across this teaching again and again. It reminds me of the old joke: “What do you feed a 6,000 pound Gorilla? Answer: *Anything he wants!*”

I'd like to counter the above thinking. I agree that God is infinitely powerful. I agree that God is the Sovereign. He can run the Universe any way He wants...and He will! These things are clear and taught in the Bible in Romans 9, for example, as well as in other places. **BUT**: As you go through the 66 books and ask God, “*How do you run your Universe? Do you ask your children to trust you without evidence?*”...you will find exactly the opposite to be true! You'll find Him *warning* us not to believe mere claims! I'll illustrate.

First I'll set out a “proof” text for you. Consider the passage in Deuteronomy 13:1 – 3 for example: “*If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the word of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams.*” Never mind the miracles, signs and wonders!

Next, I want you to consider a difficult story in the Bible. Read this incredible account in 1st Kings 13. It almost takes up the entire chapter, to verse 32. Read it now and come back.

Ooooooh! That's a nasty tale, isn't it? God doesn't come off looking too good in this story, does He? He sends a young prophet to hassle King Jereboam. God appears to use “power” here, doesn't He? He strikes the King's arm with paralysis and turns the affronting altar into ashes. Then He causes the young prophet to be killed by a lion on the way home because the young man fell for a lie. It doesn't seem fair, does it?

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I can't use this illustration without giving you some principles to use in trying to understand how God could operate this way. We will come back to it later, but for the time being focus on this: Because God is using a demonstration of evidence to the Universe (not just us), He must show what are the consequences of people's actions without imposing Himself. When He's rejected, He lets people go on their own demonstrating what happens when they set themselves up as gods, thinking that they can live without the one God. This was Lucifer's big mistake.

God has never had much to work with when His people were in a state of rejection. In this instance, He's working with His people in the manner they have asked Him to, speaking to them in a language they understand. All 66 books are full of stories where God has given His people instructions for their own good that they refused to follow. God permitted them to "have it their way" and they reaped the consequences of their own actions. In the stories from Exodus to the New Testament, His people have followed after pagan gods and wanted to be like the rest of the world, instead of being an example to the rest of the world as God intended. They believed these pagan gods to be arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe, and they wanted that of their god...so God let them experience what that would be like. Time and again they repented of it only to fall back again. In those periods of sanity when they came back to the God that loved them, God took the opportunity to show them more about Himself while He had their attention. At other times, He was hamstrung and used "emergency measures" to bring them back again. As I said before, we'll visit this again later after we have more background. So then, back to this story.

There is a moral to the story about the young prophet who went to King Jeroboam and appeared to be carrying out his mission so successfully until he ran into the old prophet. The moral is this: People who claim to be speaking from God may be lying!! God Himself warns us of this!

Let's look at another story, one of my favorite illustrations that God tries to convince us on the basis of truth, rather than power. The

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story is about Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Do you remember this? It happened after He was crucified. You can find it in Luke 24 verses 13 through 35. It's a precious story; please read it and come back.

You can't read this story without asking yourself: “Why didn't Jesus reveal Himself right away?” Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you have said to them: “Hey guys...it's me! You still have questions on what happened? Well, just ask away; I'm your authority on it!” Jesus didn't tell them who He was. He hid Himself from them until He led them to an intelligent confidence based on the unquestionable evidence contained in scripture! If God takes this approach, then who are we to look for shortcuts?

“OK”, you say. “Fancy talk. Are you trying to tell me that God hasn't used a show of power in all this? What about the Flood; the thundering on Mt. Sinai; the miracle before the priests and Jezebel at Mt. Carmel; or the plagues in Egypt. This sounds like a little intellectual dishonesty”.

There are explanations for these things that don't meet the eye without considering the cosmic nature of these events. Each time God uses power in this way we need to ask ourselves...**WHY?**

Let's look at the plagues thing a minute. The children of Israel had been living in Egypt for over 400 years. Joseph had long since died. They became absorbed into the Egyptian culture and forgot their own. Instead of being the influencers, they become the influencees! They went after what was accepted and rejected the blessing God had been bestowing upon them. They were so plenteous and potentially powerful a people that the Egyptians enslaved them to control them.

How were gods viewed in those times? If you study the history you'll find that gods were viewed in terms of power. If your nation was in control, if it ran the “empire”, your nation's god was certainly more powerful and therefore worthy of worship than the puny gods of those nations that were subjugated (oops...funny word again). The gods of the powerful nations surely must have been more powerful

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and the gods of the weak nations must have been weaker. OK, back to the plagues.

Each plague attacked an Egyptian god. The one God took out all the gods the Egyptians thought were giving them power. The lesson of God's power is an easy one to learn if you doubt God's power! It's not hard for Him to demonstrate that!

Peter had some interesting things to say about this in his second letter. Read the first dozen verses. In a nutshell, Peter is saying: "Some of you think that the 2nd coming has been delayed because God doesn't have the power to do what He has promised! May I remind you that God created the world...that He drowned it in a flood...so don't think He's waiting because He's weak!"

It's too bad that God has to reassure us once in awhile that He is powerful! If we need to be reminded, He will do it! It's easy...but it's also very dangerous because it supports the accusation that God abuses His superior power. God is very careful about the way He has to use it.

So, again, does God expect us to trust Him as a powerful stranger whose power we fear? Is that the relationship He wants? Look at what St. Paul tells us about it in Romans 10: 11 and 13 – 17: *"For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed...Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? ...How welcome are those who come preaching God's Good News!!...Faith comes from listening to this Good News – the Good News about Christ."* (LB)

Where do we find this Good News about God if not in the Biblical record? How does one go about reading the Bible to find out the answer to questions...the **truth** about God...whether He is worthy of our trust? Should we collect "key texts" (claims)? Has God asked us to believe mere claims (God is love, etc.)? Where's the evidence of these claims?

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It's in the STORIES!!

That is true! We adults do a very strange thing: **WE** collect claims. But we give the evidence to the **children!** And we hope the little dears understand how, filled with the Spirit, Samson killed thousands with the jawbone of an ass! We haven't a clue! We're terrified that someone will ask us the meaning of a story like the one above about the young prophet and the old prophet and we won't be able to explain. “Proof texts” are a lot easier. You control the Bible study, only look at those texts that support your position, and “get outta Dodge”. I suppose I'm dating myself here. “Get outta Dodge” is a term that comes from the old western movies and TV serials. “Gunsmoke” comes to mind where Marshall Dillon tells unsavory characters that he wants them to take care of their business and “get outta Dodge” City. You get the idea.

Children are the ones who should be given the claims. They're willing to accept statements and claims that others “in authority” make. You often hear them relaying this knowledge:

- “My mommy said that you should wait an hour after you eat before you go in swimming.”
- “My daddy said that you should never discuss religion or politics with anybody.”
- “My teacher said that the earth was 8 billion years old!”

Children buy this stuff and bring it home. Later they learn to question...but even then you'll hear:

- “My best friend said that she dated Elvis once.”
- “Rolling Stone magazine said that it's better to live together for awhile before you get married to see if you're really compatible.”
- “Marx said that a great struggle is needed before we'll ever achieve a classless society”.

This is so engrained that, as adults, we still carry it on:

- “Tom Brokaw said that Ken Starr viciously attacked the president with groundless claims based on politics.”
- “President Clinton said he didn't have sex with that woman.”

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- “Peter Drucker said that managers eventually get promoted to a level beyond their competence.”
- “Al Gore said that he invented the Internet.”
- “James Dobson said that abortion is a crime against God.”

Somewhere in there...maturity starts to settle in and we begin to ask for evidence! It takes longer for some than for others.

So...we need to reverse what we do in church!! We should give the claims to the children and take the stories back! The stories are the *demonstration* of the truth about our God; the key texts are the summaries of the meaning of the stories. They're really more like claims and should be used in the teaching of children!

To know God better as someone worthy of our trust, we adults need to read all 66 books and ask of each story, teaching and event:

“What does this tell me about my God?”

It takes about a year to do this...couple of chapters a day...more if you get side-tracked...less if you're on a mission. Consider the times we live in, though...there's not much time left! **DO IT NOW!!**

I've read the Bible through at least seven times now, and I've read several different versions in the process. I've discovered that:

- God is powerful
- God is equally gracious
- God is fanatical about freedom

There is no shortcut to getting to know God in this way...even though faith is a gift from Him. It's not magic...it takes effort for a relationship...like a marriage. More than half of marriages fail today because the effort isn't there, either. This is about commitment!

Can you go to bed not trusting God...end your prayer with “*please give me faith*”...and wake up in the morning trusting God with your whole heart? Does that even make sense? But...but...doesn't the Holy Spirit do this for you...after all, it's a *gift!* Does everything have

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to make sense? Well, let me ask you this...does God do senseless things? Is that how you picture God?

OK, let's look at a claim in the Bible then: Galatians 5:22 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith...”(KJV). There. That stuff is all a gift from God. It just happens when you get the Holy Spirit. Oh really?

There's no contradiction here...but you need to ask: “how does the Holy Spirit do this? Is it really magic? How are we led to trust in God?” We need to go back to Peter's second letter again. In chapter 1 verse 20 he talks about how the Spirit works. We'll look at two versions:

“But first note this: no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself. For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God.”

(New English Bible) or

“You must understand this in the first place, that no prophecy in Scripture can be understood through one's own powers, for no prophecy ever originated in the human will, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit men spoke for God.”

(Goodspeed)

It is for this very reason that you should NEVER open the Bible on your own without first asking the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth. There are plenty of other spirits very anxious to guide you otherwise. As a result, there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the Bible and what it says about God.

Look at Jesus' own explanation of how the Holy Spirit works. While in the upper room on the night before His crucifixion, He desperately tried to get these truths through to His motley crew. John 14: verses 16,17, 25, 26; chapter 15 verse 26 and chapter 16 verse 12 quote the following:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the

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truth about God...The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you...The Helper will come – the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send Him to you from the Father, and He will speak about me. When, however, the Spirit comes, Who reveals the truth about God, He will lead you into all the truth.” (GNB)

The Spirit is also called “Comforter”; “Counselor”; “Advocate”. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in the same work: **Revealing the truth about God!** Romans 8:26 says that the Holy Spirit helps us to pray as we read! So if you desire to:

- Know God
- Obtain answers to questions in the controversy
- See Christ reveal truth

READ THE BIBLE!!

But...here’s another logical question to follow: Can the Bible be trusted?? That’s the subject of our next chapter or so; we’ll deal with it then.

There are a couple of other quotes that I’d like you to consider on this topic. The first comes from John 5:39. You’ll recognize Christ talking to His church leaders here:

“You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about Me!” (GNB)

What was Jesus saying here? He was chiding the leaders of His church who had fallen into such legalism that they thought they could find the formula to follow that would earn them the right to require God to give them eternal life! They were a very “works” oriented people. If they “did the work”, they were entitled to eternal life. Jesus was saying: “you don’t get it. This isn’t about works!! It’s about relationship...about learning to trust Me again for everything! The scriptures tell you about Me!”

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We are so privileged to have the Scriptures to look back on. It was not always so. Paul clarified this in the opening of his letter to the Hebrews:

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son.”(RSV)

There are no claims in this passage. It’s an encouragement to consider the demonstration.

To have peace once again in His Universe, all God asks of us is trust. But He does not expect us to trust Him as a stranger. Besides, He has been charged with being unworthy of our faith. How has God answered such a false accusation? Mere claims of trustworthiness prove nothing. Only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances – especially difficult ones – can trust be re-established and confirmed. The Bible is a record of just such a demonstration. **THIS** is God’s way of restoring trust. There’s not a better way!

Chapter #5:

The Bible Contains the Evidence

All the work we've done up until now has been predicated or based upon a pretty heavy assumption:

The Bible is the true and only Word of God

This isn't too tough to swallow for people who have been raised in Christianity...or even for those who have had absolutely no religious background whatsoever. But remember the theme of these chapters. This one takes another look at the Bible in that larger setting of the controversy over God's character and government. Without the Bible, we would know nothing about this conflict in God's family. Nor would we have the record of how He has demonstrated His trustworthiness by His infinitely skillful and gracious way of handling the revolt! But if we're going to be fair and open-minded...we have to ask the tough questions. A logical one is this:

Can the Bible be trusted?

No...it's not an affront to God to ask this. It's a necessary question. Assuming the old manuscripts are accurate (another assumption!) you can go farther: do we have the right collection of sixty-six books? Is that all there is? Have the words been accurately preserved? Or have people fooled with it over the ages? Can we trust the many translations? Which one is the best? How do we know? And, probably most of all if we get past these, can we have confidence that we understand the meaning?

Right off the bat you're going to offend some people by claiming that the Bible is the true and only Word of God. Let's leave atheists out of it for now...we'll have plenty of fun just dealing with the different concepts people have of God. Other believers in "god(s)" also have writings that they follow that they believe are inspired. How do they know? Their books say so...just like the Bible does. Consider, for example, the Book of Mormon. Note the following excerpts from it's introduction:

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“...The book was written by many ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation.... Concerning this record the Prophet Joseph Smith said: ‘I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.’...We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

The last statement above was taken from Moroni 10:3-5 which says:

“Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true, and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”

This isn't the only place in the Book of Mormon such claims are made. It couldn't be any clearer than in the Book of a Nephite named Alma. This is in Alma 5: 45 – 48:

“And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me. And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been

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revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God. I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name."

So, you can see, there are some very good things in the Book of Mormon...many things that even agree with the Bible. The ten commandments are contained in their entirety in Mosiah 13: 12 – 24.

There are some other teachings that would not seem to follow those in the Bible. In Chapter 40 of the Book of Alma, for example, we're told that when you die you either go to paradise or into captivity by the devil to await the resurrection (which is a reuniting of soul and body). Although this is taught from the Bible, it is a misconstruing of its writings; out of context and in conflict with other clear statements in the Bible to the contrary. The Book of Mormon is crystal clear on this concept, however. Further, in Mosiah 2: 38 and 39 the book states that unrepentant sinners endure a never-ending torment in darkness. That isn't Biblical.

There are other teachings of the Mormon faith that come from sources outside the Book of Mormon. Mormons believe that their leaders have been "present-day prophets". Hence Brigham Young and other presidents have had their words recorded in what are called the Journal of Discourses. Mormon doctrine, or Mormon teaching has therefore been "updated" from the Book of Mormon. This is where the "unusual" teachings that are associated with Mormons come from, such as polygamy. In the Journal of Discourses, Volume 4, page 259 Brigham Young states that Jesus was married to Mary, Martha and the other Mary at the wedding feast of Cana. Hence Mormons accepted multiple marriages where the law of the land permitted it.

One of the strangest teachings of Mormonism is the doctrine of **blood atonement**. The origin of this comes from a sermon preached

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by Brigham Young in 1856 and published in the Journal of Discourses Volume 4, pages 53 and 54. Joseph Fielding Smith, an official historian of the Mormon church published an explanation of this doctrine in his book: Doctrines of Salvation, Volume 1, Pages 133-135. Here's a quote:

*“Just a word or two now, on the subject of **blood atonement**. What is that doctrine? Unadulterated, if you please, laying aside the pernicious insinuations and lying charges that have so often been made, it is simply this: Through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel...but man may commit certain grievous sins – according to his light and knowledge – that will place him **beyond** the reach of the atoning blood of Christ. If then he would be saved he must make sacrifice of his own life to atone – so far as in his power lies – for that sin, for the blood of Christ alone under certain circumstances will not avail.” (emphasis supplied)*

To insure that you don't miss what's being said here, I'll give you yet another quote from page 87 of Bruce McConkie's book: Mormon Doctrine. Bruce McConkie was one of the First Council of Seventy in the Mormon Church. He said:

*“...under certain circumstances there are some serious sins for which the cleansing of Christ does not operate, and the **law of god is that men must have their own blood shed to atone for their sins...**” (emphasis supplied).*

The reason I have brought you all of the above is to illustrate a point: Many books that people follow as the word of God contain claims and portions of truth. It is incumbent (Oops! One of those big words again!)...you must be careful with all claims of authority and take the painstaking time to determine for yourself whether YOU think such books actually are authoritative...whether they make sense to you. That includes the Bible.

Another faith which claims to have the exclusive and true word of God is that of the prophet Mohammed...the Muslim faith. That faith takes as its sole authority the Koran. This faith has more than 800

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million adherents (followers). Can they all be wrong? Isn't that just the kind of approach people take? If "everybody's doing it...it must be OK"! The faith came to be in the early 7th Century. Muslims accept the Koran as the verbatim, unadulterated, direct speech or language of God. They trace their origin to Abraham, whom they believe offered up Ishmael as the child of promise rather than Isaac. Tracing their lineage through Abraham, Moses and John the Baptist, they believe Jesus simply to be a prophet. Islam is closer to Judaism and Christianity than any of the other great world religions. The Muslims claim Judaism failed and Christianity became spiritually corrupt; therefore God raised up the prophet Mohammed to reform the corruption of an apostate religion.

Once again, the claims and teachings of the Muslim faith contain many truths and many teachings common to Christianity. But a critical tenet or element of the faith is that those who do not adhere to its teachings regarding the one God will be hurled into the raging fire of Hell. Other teachings come from the Traditions or the Sunna. These signify the custom, habit and usage of the prophet. They cover all phases of life and are believed in by all the "faithful". These two sources, the Koran and the Traditions, are called the roots of Islam. It is from the Traditions that beliefs in multiple marriages are believed in as well as other laws that relate to the inferiority of women. Indeed, the Islamic concept of heaven or paradise is not spiritual, but a place suited to the physical desire which man is conscious of in this life and will never outgrow. It is a luscious garden of fruits and running streams with delightful nooks in which are the "houris" or virgins who are the principal reward of the righteous. This is yet another example of a faith held in high esteem by many with moral teachings to be admired as well as a remarkable reverence for the one and only God...but one which, when examined, creates more questions about the loving fairness of God than answers.

The Hindu faith holds that God is an impersonal being present everywhere, and that ultimate salvation comes through purification via good deeds or works. It's a form of pantheism or worship of what is in nature. There are "gods of the heavens" and "gods of the earth". Archaeology has determined that Hindu roots come from the ancient Persian culture and that its religion has elements of the pagan worship

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brought therefrom. Ancient Indian scriptures are voluminous. Certain of them are contained in the Bagda Vita and teach multiple lives wherein one learns the lessons of life by coming back again and again until one gets it right. Oddly enough, the Hindu faith recognizes Jesus as a great man, an enlightened teacher and prophet...but not the Son of God. Some of the thought contained in these writings is stimulating...but the religion is fluid, having been influenced over time by Buddha, Mohammed, Christ and a great many others. There is much about it that a penetrating mind finds stimulating, and much that the same mind finds frustrating and nonsensical.

These faiths aside...how did we get so many different Christian faiths? There will be some missing from the list, but here are a few:

- Baptists (a few different branches besides)
- Bible Churches (Non-denominational)
- Catholics
- Christian Scientists
- Church of God
- Church of God in Christ
- Disciples of Christ
- Episcopalians
- Greek Orthodox
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Jews (not Christian...but in the lineage of Christianity)
- Lutherans (Many branches or synods of these)
- Methodists (United; Free and Others)
- Nazarenes
- Pentecostals (Several Off-shoots)
- Presbyterians
- Quakers
- Radio Church of God
- Seventh Day Adventists
- Unitarian/Universalists
- United Church of Christ

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All these claim to follow the Bible. As a matter of fact, there are almost as many “versions” of the Bible as there brands of religion. Again, to name a few:

Douay or New Catholic Version
American Standard Version
New American Standard Version
(Catholic Translation)
King James Version
New King James Version
Good News Bible (Today’s English Version)
Living Bible (Paraphrase by an individual)
Moffatt’s Version (Paraphrase by an individual)
Goodspeed’s Version (Paraphrase by an individual)
New English Bible
Revised Standard Version
New International Version
Williams Version (Paraphrase by an individual)
Weymouth Version
Montgomery Version
(Paraphrase by a woman in 1925)
Spurrell Version (Paraphrase by a woman in 1885)
New Jerusalem Bible (Catholic Translation)
The Amplified Bible
The Anchor Bible (Joint Protestant, Catholic, Jewish)
The Knox Bible (Catholic Translation)
The Kleist and Lily Bible (Catholic Translation)
The Spencer Bible (Catholic Translation)
The Alba House (Catholic Translation)

This doesn’t scratch the surface of all the various works of one sort or other that are out there or going on as you read. There is a Jewish version that has been in the works for 35 years that has fascinating footnotes. For example the passage in Genesis where the Bible says that “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being” has a footnote. The chairman of the interpreting committee of Jews, who should know Hebrew better than anyone else, states that the Hebrew word for “soul” used in this passage means the whole being, including the blood in his veins!

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So now...what if you were visiting with a Catholic friend who wanted to use the Douay Version or the New Jerusalem Bible? Your friend feels strongly that it is THE inspired word even though it contains a dozen or so extra books. Would you say “Wait a minute...YOURS isn’t inspired! MINE is!”? Or would it help to have the traditional key text contained in 2nd Timothy 3:16?

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching...”

Does that clear everything up? By the way, just what scripture is being referred to in this verse? What scriptures were available to Paul and Timothy? They didn’t have the New Testament yet did they? Therefore this had to be a reference to the Old Testament. There are religious faiths that throw out the whole Old Testament saying it was part of an old dispensation (the old order of things) that Christ came to do away with. Therefore they use only the New Testament as their authority for what God teaches. What do you suppose they do with this verse?

Back to your discussion with your Catholic friend...is the King James Version (KJV) more inspired than the Douay Version that contains those extra books (the Apocrypha)? After all, the KJV doesn’t have those books. Well, I’ve got a surprise for you. The KJV HAD those books in it from the start in 1611 all the way up to 1827! That’s over two hundred years! It hasn’t been that long since removal.

Martin Luther, a Catholic priest who had turned from the system of his Catholic faith, was the first to gather up these books in the Bible. He put them in the middle of the Bible between the Old and New Testaments with a footnote that said: “not for doctrine”! He recognized these as old writings, but he couldn’t see the teachings of Christ or grace in them. They seemed to him somehow inferior to the other 66 books. But remember Luther’s attitude toward the books of Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation! He couldn’t see Christ or grace in these either, so he put them at the end of the New Testament.

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Your Catholic friend looks up 2nd Timothy 3:16 and, “low and behold”, it’s in the Douay Version and New Jerusalem Bible too! Your friend says: “Hey! My Bible claims that ALL the scripture in it is inspired too! You have no exclusive on that!” Now what? Let’s take another look at 2nd Timothy 3:16 in another version, is that OK? Well, why not? It was originally written in Greek anyway. *Someone* had to interpret it into English! The New English Bible (NEB) is particularly enlightening here:

“Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth...”

Wow! That puts a little different “spin” on it now...doesn’t it? Inspired scripture versus uninspired scripture...uh-oh. Who is qualified to determine what’s inspired and what isn’t? Fundamentalists who, like the followers of the Koran, believe that every word and every punctuation mark is just exactly the way God breathed it are going to have a little trouble here. At a minimum, one has to realize that God didn’t breathe it in English! Furthermore, there was no punctuation! We’ll get to that later. How about this notion!?!? Some of scripture is inspired and some isn’t? Well...this was mentioned a little in Chapter 1 when we talked about the story of Job, remember? It was also mentioned in Chapters three and four of this book when we looked at stories about trust. Job’s friends had a lot to say in scripture about God that was wrong! God specifically said so in Chapter 42 of the Book of Job. Would you say Job’s friends’ words were inspired?

It’s likely that Timothy’s Bible that Paul was referring to in his letter was the Greek Old Testament. Guess what that contained? Yup! Those 12 books called the Apocrypha! *That’s* why Paul had to say: “Tim...you have a great many books in your possession, but only *those that are inspired by God are PROFITABLE!!*” This understanding is easily arrived at by reading around the passage to consider the context in which Paul put this in his letter:

“But for your part, stand by the truths you have learned and are assured of. Remember from whom you learned them; remember that from early childhood you have been familiar with the sacred writings which have power to make you wise and lead you to salvation through faith in Christ

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Jesus. Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind”.

That’s 2nd Timothy 3: 14-17 in the NEB. Do you see it?

The Orthodox Jews were the first to get “Scripture”. They only had 39 books, starting with the author Moses. Scripture was broken down into three broad categories:

THE LAW – *Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy*

THE PROPHETS – *Joshua; Judges; Samuel; Kings; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi*

THE WRITINGS – *Psalms; Proverbs; Job; Song of Solomon; Ruth; Lamentations; Ecclesiastes; Esther; Daniel; Ezra; Nehemiah; And Chronicles*

Now it IS significant to note here that Jesus referred to these as authoritative. Note what He said in Luke 24:44:

“Everything written about in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.”(RSV)

It is also important to note that, in reading other verses in the New Testament, sometimes they shortened the reference to scripture to *The Law and The Prophets*. Sometimes it was shortened even further to just *The Law*! Now think about that! It’s very important! Sometimes references to the Law were meant to be the whole Old Testament...not just the Pentetuech (first five books of the Bible) or the Ten Commandments! This, of course, needs to be illustrated...and that’s not a problem!

Let’s consider Matthew 5 first. This is Jesus speaking. He’s talking about the whole Old Testament here and not just the Ten Commandments as you can read in its context:

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“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” verses 17 & 18 (RSV).

Isn't that something? Many fundamentalists have construed this to refer to just the Ten Commandments, especially Sabbatarians who wish to “prove” that the Fourth Commandment regarding the seventh-day Sabbath has NOT been abolished. But that's not the meaning here at all; read it yourself.

Let's look at another instance. This is an interesting story of an encounter Jesus had with the leading Jews of the time and it's recorded in John 10: 22 – 39. People asked Jesus to quit keeping them in suspense and to declare whether He was the Messiah or not. Jesus answered them and said He was One with the Father, at which point they picked up rocks to stone Him for blasphemy. When He questioned them about it they said:

“You are only a man, but you are trying to make yourself God!” verse 33 (Good News Bible or GNB).

So, in verse 34 Jesus referred them to their own authority:

“It is written in your own Law that God said, ‘You are gods’.”(GNB)

If you look at a margin or a footnote to John 10:34 you will see a reference there to Psalms 82:6 which reads “‘You are gods,’ I said; ‘all of you are sons of the Most High.’” Jesus was quoting from the Psalms here and He referred to them as the Law!

You will find...if you try...that this concept (this realization that references to the Law and the Prophets, etc. are to the Old Testament or scriptures of the time) helps you better understand many confusing verses in the New Testament. And while we're looking at Jesus' reference to the Old Testament, please look at the confidence He expressed in it in John 10:35:

“Oh My God!”

*“We know that what the scripture says is true forever...”
(GNB)*

To a Christian, this revelation regarding the Law, the prophets and the writings must have great significance. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Church of God completely throws out the Old Testament as no longer relevant and accepts the New Testament only. Yet the New Testament, as well as Christ Himself, corroborates the authority of the Old Testament. Evangelicals that say the Law has been done away with are usually referring to the Ten Commandment Law. But often the “proof texts” they use (like Colossians 2:13 and 14 for example) refer to more than the Ten Commandment Law! If you just continue reading in Colossians 2 through verse 16, this becomes very apparent.

Consider a popular “proof text” in the Old Testament...a well known passage containing excellent counsel:

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” Isaiah 8:19,20 (NIV)

Note the familiar reference “to the law” (1st 5 books of the Bible) and “to the testimony” (the Prophets). Readers of the scriptures and quoters of it often used this common language to refer to groupings of the writings. Another prophet offered the same sentiment as Isaiah in Zechariah 7:12:

“They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by His Spirit through earlier prophets.” (NIV)

Zechariah offers the same test of what truth is...to the law...and to what was taught in the past! Notice the categories of “THE PROPHETS” referenced up to the time of Christ. The book of Daniel is conspicuously missing! Keep looking and you will see that it was

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categorized with the Psalms and Proverbs as part of “THE WRITINGS”. The book was not commonly understood as prophetic until after the New Testament was written and readers compared it to the common language contained in the book of Revelation.

A little over 400 years passed between the Old Testament times and the New Testament times. There were a number of other books written during this period and after that claimed inspiration too...far more than were finally chosen to comprise the Bible! Many Mediterranean people accepted these books as inspired, and many people today feel that way about them as well. About a dozen of them that we previously referred to above were taken so seriously by the more Orthodox Jews scattered abroad outside of Palestine that they found their way into the Greek Septuagint (Greek Old Testament). This, indeed, was the Bible used by early Greek Christians. The books were referred to as the Old Testament Apocrypha:

- 1st Esdras and 2nd Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- Additions to Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus
- Baruch
- Susanna
- Song of the Three Children
- Bel and the Dragon
- Prayer of Manasseh
- 1st and 2nd Maccabees

There were still others that were NOT accepted then or now. They were commonly referred to as the Pseudipigrapha (means “falsely titled”):

- Testament of Adam
- Book of Jubilees
- Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
- Testament of Job
- Book of Enoch
- Sibylline Oracles
- Assumption of Moses
- Ascension of Isaiah

“Oh My God!”

Psalms of Solomon
Magical Books of Moses
Story of Ahikar

The stories contained herein were so far-fetched and distinguishable from the rest of the Canon that they were unanimously left out of the Bible by scholars.

The Old Testament Apocrypha, however, was the subject of much debate by Catholic scholars. As mentioned above, Martin Luther bunched all of these books up in the middle of the Bible. Finally, the Council of Trent in the 1500s declared the Apocrypha to be sacred...THAT'S why they're still in Catholic Bibles today like the New Jerusalem Bible. You should take particular note at something important here, however. These books are not “Roman Catholic” books...they were written by Jews, before there was a Christian church! Many of the “traditions” in the Christian church came from Judaism and paganism.

There were many, many other apocryphal books written by unknown and undetermined sources...books like:

Gospel of Thomas
Book of James
Assumption of the Virgin
Acts of John
Acts of Paul
Acts of Peter
Letters of Christ and Abgarus
Letter of Lentulus
Apocalypse of Peter
Apocalypse of Paul

The list goes on, but these are some of the better known. I'll set out a passage from the Book of 1st Clement below to give you a sense for what's in these lesser-known works:

“Let us consider that wonderful type of the resurrection which is seen in the Eastern countries; that is to say, in Arabia. There is a certain bird called a Phoenix; of this there is never but one at a time; and that lives five hundred years. And when the time of its dissolution draws near, that it must die, it makes itself a nest of frankincense, and

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myrrh, and other spices into which when its time is fulfilled it enters and dies. But its flesh putrifying, breeds a certain worm, which being nourished with the juice of the dead bird brings forth feathers; and when it is grown to a perfect state, it takes up the nest in which the bones of its parents lie, and carries it from Arabia into Egypt, to a city called Heliopolis: and flying in open day in the sight of all men, lays it upon the altar of the sun, and so returns from whence it came. The priests then search into the records of the time; and find that it returned precisely at the end of five hundred years. And shall we then think it to be any very great and strange thing for the Lord of all to raise up those that religiously serve him in the assurance of a good faith, when even by a bird he shews us the greatness of his power to fulfil his promise?" 1st Clement Chapter 12: verses 1 through 6. You get the idea.

How do you know whether books like this should be included in the Holy Bible: "the only and true Word of God"? Obviously, one must either examine these; or take the word of the scholarly committees comprised of such a wealth of people from a variety of nations and faiths who, over the centuries, have all agreed on those to be included and those to be excluded.

Let's leave the "which books should be included" problem now and deal with whether we have the right, inspired words from these books! Now you know the Bible was NOT written in English. It was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic (which read from right to left) and Greek. Here's a modern example of what those languages look like:

“Oh My God!”

Hebrew: **בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ**
 earth the and heavens the God created beginning in

Aramaic: מְלִכָּא לְעֻלְמָן חַיִּי
live ever for king O

Greek: Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον
So for loved the God the world

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED

Ancient forms of these languages had no space between words, no punctuation! Can you see how mistakes could innocently occur? Take, for example, the following phrase inserted in a line of writing:

GOD IS NOWHERE

How would you read this phrase? God is nowhere... or God is now here? It makes a big difference doesn't it? The accuracy and continuity of the Bible is truly remarkable!

Archaeology has come just in the “nick of time” as a science to corroborate for us much about the authenticity of the history of the Bible. We don’t have the time or space here to get into it, but for those of you who may want a little more comfort about the authenticity of the Bible, you may turn to The Bible As History, a Confirmation of the Book of Books, by Werner Keller. William Morrow & Company, 1956, 1964. There are numerous works and even shorter articles on this subject. You might even pull a few up on the Internet.

The point to be made in this chapter is that all claims of inspiration are just that: CLAIMS. It is up to the individual to examine works of interest in his pursuit of truth. A great many works claim to be as inspired or more inspired by God than the Bible. At a

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minimum, you MUST read the Bible yourself to find out what YOU think. Frederic Kenyon, a one-time curator of the British Museum felt convinced as he read it and compared it to his own vast knowledge and evidence of history. He said: *“The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.”*

But...but...why didn't God make it any clearer than this? Does it need to be any clearer than this?

You may not like it...or you very well may: YOU have to be the judge. We'll go just a little deeper into this in the next chapter.

Chapter #6:

Evaluating the Evidence

I promised to go just a little deeper into the concepts studied in the last chapter...permitting you to judge for yourself whether or not the Bible can be trusted. Last time we entertained a look at some of the other books of other faiths outside Christianity that claim to be inspired and the only true Word of God. We shouldn't neglect to mention the Torah of the Israelites along with the Talmud with its Mishnah and Gemara. The Torah contains the same first five books that the Bible does. The Talmud is the authoritative body of Jewish traditions containing the Mishnah (the traditions themselves) and the Gemara (commentary on the traditions).

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the volumes of print claiming to contain God's Word to mankind. To be honest, I've not examined the entirety of all these works either...though I probably could have for all the television I've watched and novels I've read! That aside, I have read enough of all these works, including portions of many more modern philosophers and seers/prophets (Cace; Blavatny; Rand; Dixon; Castenada, etc.) to sort out for myself what I believe is truth...what is authoritative. So...am I going to claim that I've got the answers? Am I going to ask you to accept my word? People ask that of you all the time...and most of you go along with it! In the business world where I live, it's called marketing and it works! I think that's dangerous when it comes to your personal involvement with God. It's true that mentors are important along the path...I thank the Lord for mine. But an individual's relationship with God...what they really come to believe...is deeply personal. The pursuit of truth is that way, and it's the quest of a lifetime. Well, that's a worthwhile discussion, and it is related to this chapter. But I want to bring in some things that would've fit into the last chapter except they would have made it too long! They may make this one too long too!

We previously examined the way the Bible came together. We asked ourselves if we had the right collection of books to comprise it. One of the things I wanted to mention in the last chapter was the importance of Archaeology in confirming the Bible. I suggested you read at least one book on the subject, but I wanted to call your attention

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to a couple of items. Everyone's eyes light up and ears tune in when the topic of prophecy is mentioned. People today want to know what's going to happen in the future. Consider the popularity of "psychics" and the whole network of them promoted by Dionne Warwick. She lends them credibility. You've never heard of any of them, but people will sit up and listen if a celebrity recommends something. Celebrities usually do it for money, for some advertiser. It makes me wonder what's in it for Ms. Warwick. People have wondered after "mediums", "seers", astrologers, etc. for millenniums. We talk of a prophet's ability to predict as though they were baseball players' hitting averages: "Did you realize that only 31% of Jean Dixon's prophecies ever came true? Why Edgar Cace had a better record than that (47%) and Nostradamus holds the all time record (68%)." Did you ever take a look at the "batting average" of the Bible? As time goes by, archaeologists confirm story after story and prophecy after prophecy so that the Bible's accuracy, as well as it is known, keeps growing. I want to illustrate this.

Whatever happened to the mighty empire that was once Egypt? At one time it was a world power! The proud, prosperous nation was once the granary of the world, supplying wheat, cotton, and linen to others. The full waters of the Nile would regularly rise and flood surrounding fields, making them rich and fertile. In ancient times twelve branches of the Nile flowed through the delta region. For a variety of reasons, this land became an object lesson of what happens when you trust in Pagan worship. The prophet Isaiah in Chapter 19: 5-7 said: *"The waters of the river will dry up, and the riverbed will be parched and dry. The canals will stink; streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up. The reeds and rushes will wither, also the plants along the Nile, at the mouth of the river. Every sown field along the Nile will become parched, will blow away and be no more."* According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Windblown sand dunes and stony and sandy plains comprise 90% of Egypt's land." Another prophet of the Bible, Ezekiel, predicted the following about Egypt in Chapter 29: 14-15 and 30:12: *"They will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowliest of kingdoms and will never again exalt itself above the other nations. I will make it so weak that it will never again rule over the nations....By the hand of foreigners I will lay waste the land and everything in it. I the Lord have spoken."* In just a few words, Ezekiel described the

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entire subsequent history of a nation that was once one of the richest and most powerful on earth. Egypt has indeed been ruled “by the hand of foreigners”, dominated in turn by the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantine Greeks, the Saracens, the Turks, the French and the British. Today Egypt is truly “a lowly kingdom” of departed glory. But it *still* exists as a nation.

The Bible predicted the desolation of the Edomite nation also in Ezekiel 25: 12-14. For years scholars questioned its existence. It’s capital city of Petra was hidden for almost 4,000 years! A great many people have seen it since it was featured in the last Indiana Jones film! This capital had magnificent buildings carved entirely out of stone. They even had hot water in that city and systems of running water. The prophet said nobody would ever live there again, and so it is.

Scholars scoffed at the Bible for hundreds of years because it says that Nebuchadnezzar built Babylon. They all said, “Queen Semiramis built Babylon. We don’t know anything about this ‘Nebuchadnezzar’.” Not long ago, archaeologists uncovered Procession Way. This brick-paved roadway running through the Ishtar Gate was the route conquering Babylonian armies marched on as they triumphantly returned to the city. Every one of these bricks has Nebuchadnezzar’s name stamped on it! The Bible was right when it named Nebuchadnezzar as the builder of Babylon. The Bible has fascinating predictions concerning Babylon. The discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder confirmed the Bible’s stories in the book of Daniel...a very important prophetic book.

Critics of the Bible have for centuries described it as just a collection of legends. Over the years, archaeologists have confirmed “legend” after “legend” as truth! Other famous discoveries, such as the Rosetta stone, have led the way to understanding ancient languages the manuscripts of which, previously not decipherable, have confirmed the Bible. The Ebla tablets found in the Syrian city of Ebla contain a whole library of 3,000 volumes in stone. They span about 45 centuries of history from about 2500 years before Christ to 1800 years after. They tell the story of creation just as in the Bible. They tell the story of the Flood...a worldwide flood. They talk about Abraham and Isaac, and about two famous cities: Sodom and Gomorrah – and how they

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were destroyed by fire just as the Bible says. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in the Qumran community provides us with a 2000-year look at the Bible. They were copied 150 years before Christ in what was called a scriptorium of the Essenes. Priests hand-copied the Bible on a large table under strict laws of transcription. They would count every word in a passage they worked on. If they were copying Psalm 49, for instance, they'd count every word in Psalm 49. Let's say it had 350 words. Then they'd count to the middle word. Let's say the middle word is "blessing." Then they'd count every letter! Suppose it had 7,000 letters. And let's say the middle letter is "S". Before they started copying Psalm 49, they'd write down all the numerical computations: the number of words, 350; number of letters, 7,000. They'd write down that the middle word was "blessing" and that the middle letter of the passage was "S". Then they'd begin copying word by word and compare the copy to the original. Sometimes the copy would seem to look the same, but after the words and letters were counted, they'd discover that although the middle letter was supposed to be "S", it wasn't – it was an "E". They'd have to rip up the copy and start all over again! The copy couldn't have even one letter wrong. You can look at almost 2,000 years of copying, compare them to your Bible today and see no difference, no discrepancy.

The history of the preservation of the Bible is awesome. Few, if any, would deny that the book has been kept intact for millennia. The same kinds of pain to preserve are yet taken today. The very Dead Sea scrolls that validate the Bible text are housed at Jerusalem in a building called the Shrine of the Book. They're so priceless that they're stored in a nuclear-proof elevator inside the Shrine of the Book! If there were ever a nuclear attack, the elevator containing the scrolls would descend in a cement shaft far into the ground and be automatically covered with a cement block wheel in a ground cylinder that would protect it. So that leads us back to this chapter. We believe we have the right books; we believe we have the right words; we believe we have them translated reasonably.

BUT...WHAT ABOUT THEIR MEANING?

“Oh My God!”

Given whom they were written for...allowing for the cultural and time differences, etc....

How can we be satisfied that we know what these words MEAN?

Stay with me now, I'm going to pick on a version of the Bible a little bit. I'm going to point out some interesting observations regarding the King James Version. This can be a little sensitive because there are those who believe that this is the only true authorized translation of the Bible...and that all subsequent translations have been part of some conspiracy to erode the truths that then became available to the common man. Remember this: the original Bible text was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. We have access to the original words today through the efforts of people like Strong and Young. Their work has been computerized as well. We have more access and more ability to understand than at any other time in history! Let's use this blessing to get all the light we can.

Let's look at a couple of texts to illustrate the importance of reading other versions widely, or otherwise using a Hebrew/Greek dictionary to get a better understanding of what the Bible is saying. Consider the following:

“Thou shalt be for booties unto them.” Habakkuk 2:7

What are “booties” anyway? Baby shoes? Hind ends (“shake your booty”)? Or how about this one:

“By his neesings a light doth shine.” Job 41:18

OK, what on earth is a “neesing”? Seen one lately? These words are old and next to unused in the English language today. Therefore it's hard to understand them when we come across them. To give you an update:

Booty – This is “plunder”. Goods taken from people.
Neesing – This is nothing more than “sneezing”.

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Let's look at some more...there are lots of these in the King James Version.

"Ouches of gold" Exodus 28:11

Could this be a dental term...maybe for when you get a crown put in? Or could it have to do with the cost of jewelry? We're getting a little warmer. "Ouches" are actually a setting into which jewels are put. They were common on crowns, headpieces, adorned garments and, of course, rings.

"I trow not." Luke 17:9

Well, what have we here? Does this have something to do with masonry? Back in my day there was a vulgar display of disrespect to an individual called "dropping trow"(trousers). This was renamed in more recent years to "mooning". Is that what is referred to here? No. It meant, merely, "I think not". I wonder what people hundreds of years from now will think "mooning" means. Culture DOES have a bearing on language, doesn't it?

You see, these aren't errors in the King James Version. Over time, more than 1,000 words have changed their meaning...some the reverse of what they were. There are remedies to this if you want to hang on to your King James Version and still understand it. You could refer to books on archaic words; there are good works on this. You could also reference the Bible dictionary. That's one of the reasons it was created. The same could be said for Bible commentaries. Then there's the New King James Version that takes out the "thees" and the "thous" and updates most of these older words. Yet another alternative is to refer to some other version!

Some of these older words have exactly the opposite meaning now that they had in the time of King James Court. Let's look at Romans 1:13

"Oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto)."

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If you read the whole verse, you see that what Paul was saying here was that he wanted to visit the church at Rome, but was *prevented* for some reason. In the time of King James, the word “let” did not mean “to permit”. It meant “to prevent”. As a matter of fact, the word “prevent” itself didn’t mean “to hinder”...it meant “to precede” or “go before”! Tennis was a royal sport in the time of King James. If you’ve watched tennis matches today, you’ve seen when the first ball served hits the top of the net before it goes over and the referee yells “Let!” Many people think he says: “Net!” because the ball hit the net first. In fact he yells: “Let!” It means that the tennis ball was hindered by the net or prevented from coming over correctly. It’s an old-English holdover! Bet you didn’t know that one!

Since I mentioned the word “prevent”, let’s look at the use of it in 1st Thessalonians 4:15:

“We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.”

Now what on earth does that mean? Why would we want to “prevent” those which are asleep? Would we want to hold them back? Would that make sense? Note in the above paragraph that the word “prevent” meant “to precede” or “go before”. Paul meant here: “We shall not precede them!” There! Now we have significant meaning. You see the translation isn’t wrong, it’s just out of date! There’s a little history that helps here too. Back in Paul’s day, Christians grieved at the deaths of those in the family because they thought that Jesus was coming back again in their time. They sorrowed that those who died (or who went to sleep as Paul says above), would not get to see Jesus come again as they who were alive would. Paul said: “We won’t precede them!” It’s a beautiful passage, read also verses 16-18 to complete what Paul was saying.

Some of these misunderstandings have led to some pretty strange theology. In John 20:17, for example, Jesus said to Mary in the garden:

“Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father”

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The Church taught from this that if Mary WOULD have touched Jesus, He would NOT have been able to go to heaven! He would've been defiled by the touch of a sinner and been unable to enter the presence of a sinless God! The whole plan of salvation would have gone down the tube. To put it another way, that teaching has the effect of saying that Mary's restraint that morning outside the tomb was as important as the *CRUCIFIXION*! Does that make sense? Was Christ saying in horror: "OH NOOOooo! Don't touch me! Don't touch me!"? I "trow" not! There were two ways of saying or two meanings for this phrase back then. One was just plain "Don't!" The other meaning was "don't go on"...or "don't continue". In other words Jesus was saying "Mary, don't go on holding me. I really need to go now." Doesn't that make more sense? It should make sense, shouldn't it?

OK, here's another interesting one...John 2:4. Was Jesus sassing His mother when He said:

"Woman, what have I to do with thee?"

Remember this was at that wedding at Cana, when Jesus' mom asked Him to help out the family of the bride when they ran out of wine. A little knowledge of the culture and idiom or language use of the day helps here. The word "woman" could mean "wife"; "mother"; "handmaiden" or whatever the circumstances called for. When you read the entire verse, Jesus was in effect saying: "Mom, why bring this problem to me? I've never performed a miracle before and it's not time yet!"

Let's move now to another logical question about the words in the Bible. *Why do there seem to be so few theological statements?* You can go for chapters and chapters, sometimes without so much as a statement about God. Why isn't there more direct stuff like:

- God is Good
- God is Love
- God CAN be trusted
- God's really NOT a hard guy!

These are just claims, though, aren't they? The Bible itself warns against claims, even though it makes many! Remember Deuteronomy

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13: 1-3? What we need is evidence and demonstration of truth so that we can observe and know what happens.

God gave us minds and the ability to reason that we may hold Him to the same standard we hold a fiancé or a car dealer or an investment broker or a lawyer or a doctor! A doctor? One who heals? Do we like to know that a doctor has a good reputation before we listen to his advice?

OK, if the claims are going to be few...*Why is there so much historical detail in the Bible? So MUCH of it seems of little importance!* You've heard the phrase "the devil is in the details", haven't you? It means that it's easier to have an idea or a big plan than it is to work out the details of it. You might think to run for President of the United States. The details of carrying out such a feat are entirely more intimidating, however. Often, as a parent, you go through those experiences when your children fight with one another. When you break in on it, the accusations and claims start to fly: "He hit me!" "She hit me first!" So you have to get down to the details and find out what happened...what events occurred...what the context of the situation was...if you try to understand it and be fair.

God is like this. I'm convinced it's one of the reasons He gave us the family unit...and it's one of the reasons Satan has worked so hard to destroy the family unit. Much understanding of our relationship with God can come from it. If God's way is to demonstrate...to involve himself in human affairs and say "*watch the way I handle situations; that's the way to find out what I'm like*"...well, if we didn't have the historical details...we wouldn't be in a position to recreate the setting to understand why God thunders one time...and speaks so softly another time! Are you getting this?

Take the Sinai experience for example. God's chosen had just come out of hanging with the pagans for 400 years. They almost lost sight of Him completely...they surely didn't know Him very well. They expected things of God...literally wanted things of God that God didn't particularly want to give them. They wanted to see God's power...they wanted Him to be scary. If He scared them, so the Pagan thought went, He would surely scare their enemies. Read Exodus 19,

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the story is harrowing. Here, God is speaking to them in a language that they understood. He thundered with His voice. There was lightning and an earthquake. People were frightened all right. He told Moses that the mountain was holy ground. They were to build a fence around it and kill those who touched it. God said if they broke through the fence, He would consume them. They were terrified indeed!

Now we sing in church, “nearer, still nearer” and “what a friend”. Is this the same God we’re talking about here? How do you reconcile these? You see, it’s important to recreate the historical setting. The behavior of the Children of Israel was abominable. They just saw the Egyptians get taken out and they thought it was their turn to be the World Empire. They couldn’t wait to take the blood of those they came across on the road to the Promised Land. They grumbled and complained at every turn of events. They were so used to Egyptian gods being more powerful than their own that they were unbelievably irreverent toward the God of Heaven. So God took the risk of the Sinai experience. He did it to get their attention and hold it long enough to say some more of the truth about Himself. He risked terrifying them and He risked the accusations of Satan against Him in the courts of Heaven for being coercive. He risked misunderstanding above and below! But the demonstration was instructive and revealing. Look at what happened a mere 40 days later when the thunder had ceased! They “forced” Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship. They thought that Moses was dead. They immediately reverted back to the pagan form of relationship they had with God. EVIDENTLY (meaning, the evidence would seem to point out that) God HAD to raise His voice that loud because of the circumstances prevailing at that time. Isn’t that fair? Doesn’t that make a little more sense to you?

All right...the implication here is that God really doesn’t like to raise His voice or use pressure. Just what IS God’s preferred modus operandi? How would God prefer to deal with us? Is there any evidence that He’s not into denials or claims? Of course. The Story of John the Baptist contains a beautiful example of this.

John risked his life to introduce his Cousin! Remember John’s words to his disciples and the Jews when they asked him if he was the

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Messiah. He talked about Jesus and said, “He must increase, and I must decrease.” John watched as the ministry of Jesus took off, and his ministry diminished. He was present at many of Jesus’ lectures. He heard about what Jesus was doing and how Jesus told people to minister to those in prison. But did Jesus visit John when John was in prison? Did John expect Him? Perhaps the depression of prison caused John to send his followers to ask Jesus: “Are you the One?” Here lies the evidence! Here it comes now. Did Jesus (our God Himself come as a man) respond to John saying: “What are you talking about?...Of course I’m the ONE!!”? Listen to what Jesus said here in Matthew 11: 4-6:

“Jesus gave them this reply, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see – that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised to life and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me.’”

Do you suppose this was good enough for John, who knew what the scroll of Isaiah said about the One in chapters 35 and 61 (read ‘em.)? Do you think John was into evidence? Do you think Jesus knew that?

THIS IS GOD’S WAY...THE ONLY DEPENDABLE WAY! EVIDENCE !!!

So...back to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy ...and the questions continue to arise:

- Why so much?
- Why so many details?
- Why so many varied pictures of God?

An answer to all these is found in the New Testament...and it’s Paul again:

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these days He has spoken to us by His Son...The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.” Hebrews 1:1-3 (NIV)

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WOW! Did you get that? The “exact representation of His being”! Just as Jesus said: “...if you have seen me, you have seen the Father”! John 14:9.

OK, if we have the Son...why spend so much time in the Old Testament? Why not spend a LOT more time in the gospels where the picture of God seems so much clearer? I like the Sermon on the Mount, for example. “What the world needs now, is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of” (Didn’t Dionne Warwick record a version of this song?). Give me more of that stuff! See how Jesus treated sinners? How forgiving He is? Man, is there anything arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving or severe with Jesus? Yeah, I like the New Testament. Out with the Old; in with the New! Let’s look at it a minute. Just think about how Jesus treated:

- Judas
- The Woman caught in adultery
- Her uncle, Simon the Pharisee
- Jairus’ daughter
- The funeral of Lazarus

You’ve got to admit here that in the “New Testament – Jesus” is certainly NOT the devil’s picture of God! He is not the person Satan pictured God to be! So then, let’s be like the Church of God and settle for the Gospels.

The trouble is...when you trip through the Gospels...you CANNOT help but notice Jesus’ own use of the Old Testament. Look at John 5:39, 40 for example:

*“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”
(NIV)*

Again, what “Scriptures” were there when Jesus walked among us? The New Testament wasn’t quite available then, was it? Notice how He speaks of the Old Testament Scriptures as bearing testimony to the truth about Him! Would we therefore want to waste the Old Testament?

“Oh My God!”

Let's look at another example in Luke 24:27 when He was giving some friends a pep talk:

*“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.”
(NIV)*

Jesus made wide and exclusive use of the Old Testament. We're told in 1st Peter 2:21 that Christ suffered for us and left us an example so that we would follow in His steps. To follow Christ's example then...is to use the Old Testament. This begs another question. As a human being, where do you think Jesus found His picture of God? How did He get to know God so well? He grew up with the 39 books of the Old Testament! What did He see that we haven't? What are the implications for us?

All right then, back to the Old Testament we go. The first chapter is OK...I like the beginning with the lovely picture of Eden and everything...

But

by the end of the week God says to our first parents: “In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die!” Now THERE it is...that's just the problem! Did God mean: “If you disobey me,...I'll kill you!”?? That DOES sound a little arbitrary and severe, doesn't it? To top all that off, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden on their first offense! Now you have to ask yourself here: What if all children were thrown out of their homes the first time they disobeyed? We'd have a lot of homeless children in the world! So...this spawns yet another question:

Are WE more forgiving than our God???

OK, OK...how about the flood then? I mean, man alive! Women, children, pets, EVERYTHING...gone! Or Sodom and Gomorrah...*the burning of human beings!* (Just a little foretaste of hell?) Or how about Lot's wife... might YOU want one last look at the home where you raised your kids...all those memories! Man, look at all those

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fight in the Old Testament. God told them: “Don’t leave anyone alive! Get ‘em all...women, children, babies, pets animals”...sounds like the god of Kosovo doesn’t it? No, I’m not going to let up here either...there’s just too much! This picture of God is portrayed in that story about Saul capturing King Agag of the Amalekites in 1st Samuel 15: 8-34. Read it and come back to this. Not pleasant is it? The icing on the cake in this one is Samuel himself. The prophet...the good guy...the representative of God...what does he do in verse 33? Come on people...does THIS sound like or resemble the New Testament? How could Jesus get the picture He had of His Father from these stories? That Mary...she was some kind of teacher, huh?

And there’s SO much more:

- The stoning of Achan...the people were to do it!
- “An eye for an eye...a tooth for a tooth!”
- Gluttonous children were to be stoned!
- Illegitimate children were banished for 10 generations!

No wonder people don’t know what to do with the Old Testament! No wonder also that at least ONE of the disciples didn’t know how to deal with it either. It was Philip when he said in John 14: 8-9:

“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

In other words, Philip was saying, “We see you’re a nice guy, Jesus, and we really feel safe and loved in YOUR presence. But that Father of yours...whew! Can you satisfy us that He’s ok?” Jesus, of course, responded:

“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (NIV)

We’re left with that...and I know it’s enough. But I imagine the conversation going on a little with Philip retorting:

“OH! We’re not asking about YOU Jesus...we really worship you as God’s true Son! To our great surprise, we’re really not afraid of you. What we really want to know about, though, is the Father! We want to know about the one who:

“Oh My God!”

- *Drowned all but 8.....*
- *Said: “if you disobey, I’ll kill you!”*
- *Killed the firstborn of Egypt*
- *Killed the 180,000 Assyrians*
- *Killed Uzzah for just touching the Ark*
- *Turned Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt*
- *Burned all those folks in S&G*
- *Swallowed up Korah, Dathan & Abiram*
- *Burned Nadab & Abihu*
- *Sent the she-bears to kill those kids*
- *Etc. etc. etc. ad infinitum!*

Now Jesus.....could the Father possibly be like you?”

Surely this conversation went on awhile, for it took place in the upper room between John Chapters 13 and 17. Watch it develop; read it! Jesus had a lot to say about the Father in this last ditch effort on His part to prepare His faithful for what was about to happen. Again, I can imagine Jesus’ comeback:

“Philip...don’t misunderstand those stories in the Old Testament to mean the Father is any less approachable than you have found me to be. It so happens that I am the one who led the children out of Egypt...I gave the command to kill Achan! That’s ME you’re referring to! Philip...why don’t you ask me WHY I did those things? I’d almost put off the Crucifixion if you’d only ASK me!!”

BUT THEY NEVER DID!

So then Jesus went on to say something ***quite extraordinary*** in John 16:26!

“I do NOT promise to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself!” (Goodspeed)

A great many Christians have not incorporated this into their understanding of the Good News!!

We must and will spend much time on this concept later.

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That Jesus WAS the God of the Old Testament was recognized by Paul as he stated in 1st Corinthians 10:4:

“They all drank from the supernatural Rock that accompanied their travels – and the Rock was Christ.” (NEB)

The travels referred to here were those of the Children of Israel through the wilderness after escaping through the Red Sea experience.

What a shame the disciples didn't ask Jesus what He meant by those words. Instead they wanted to jockey for position in the new kingdom (see Luke 22:24). Since THEY didn't ask...it's been left to us. Doesn't it burn within you to know:

Jesus – WHY did you order the stoning of Achan? How could you, the gentle Jesus,...do that??? Why did you set up the whole priestly system of intercession & mediatorial work if you just got through saying: ‘There is no need for me to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself!’ ?

I wish they would've asked! Man...the record would've held such incredible information...right from the LORD HIMSELF!!!

Oh, well...we'd better ask now...for if we ask, what important answers may come! Of every story and teaching in the Bible we must ask:

WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT GOD?

Of all people, we're fortunate that the Pharisees came through for us a little...so we gain some additional insight. They asked Jesus a very difficult question about divorce. They were trying to trap Him, but the incident...the story...is very revealing. In Matthew 19:7, 8:

“The Pharisees asked Him, ‘Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?’ Jesus answered, ‘Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation’.” (GNB)

“Oh My God!”

Do you know what divorce was like in Moses time? The Law spoke against adultery, which meant sex before marriage and sex after marriage with anyone other than the betrothed. Men, being what they are, therefore came up with the ordinance of divorce. The day after the wedding they often gave their wives up in divorce and married yet another. They went through women like a child through candy. Moses said to them: “if you’re going to do that, you’re going to do it in a more humane manner!” But God’s real feelings about divorce are set out in Malachi 2:14-16 in no uncertain terms:

“...you have broken your promise to the wife you married when you were young. She was your partner, and you have broken your promise to her, although you promised before God that you would be faithful to her. Didn’t God make you one body and spirit with her? What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God’s people. So make sure that none of you breaks his promise to his wife. ‘I hate divorce’, says the Lord God of Israel. ‘I hate it when one of you does such a cruel thing to his wife. Make sure that you do not break your promise to be faithful to your wife.’” (GNB)

There’s no two ways of looking at it from a Biblical standpoint: God hates divorce. Now why is this passage so revealing? Because it demonstrates a key to so many other problems in the Bible where God seems to be recommending something that doesn’t stack up or ring true. He’s actually meeting people where they are...speaking in a language that they understand...permitting them free choice while trying to mitigate the consequences of such choices.

This brings up the fundamental rule of interpretation which we must use from now on when we read from the Bible: **The principle of context.** Context determines the meaning of a passage when it was originally written. If we want to recover the meaning of what was said, we must recreate and recover the original setting.

Well, again we’ve covered much! To recap: The Bible is no mere collection of theological statements. Nor is it a code book of deeds to be done and sins to be shunned. It is, rather, an inspired record of God’s handling of the crisis of distrust in His universe. To be

Evaluating The Evidence

confident that we see the real meaning, we must view the Bible as a whole, relating all its parts to the one central theme – the truth about God Himself. Of every story, teaching and event the same question must be raised: What does this say about God? Another question naturally follows: Can we trust the God that we see?

The great purpose of the Bible is to reveal the truth about our heavenly Father that we may be won back to Him in love and trust. This truth, this everlasting good news, is to be found in every one of the sixty-six books. But to discover this truth we must learn more than just what happened to Samson and Delilah, to David and Bathsheba, to Gideon and his fleece. The all-important question is, “What do these stories tell us about God?”

If you don’t ask this question, much of the content of Scripture may seem unrelated to the plan of salvation, even perplexing, sometimes even contradictory. When you learn to view the Bible as a whole, however, there emerges a consistent picture of an all-wise and gracious God who seems willing to go to any length to keep in touch with His people, to stoop and reach them where they are, to speak a language they can understand. The further you read on, book by book, the more you are moved with love and admiration for a God who would be willing to run such risk in order to keep open the lines of communication between Himself and His wayward children.

God will save all who trust Him. But He has not asked us to trust Him as a stranger:

"But I know there is someone in heaven who will come at last to my defense. Even after my skin is eaten by disease, while still in this body, I will see God. I will see him with my own eyes, and he will not be a stranger." Job 19: 25 - 27 (GNB) and "yes" this is Job himself speaking!

The Bible – all of it – is a record revealing God and His demonstration of His trustworthy nature.

Chapter #7:

Where Does God Get His Authority?

At first blush...this seems like a pretty dumb question, doesn't it? "What're you talking about?" you might ask. "Where does God get authority...are you kidding? He's GOD! He can have anything He wants!" Ah! But that's just the kind of character examination this book is designed to undertake. Can we even ask these questions? Where DOES God get His authority...where does it come from? How does He use it...is He fair? Can He be trusted with it? Given what we've looked at so far, do you think it's safe to ask these questions? Hasn't God permitted the universe to entertain exactly these questions for millenniums now? And remember, Satan has accused God of abusing His power, calling Him arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, exacting and severe (A.V.E.U.S.). This gets right at the heart of the matter. It's the central issue in the debate over whether God can be trusted...it's just stated in another way:

Should God have such authority? Is that safe?

Remember past chapters now. We've already come to the conclusion that the issue regarding God is NOT over who has the power! God has it, of course! The demons themselves are convinced that God has the power-thing sewed up:

*"Do you believe that there is only one God? Good!
The demons also believe – and tremble with fear."
James 2:19 (GNB)*

The problem is that God has been accused of abusing His power. He's blamed for bringing all the "natural disasters" we experience such as floods, severe thunderstorms and lightning, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes. If you don't believe me, take a look at your homeowner's insurance policy sometime. These are referred to as "acts of God". You can hear that reference just listening to the weather report. God is also blamed for the Bosnias and Kosovos, still-born babies or children with terminal diseases. For that matter, any time someone dies...regardless of age...you'll hear many say, "It was God's time for him(her) to go". In religious circles this phenomenon is treated a little

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more discretionary. At these kinds of funerals you'll hear: "God called him(her) home". What does that mean? If people were with God in heaven in the first place (home?) why did they wind up here on earth? Well, let's not get too distracted with that one, but please think about these phrases when they're used...do they make sense? How do they fit with your picture of God...how do they help explain Him as a God of love? We didn't even get to those who believe in retribution: "AIDS is God's punishment upon homosexuals"...where is THAT in the Bible? Who would want to spend eternity with such a God?

THESE ARE BIG AND WORTHY QUESTIONS!

Remember...one-third of the intelligent angels were persuaded that God is not worthy of their trust or ours! These brilliant beings spent eons in the very presence of God...EONS!...and still they were poisoned against Him.

Over the millenniums of history that we have, God has sought to demonstrate, in many and various ways, that He is not the sort of deity his enemies have made Him out to be. He is also not the pagan God His people wanted Him to be...there is so much evidence against this in the Bible. In the same way, over the millenniums, Satan has, in many and various ways, sought to twist and pervert the truth in support of his cause. Again, there is much evidence of this in the Bible. The methodology of the two is SO different:

**One uses demonstration and evidence
The other uses claims and coercion**

Diabolically, Satan has used the claims of religion to support his case! (Diabolically...Diablo...the devil! Get it?) Even more diabolically, Satan has twisted the teachings of Christianity to support his cause. His cause has been to confuse and control the masses, thereby leading them to distrust God even though claiming to follow Him! Satan has perverted the meaning of the cross in support of his accusation that God demands our obedience under pain of execution. "Love me or I'll kill you!" is Satan's perversion and caricature of God's warning in the very beginning of the world:

“Oh My God!”

***“Children, I don’t want you to die! If you go your own
rebellious way...your disorderly way...you’ll die!
Gen. 2:16 & 17 (Cinquemani-that’s my interpretation!)***

These words God said to mankind in the Garden of Eden...and they’ve been the object of jokes, conjecture and confusion ever since. What is the truth and meaning of these words? That is MUCH of the topic we are about to take up in this chapter.

Remember that story back in Genesis 2 where God talks about the trees in the Garden and He cautions Adam and Eve to stay away from one of them? Just how much damage do you suppose has been done by Satan’s perversion of God’s words in the Garden of Eden? How many millions have lost their way because they don’t trust, want or respect a God who would burn them forever if they didn’t obey Him? Where’s the love in that? Even worse...how many have tried to accept that picture of God and served Him out of fear...and suffered the destructive consequences of forced submission? Those are the scary, judgmental people you come across in churches.

The GOOD NEWS! Just what is it anyway?

I interject that question from time to time for a reason. We’ll entertain the answer to it shortly (you should have strong clues about what it really is already...but it’s such a subtle, important truth. I want to you be VERY curious about it so you’ll revel in it when it’s been made plain to you).

The whole Bible records a strong and successful argument proving these charges against God to be FALSE! The Bible doesn’t just make claims about this. It records the demonstration of evidence of God’s way of exercising authority and power. God’s way is so different from our way...or from Satan’s. His way brings us back to understanding and *trust*! This understanding of the way God runs His universe will hold the universe secure once again...free and at peace for the rest of eternity. God’s way is to demonstrate the need for freedom to make choices; the happiness that comes from making the right choice and the grave danger that comes from making the wrong choice. He does this patiently through providing evidence.

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Some Christians (too few) believe that this understanding of God's way of executing His authority and power is far and away the most important of all Christian beliefs! Truly, every other Christian doctrine or teaching derives its importance...even its meaning...from this central essential truth about God! He doesn't force his creatures to obey Him. He shows them the natural consequences of what occurs if they don't. The world we exist in is evidence! To some Christians (again...too few), the most important information we have to share with others is this **truth** about the way God runs His universe and what He wants of His children. The importance of sharing this lies not only in our desire to have everyone befriend God again; but also in our sense of urgency for the short time we have left to get this down!

The Bible tells us that we're at the end of time...a time of confusion... a time of deception never before seen in the history of the world! Satan will attempt to get the whole world to trust him! The apostle John saw this and recorded it in Revelation Chapter 13. That passage states that when Satan's campaign is over, the *whole world* will be worshipping him!...except whom? Those who will not be deceived! Deceived by what? Deceived by the power Satan will exercise when he appears as an angel of light and when he calls fire down from heaven (Revelation 13:13). How many of those people who will not be deceived do you suppose there will be? Satan will use claims and miracles as well as other forms of persuasion in his great, final effort to deceive us. That's the way he operates, as revealed by history. Miracles are a big deal. The Jewish priests and leaders were continually asking Jesus to work one. They didn't even realize the miracle of God in human form before them! They sure didn't realize the purpose of this miracle, more important than the miracle itself!

Just take a look around you today at all the different claims to religious

AUTHORITY!

As you observe and listen to these...notice how often these claims are supported by:

- Position
- Power

“Oh My God!”

- Miracles
- Special Communication From God
- Popularity

I could name a number of television personalities that you might recognize who utilize these very techniques. Some of them heal people; some are eloquent in persuasion; some just make you feel good without getting much into the Bible at all; some scare the bejeebers out of you with what they say is to come; some have so many doctorates and divinity decorations it makes your head spin. They leave you with the impression that they know so much more than you could hope to know about God. Therefore, what chance do you have? Unless perhaps you listen to them! Does that make sense? Do you have to have an MDiv degree or a PhD to know God? If that were true, how could the common man ever know God? Can't everybody, young and old, rich or poor, educated or not, know God?

Satan just loves turning God's friends on this planet against their heavenly Father. Imagine how much more he would enjoy deceiving God's friends into *misrepresenting* the Father even as they continue professing to be His commandment-keeping people!

It's no wonder the apostle Paul admonished the Ephesians to grow up there in Ephesians 4:14:

“Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful men, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent! Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head.” (GNB)

Paul wasn't shy about this theme. Again in Hebrews 5:13,14 he urges, “Grow up...get past drinking milk and chew on the meat of the Word and learn to be more discerning”:

“Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right and wrong. Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil.” (GNB)

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We'll revisit these passages in a later chapter. The question for THIS chapter is: ***how do we train our faculties by practice so as not to be deceived by all the conflicting claims to religious authority...particularly the claim of the adversary...and, at the same time, be sensitive to the voice of true authority?***

Well, there we go! Full circle in six pages! We're back to the question of:

AUTHORITY!

How DOES God exercise His authority and power? If we can understand this we can discern by contrast the counterfeit and the substitute! How does God convince us as to the rightness of His position? How does Satan? Let's compare...which method do we prefer? Which method do we find more convincing?...More trustworthy? Under which Government would we rather live?

How DO we settle such questions? Do we open our Bibles and begin to examine God's claims about Himself? What do we find almost on page one? There's that story in the Garden of Eden again! What does this do to your confidence level?

Again the apostle Paul gives us a strong hint as to how God is resolving these questions to the universe! When God was accused of being unworthy of the trust of his family, He did something extraordinary! He did something no being expected! Amazingly, the God of the universe humbled Himself and took His case into court! That Paul understood this comes from a passage wherein He quotes David in the Psalms. Look at Romans 3: 1-4:

*“Do the Jews then have any advantage over the Gentiles?
Or is there any value in being circumcised? Much, indeed,
in every way! In the first place, God trusted His message
to the Jews. But what if some of them were not faithful?
Does this mean that God will not be faithful? Certainly not!
God must be true, even though every man is a liar. As the
scripture says, (and this is where Paul quotes Psalms 51:4)
‘You must be shown to be right when you
speak; you must win your case when*

“Oh My God!”

You are being tried.” (GNB)

Huh? What court? Who could possibly judge God? What about a jury? Well,...that couldn't be of God's peers, now, could it? What's to be decided anyway? And why? Ready for the answers?

Let's do one thing first...use the brains God created us with. Can any sense be made of this at all? Were we not taught that God is the Judge? That He will judge everyone in that “great day of reckoning”? We're taught that God is all-knowing; all-powerful and ever-present. If God knows everything, why would He need to judge or hear evidence? But what about that famous passage in Revelation 14 where it says: “Fear God! For the hour of His judgment is come!” Does that mean the hour when God will judge mankind? Or could it mean the hour that God Himself would be judged? Who would do that? Help!

OK...it's time to remember now. All of these chapters are about God and His character. We learned that a war started in heaven. It erupted over a big argument over whether or not God could be trusted! Sounds like God is on trial here, doesn't it? Who's trying Him? Who has questions about Him? The entire universe! We'll give you many more quotes on this from the Bible in the ensuing chapters. God invites His entire creation, His children, to inquire of Him...to investigate...to **judge!** They must determine, to their own satisfaction, whether God is worthy of their trust! Can we do any less? Imagine the infinite One submitting His character and government to the scrutiny of His creatures!

Does THAT say something about our God?

So Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “May you win your case...” Well, God HAS won it in the eyes of the universe! It's only down here that some of us are still not sure about God!

WOW! Where is THAT in the Bible? How DID He win His case? Did He bribe the judge? Did He intimidate the jury? Did He hide or fool with the evidence? NO to all! He won because the TRUTH was on His side! The evidence was in His favor! What

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evidence? Only the most COSTLY evidence the universe will ever see...the most CONVINCING evidence the universe will ever need. That evidence will be the entire subject of the next chapter entitled:

Why DID Jesus have to die?

Notice something here: Satan can't use this method! He'd lose if He tried to permit an honest investigation of himself. It would destroy him because the truth isn't with him. The truth will ultimately destroy him. Let's look a little deeper into the incredible methods Satan has used to keep this all under hat.

Satan has used religion to silence inquiry! That's right, I said religion! No, I'm not talking about the church of Satan...I'm talking about Christian religion as well as all others that claim to worship and honor God. Satan specializes in this type of perversion, it's what he knows and does best. It gets worse! Satan calls the willingness to believe without inquiry, FAITH! Instead of evidence and truth, he has to substitute:

- Force
- Fear
- Ignorance
- Miracles
- Excitement
- Feelings
- Pomp
- Majesty
- Ceremony
- Mystery
- Lies
- Flattery
- Seduction

All these methods are designed to deceive! Deception is Satan's mainstay. I'm going to go back to something mentioned at the beginning of this chapter...it needs to be repeated and hammered home! It's not that you need to be afraid of Satan, or fear that God

“Oh My God!”

cannot rescue you...but ***don't ever underestimate Satan's cunning!*** ***He took out 1/3 of the brilliant angels!*** These were angels that lived in the very presence of God for a time we can't even contemplate. They saw and experienced His love and fairness; His servant leadership; and His insistence in giving all His creatures freedom! They took advantage of their freedom and of God. They foolishly thought they could become as God themselves!

As we read all 66 books of the Bible...we'll be startled to see just how often we've been warned to beware of the methods Satan uses. Jesus Himself warned specifically of Satan's methods:

“Then, if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ – do not believe him. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear; they will perform great miracles and wonders in order to deceive even God’s chosen people, if possible.” Mat. 24:23,24 (GNB)

Matthew 24 is a special passage where we have evidence that Jesus responded positively to His disciples' questions about the end of time. Jesus Himself talks and warns about the very times we live in today!

*“Jesus answered, ‘Watch out, and do not let anyone fool you. Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will fool many people.’”
Mat 24:4,5 (GNB)*

So...could this happen? Has it? Could it happen to YOU?

Recall the claims of the Book of Mormon that it is inspired...or the Koran or the Spiritist's Bible. Ancient Hindu writings do as well; there are lots of claims out there!

John, the beloved disciple, warns of miracles used to deceive. The warning is contained in Revelation 13:13 and 14:

“This second beast performed great miracles; it made fire come down out of heaven to earth in the sight of everyone. And it deceived all the people living on earth by means of the

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Miracles which it was allowed to perform in the presence of the first beast.” (GNB)

Speaking of the last times in human history, the apostle Paul gave the same warning in 2nd Thessalonians 2:9, 10:

“The wicked one will come with the power of Satan and perform all kinds of false miracles and wonders and use every kind of wicked deceit on those who will perish. They will perish because they did not welcome and love the truth so as to be saved.” (GNB)

So you can see...our only protection is to love the truth! You have to know what the truth IS first though. What IS the truth...that truth that John spoke about in his gospel in John 8:32 where he said:

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” (KJV)

What IS that truth? You’ll know when you’re done reading this book!

Paul was so concerned about this because he saw it at work among those he brought the gospel to. It broke his heart. There were those who claimed to be workers in the Christian effort who were engaged in deception. Look at his letter, the 2nd one to the Corinthians in chapter 11 verses 12 – 15:

“I will go on doing what I am doing now, in order to keep those other “apostles” from having any reason for boasting and saying that they work in the same way that we do. Those men are not true apostles – they are false apostles who lie about their work and disguise themselves to look like real apostles of Christ. Well, no wonder! Even Satan can disguise himself to look like an angel of light! So it is no great thing if his servants disguise themselves to look like servants of righteousness. In the end they will get exactly what their actions deserve.” (GNB)

“Oh My God!”

Christ had some pretty serious words to say on this very topic. They may be some of the most serious words He ever spoke. What’s interesting here is His audience. He was talking to devout, tithe-paying, sabbath-keeping, commandment-keeping **Bible teachers!** That’s right, Bible students had just got done denouncing Jesus’ picture of His Father as Satanic! It’s recorded right there in John 8: 44-59...please read it. I find it fascinating that Jesus hardly ever used harsh words in His dealings with people. The few times that He did, He was always talking to His church leaders and teachers. Look at the attitude of these Bible teachers and see if you don’t recognize some characteristics of present-day Bible “scholars”: The following is from John 7:32 – 52:

“The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about Jesus, so they and the chief priests sent some guards to arrest Him. Jesus said, ‘I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I shall go away to him who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me, because you cannot go where I will be.’ The Jewish authorities said among themselves, ‘Where is he about to go so that we shall not find him? Will he go to the Greek cities where our people live, and teach the Greeks? He says that we will look for him but will not find him, and that we cannot go where he will be. What does he mean?’ On the last and most important day of the festival Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, ‘Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. As the scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.’” Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were going to receive. At that time the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not been raised to glory. Some of the people in the crowd heard him say this and said, ‘This man is really the Prophet!’ Others said, ‘He is the Messiah!’ But others said, ‘The Messiah will not come from Galilee! The scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and will be born in Bethlehem, the town where David lived.’ So there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. When the guards went back, the chief priests and Pharisees asked them, ‘Why did you not bring him?’ The guards answered, ‘Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!’ ‘Did he fool you too?’ the Pharisees asked them. ‘Have you ever known one of the authorities or one Pharisee to believe in him? This

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crowd does not know the Law of Moses, so they are under God's curse!' One of the Pharisees there was Nicodemus, the man who had gone to see Jesus before. He said to the others, 'According to our Law we cannot condemn a man before hearing him and finding out what he has done.' 'Well,' they answered. 'are you also from Galilee? Study the Scriptures and you will learn that no prophet ever comes from Galilee.'" (GNB)

And so it has been throughout the ages...the church officials always having the last word about what is correct and what isn't, what people are to believe and what they're not. In almost all churches, servant leadership (leading by serving people as Christ did) has been lost sight of. Instead of winning people to Christ through teaching and praying for the conviction of the Holy Spirit...organized churches have amassed rules of membership and threatened followers with the "wrath of God" to control them. That's not to say that standards are not to be upheld in the church. But look at the example of the early churches in the book of Acts. People worshipped in homes and stayed all day (and sometimes all night) to learn and encourage and work for the souls of others. Compare that to the churches we attend today. Enough said.

The "tricks" of manipulation of the Word in the early church started soon after it was created! Paul gives evidence of this in the second letter he wrote to the Thessalonians in Chapter 2 verses 1 – 3:

"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to be with him: I beg you my brother, not to be so easily confused in your thinking or upset by the claim that the Day of the Lord has come. Perhaps it is thought that we said this while prophesying or preaching, or that we wrote it in a letter. Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For the Day will not come until the final Rebellion takes place and the Wicked One appears who is destined to hell." (GNB)

You see, Paul was concerned about misinformation, lies and forgeries of his letters which caused early Christians distress. From then on he signed his epistles with greater care!

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John also warns of false teachers who arise claiming to have the Holy Spirit...but it's a fraud:

*“My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit, but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere. This is how you will be able to know whether it is God’s Spirit: anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being has the Spirit who comes from God.”
1st John 4:1,2 (GNB)*

And, of course, Paul agreed readily with the concept of testing. He encouraged his Thessalonian friends about this in the first letter he wrote them, Chapter 5 and verse 21:

“Put all things to the test: keep what is good.” (GNB)

The implication here is to “toss” what is bad! Another implication is that truth often comes mixed with falsehood. Get the good from it and “pitch” the rest! So, testing is good! Remember, God is not afraid of being tested! The truth is on His side! That’s why Jesus spoke with such authority. Let’s look at some evidence of this:

“He wasn’t like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.” Matthew 7:29 (GNB)

“His message had authority.” Luke 4:32 (NIV)

In WHAT did His authority lie...how can we recognize the voice of true authority? Well...did Jesus base His authority on claims? Remember in the last chapter when John, Jesus’ cousin, was in prison? He inquired whether Jesus was really the Messiah...did Jesus say “Yes I am!”? Did He base it on miracles and a show of power? Remember how He inspired the warning against this in Deut. 13: 1-3 where Moses warned not to be misled by miracle-working liars who do not teach the truth? Remember how He inspired the recording of the story of the lying old prophet who claimed to speak for God and thereby enticed the young prophet? That was in 1st Kings 13: 15-18. Jesus turned crowds away. He wasn’t in this to “show off”. Evidence of this is in

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Mark 6: 30-34 and 44-46; look at it. He told the beneficiaries of the miracles that He worked to keep it to themselves! See Mark 1:40-45 for example. It's just that Jesus couldn't stand to see people that He created suffer disease or disfigurement. He couldn't walk past it without fixing it!

Come on now,...don't you think Jesus was really tempted to use His power? He knew what kind of Messiah was expected. He wasn't getting through to many with the methods He was using either. That all aside, Jesus could not be other than who He is! To do otherwise would've misrepresented the truth and God's way of exercising His authority! God's way is to use evidence. God's way is to endure injury with patience and without resentment! What a God...what a GOD!!

Perhaps my favorite summary of the way Jesus exercised His authority is in the experience of the Disciples on the road to Emmaus. Remember this story? It's so precious. Those two discouraged disciples were headed out of town with heads bowed in defeat, commenting to each other on the high hopes they had for Jesus. But now He was gone...dead! Their own church leaders killed Him! The story is in Luke 24 verses 13 through 22. Read that and come back. Notice how Jesus did things. He didn't reveal Himself to these comrades, but rather kept Himself disguised. He interpreted the Scriptures and led them to an intelligent faith in His life based on evidence! He went over how the Old Testament revealed His character, His mission to earth, His death, His resurrection. He wanted the truth to take root in their minds, ***not because it was supported by His personal testimony***, but because the Law and the prophets and the writings agreed with the facts of His life and death and presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When He accomplished that, THEN He revealed Himself to them. See? Evidence, then choice, THEN confirmation! THAT's God's way...THAT's how He gets His authority, both here and in heaven!

Chapter #8:

How Far Is God Supposed To Go To Win Us Back?

Get ready...this chapter is POWERFUL! Hopefully you're now prepared to consider it from the perspective we've been working on so far: the controversy over God's character of love and the way He runs His government. How could a loving God permit His Son to go through what Jesus went through? Doesn't it seem somewhat inconsistent? God LOVES us, but because of what Adam and Eve did we're hopeless sinners and unfit for heaven. However, through some magical miracle of justice, God turns His Son into a human so that He can die for us in our place and appease God's anger and sense of justice. He does this because He LOVES us and doesn't want us to go to hell. This plan takes care of the whole deal: God's justice is satisfied and, if we buy all this, we get to go to heaven! Win – win! Sound good to you? Well, the part about getting to go to heaven sounds good to everybody, so we've been willing to go along with this scenario for centuries. There's a lot of truth in it. Notice I said a "lot" of truth. The implication is that it's not the whole truth. Go look at the above sentences again. Does that explanation of the "plan of salvation" make sense to you? Or don't you think it needs to make sense? We've covered THAT ground before, haven't we?

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!" John 3:16 (KJV)

That's a wonderful, encouraging text, isn't it? It's beautiful, often quoted and memorized by children. Every Christian knows it. But it still doesn't explain "WHY?"

Remember what was in Chapter Two? In that one, we looked at the traditional interpretation of the Bible's description of sin as a "breaking of the rules". But we discovered that it's a lot more than that. Sin involves a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness. It provokes a suspicious unwillingness to listen. Unless something can be done about it, sin makes peace impossible because it rejects God as

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the only source of what is right. It promotes anarchy. To set and keep things right again, trust must somehow be restored. God sent His Son to “deal with sin”. Why wasn’t it enough for Jesus simply to tell us the truth about His Father and to demonstrate by His own gracious treatment of the worst of sinners that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be? Why did Jesus HAVE to die? Was there no other way?

Well...knowing what happened in heaven before the earth was made and knowing how it happened helps us know what to do to fix it. Over time we hope we will learn WHY it happened. Knowing “What” and “How” gives us evidence of God’s graciousness in this matter. That evidence gives us “faith” in Him. Remember what “faith” is? It sure isn’t blind! It sure doesn’t come from a lack of inquiry! It’s that patience, that willingness to wait based upon our prior experience with God and the evidence He’s already provided concerning His fairness and rightness: the patience of a true friend. It’s the loyalty that experience provides. That’s faith.

The way Jesus suffered and died is the greatest revelation of the truth about God the universe will ever see or ever need. If you understand it correctly, it means the defeat of the accuser of our Heavenly Father! It is no wonder, then, that Satan has sought to obscure, even pervert, the meaning of the cross – to his own evil advantage and to our great loss! Still, the question begs a better answer: “Why DID Jesus HAVE to die?” Well, we’ve got a “line” on the answer by knowing what happened in heaven between Lucifer and God...and by knowing how that happened. In this chapter, we’re going to try to strengthen that “line” into a cord. Get it? Accord! We’re going to wrestle back from Satan the *advantage* in understanding the true meaning of the cross.

Jesus talks often about His death and what His mission was. He tried to tell this to his disciples, but they just weren’t up for it. On one such occasion, Jesus revealed something special. In John 12: 27 & 28 he said:

“Now my heart is troubled – and what shall I say? Shall I say ‘Father, do not let this hour come upon me’? But that is why I

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came – so that I may go through this hour of suffering. Father, bring glory to your name!’ Then a voice spoke from heaven, ‘I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again.’” (RSV)

This verse is revealing, but we need to get at the original Greek to analyze what’s really being said. Notice what jumps out in this passage: “Father, bring glory to your name.” Now why would Jesus say that? What’s up with this? In His hour of need, when He’s thinking twice about going through what He knows He must, He asks His Father to bring glory to Himself? Let’s look at it. After He addresses His Father He says, “glorify thy name”. Father, “doxazo anoma!” In the Greek, “doxazo” means “magnify” and comes from the word “doxa” which means “make apparent”. “Onoma” means “authority...character”. What’s really being said here is “Father, magnify your character. Make it apparent.” Well, you say, why didn’t the scholars and the committees interpret it that way? Well, some versions of the Bible have it close to that, but my answer would be this: The scholars and committees weren’t looking at interpreting with this view in mind! The Greek has both possibilities in it. They chose “glorify thy name” instead of “make your character apparent”. The Greek Lexicon says to compare “onoma” in context with “oninemi” which means (through the idea of notoriety) “to bring joy and advantage”!! See why it’s important to look at these things for yourself? Jesus was telling His Father to use Him to point out the truth about His character as one of love. Through His notoriety as a God of complexity, Jesus asked His Father to take the advantage back from Satan and bring joy and freedom to those who thought of Him as arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe!

OK, OK...but couldn’t Jesus just have explained the deal about His Father and then gone about His life healing and blessing people and stuff like that? Wouldn’t that have done it? Why’d He HAVE to die?

ALERT! ALERT! This is **an important point** to get. We need the following backdrop to get this point: Remember back in chapter one when we talked about Lucifer falsely accusing God of things that were not true? And then we pointed out how that it would take time for God to demonstrate the truth about those accusations.

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Well, here's another one...and it's **one of the biggest points** to make in this entire book. Lucifer called God a liar when He said: "In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die". Remember that? When God told that to Adam and Eve? It's over in Genesis 3: 2 – 5:

"We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden," the woman answered. "except the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; if we do, we will die!" The snake replied: "That's not true; you will not die. God said that because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God. And know what is good and what is bad."

Sounds like somebody's calling God a liar there to me...don't you think so? **Now here's the big point:** God would demonstrate through the experience of Jesus that what He says is true and a natural consequence of making the wrong choice. To side with Satan and separate from God results in death...even to the Son of God! It's a law...a physical law just as immutable as gravity, or, "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". We'll come back to this.

One of Satan's specialties is perversion of the truth. He was left out of the creation process, so he has prided himself in perverting what God has created and what God has said. He perverted the meaning of what God said to His children in the garden to mean, "Either you obey me...or I'll kill you." In other words: "Touch that tree and you're toast!" Just look at the effect this has had on the practice of religion! It's literally brought pagan practices right into the Christian faith: God must somehow be appeased or it's over! Most of Christianity teaches this! The notion is that Jesus died to appease His wrath...and Jesus goes between or mediates for us yet or the Father would still wipe us out! That's stock in trade from most pulpits today. It's as if to say that God cannot find it in His own heart to forgive and heal His own children! Who, in the Universe, could've come up with such a perverse idea?

Now, what is the evidence of the 66 books of the Bible? What do they tell us about God as summarized in John 3:16 as quoted above? "For God so loved only good people?" NONSENSE!! God so loved THE WORLD! That's ALL His children, both good AND bad!!

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So, then, back to those words spoken in the Garden of Eden...they were not a threat! They were a gracious warning! First of all, they warned Adam and Eve to stay away from the place where Lucifer was confined. The tree he lived in was a dangerous place! If they placed themselves under his spell, like 1/3 of the family of heaven did, they would choose against God! It was a warning not to do this because it would result in death! When people choose against God they set themselves up to be gods themselves...as if they exist on their own power! The effect of this so changes people that a natural consequence of the condition is death! Cut off by rebellious choice from the source of life, those who would so foolishly choose will expire! Those who so choose are so out of harmony by rebellious rejection of everything that is right that they become changed so that even the life-giving glory of God becomes to them a consuming fire!

Now here's a challenge. How would God best demonstrate this? Should He strike Adam and Eve down on the spot and say, "See?" Would that help? Or perhaps should He have struck Satan down before the whole thing spread like cancer throughout the universe? A lot of "armchair quarterbacks" would go for that one. These are seemingly easy approaches...but

The angels and rulers had never seen death before!

What reaction do you suppose either of those choices on God's part would've brought on the part of the members of the universe? Do you suppose they might have feared God in the sense of being "afraid" of Him? That they were absolutely NOT afraid of Him is evidenced by the fact that Lucifer and the 1/3 of God's family that sided with Lucifer surmised that they could get away with the rebellion they undertook! Service through fear is not uncommon in the world we live. You see it in totalitarian governments such as Cuba, Libya, Iraq (is Sadaam Hussein still alive?), Serbia, Yemen, the Sudan and other such countries. What do the leaders of those countries live in constant fear of? REBELLION! Obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel!! Rebellion is the essence of sin. It causes separation and distrust. So, instead of taking this approach, which God could easily have done,...not wanting obedience that comes from fear

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and its dire consequences (a solution totally unacceptable to a loving God)...God sent His Son in human form...and Jesus died the death that is the natural result of SIN or SEPARATION FROM GOD!! He demonstrated the truth of His words “When you separate from me...you die! It can’t be helped!” The universe could watch this all happen and see how God is involved! Do you question that Jesus knew He was separated from His Father? Just read Matthew 27:46 or any of the Gospel accounts of the death of Jesus.

Of all the 66 books in the Bible...Paul in the letter to the Romans gives the clearest explanation of why Jesus died. First, Paul recognizes the truth of the warning given in the Garden of Eden and he talks about it in Chapter 6 verse 23:

“Sin pays its servants: the wage is death.” (Phillips)

Remember, Satan denied this truth when he called God a liar in Genesis 3 as quoted above. Satan said: “You won’t either die!” And from that experience, the great controversy over “who’s tellin’ the truth” began on Earth! Don’t you think Adam and Eve were warned about Satan? Don’t you think they got something more than what was recorded...“Don’t touch the tree or you die”? From this point God and Satan could’ve argued back and forth: “Will too die!” “Will not!” “Will too!” “Will not!” “Will too!” But remember, God chose a different way: He took His case into the court of the universe (Romans 3:4). There’s SO much to be learned on this by studying ALL of the letter to the Romans. That this court met is talked about elsewhere in the Bible. Look at the first two chapters of Job, for example. It’s apparent there that the leaders of the universe met regularly and debated these great issues. The book of Daniel in Chapter 7 even indicates how many attend these get-togethers: Hundreds of millions!

Let’s look, for a minute, at how God resolves these kinds of questions, particularly those of Satan, about Himself and His friends before this court. The book of Job is so misunderstood. Many believe it’s the oldest book in the Bible. Many others believe it’s just fable. In any event, many have been driven from God because they’ve understood the book of Job to represent humans as “pawns” in the great fight between God and Satan. Nothing could be further from the

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truth; it's another of Satan's perversions. In that book, Satan accuses God and also says that Job is unworthy of God's trust. Did God say: "Now wait a minute! That's a lie, Satan! This man is perfect!" and Satan say: "There you go again, lying. I'm telling you: Job is a fraud!" "No he's not!" "Yes he is!" "No he's not!" "Yes he is!" That's not how it was. God said: "You've raised a very serious question! The only way to answer it is to show you!" Just look at what happened in that book! The traditional interpretation of Job just focuses on the first two chapters that talk about the debate between God and Satan. The other 40 chapters deal with false theology and the true response to it! **Let me show you!** **That's God's way!!** He doesn't stop there, either! After showing you and demonstrating the truth about what He says, He lets

YOU DECIDE

Imagine a God with such humility! Does that fit your picture of Him? That's God's way to fully re-establish love and trust again in the universe...in the fullest sense of freedom. You get to make the choice!

OK...OK...back to the question of the chapter. We could snazz it up a little now too: Why DID Jesus have to die, and why did God have to wait so long for this to happen? It is God's way to demonstrate the truth about what He says and it takes time to reveal the evidence that demonstrates that truth. Paul sums this up pretty well in Romans again, chapter 3: verses 25 & 26:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (KJV)

Do you like the way this is worded? Are you familiar with these words? What is this “propitiation” anyway? The word actually means “appeasement” and is a regrettable translation of the Greek word used there. The Greek word is “*Hilasterion*” and it means “the mercy seat”. Many of you have heard of “the mercy seat”...but the fact is that the Bible doesn't really use this phrase. Martin Luther made it up when, in the Old Testament, he saw that the Hebrew word for the cover of the

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Ark of the Covenant just meant “a covering”. He wanted something a little more dramatic, hence in the German he interpreted it “Genardstuhl”. It was Tyndale who interpreted Luther’s words in English as “mercy seat”. The cover of the Ark of the Covenant was never called the “mercy seat” until the 16th Century! It’s really a pity that the King James Version used “mercy seat” in Exodus and in Hebrews, but not in Romans 3. The Greek word literally translated means “a place or means of reconciliation”. Look at this translation of Romans 3:25,26 and notice the difference:

“God offered Him, so that by His sacrificial death He should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in Him. God did this in order to demonstrate He is righteous. In the past, He was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time He deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate His righteousness. In this way, God shows that He Himself is righteous and that He puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.” (GNB)

That’s a lot clearer now, isn’t it? My favorite translation is from a friend and mentor who stated it this way:

“For God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation to be taken advantage of by faith. This was to demonstrate God’s own righteousness, for in His divine forbearance He had apparently overlooked men’s former sins. It was to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, to show that He Himself is righteous and that He sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus.” (Maxwell)

With all the attention I’ve given it, you might surmise that this passage is an important one to understand...and you’d be right. It’s not difficult to understand, but it is important for you to see that what the Apostle Paul is saying is merely this: Jesus died to answer questions about His Father...to reconcile the world to Him!

God did not lie about sin leading to death as Satan accused. God sent His Son to answer the questions about what He is really like. Let’s use some imagination here for a minute. Let’s go to the cross

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and watch Jesus die. When you consider the details of any of the accounts in the Gospels, some of these questions pop up:

- Did Jesus really die? *The soldiers around Him were Obviously surprised. They pierced Him to make sure.*
- Well...is it true that Jesus was dying the death of a sinner?...To demonstrate or show us how a sinner really dies? *The Apostle Paul sure thought so. Read what he said about it in his second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 21.*
- Ok, ok then...here's another question: Just what caused Jesus to die? He was already dead before they pierced Him. *Well, take a good look – is God killing His Son here? Is He torturing Him to death? Is He pouring out His wrath on His Son? That's what many picture the Bible having God doing to those sinners for whom there is no further hope! Is that what's revealed here? That would depend on the meaning of “wrath” now, wouldn't it? That prompts the question: Just what IS God's wrath? The answer is in the letter to the Romans. Read Chapter 1 verses 18,24,26 and 28. There are many other passages in the Bible that demonstrate this concept. Three times here Paul says God “gave them up”. THAT's the definition of His wrath! Verse 18 says God's wrath or anger is here revealed. How God manifests this wrath or anger is set out in verses 24, 26 and 28. He finally lets people have their way...and they reap the natural results of their own actions and choices! God “gave them up” in loving disappointment, leaving those who don't want Him anyway to the inevitable and awful consequence of their own rebellious choice.*
- Wow! If that's true, it seems it would only be fair then to ask this question: Was Jesus “given up”? *Paul, in his Roman letter, doesn't let us down here. In chapter 4 verse 25 he says: Because of our sins he was given over to die...*

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The Greek word used for “given over” is paradidomi and it means “yielded up, given up”...the exact same Greek word used in Chapter 1 verses 24,26 and 28! If only the translators would consistently use the same terminology! There are examples of this concept in the Old Testament, too. Look at Hosea 11: 7&8. “How can I give you up...?” God asks!

- Did Jesus know He was being given up like this? *His own words echo in our memory: “My God, my God...why are you sending me to hell forever?” Is that what He said? Look at Matthew 27:46 – He said:...”why have you forsaken me (given me up or given up on me)?”*

You see...insofar as Earth is concerned, it all started in the Garden of Eden. There was a “break up” between man and His God. Who jilted whom? Jesus chose this “break up” between Himself and His Father to demonstrate to the universe that the charge against His Father was false. When you separate from God, the Source of Life, you can’t go on. Who suffered while Jesus was on that cross: Jesus or His Father? Of course. They both did.

So two important questions were answered in Jesus’ experience starting in Gethsemane and ending at Golgotha:

- Is death the result of sin?
- Is it because God kills His wayward children?

You’d really like to know the answers to these two, wouldn’t you? The Apostle John answers them both in his gospel – John 10: 17 & 18. John here says that Jesus “gave up” His life. How did He do that...how did we just observe it? We saw that He chose to separate Himself and demonstrate what happens. Death IS the result of that choice. God didn’t kill Him...His own church members under the influence of Satan did! Take a look at how Mark understood this when he gave his version of what happened in the garden of Gethsemane. It’s in Mark 14:41 –

“When he came back the third time, he said to them, “Are you

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*still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come!
Look, the Son of Man is now being handed over to the power
of sinful men.” (GNB)*

Don't overlook the fact that the Greek word for “*handed over*” used in the above text is the very same “*paradidomi*” used in Romans 1: 24, 26 & 28 to explain the “wrath” of God. When people demand to be counted on the side opposite God, He eventually has no choice but to hand them over...let them go.

Yet another question needed answering too, and here it is:

Why is it so important that we understand that God does not *execute* His wayward children? Yes, this had to be answered too...

So, an angel came to strengthen Jesus...so He could withstand the torture of the cross! The cross experience was, after all, torture...wasn't it? Did God torture His Son on that cross? Who does the Bible say did that?

Only the most devout

- Sabbath keeping
- Tithe paying
- Health reforming
- Bible quoting

Members of the Faith!!!

They did this because their obedience came from FEAR!! They did NOT know God! Let's look at John's recording of it in John 19:31:

“Then the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to allow them to break the legs of the men who had been crucified, and to take the bodies down from the crosses. They requested this because it was Friday and they did not want the bodies to stay on the crosses on the Sabbath, since the coming Sabbath was especially holy.” (GNB)

Can you believe it? They killed God and wanted Him pulled off the cross so as not to offend as they proceeded to “worship” Him! Did they know Him? It doesn't appear so, does it?

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We've been harping about how important it is to understand this. Why? What's so important or so dangerous about misunderstanding this and serving God from fear? The evidence would seem to indicate that even those dedicated to obedience become God's worst enemies under those circumstances!

Well...one thing we can take away from this discussion for sure: It's obvious that Jesus did not die to win over His Father. That such a concept is taught anywhere in Christianity is truly sorrowful and a gross misrepresentation. St. Paul is so clear about this. We've referenced his letters so often, but they're chock full of evidence that the Father loves us just like Jesus does. Look once again at Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 5, verse 19:

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself".

Huh? What was God doing here? Nowhere ever does the Bible even suggest that God the Father had to be reconciled to us! We, rather, needed to be reconciled back to Him. Get this now:

***Jesus didn't die to pay some mere legal penalty.
He died to reveal the truth about God!...
and the falseness of Satan's charges.***

Don't feel too bad if this comes as somewhat of a revelation. Even the Angels in heaven had this to learn!

*"...and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood
of His cross" Colossians 1:20 (GNB)*

Look at what Jesus said He would accomplish by His death in John 12:32:

*" And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."
(KJV)*

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Hmmm. All men? The word “men” is italicized in the King James...that means it’s supplied. If you read it in the Greek, the word “men” is not there. Hence Christ said, “I will draw all unto me.” There’s a big difference! This effort on Christ’s behalf was not just for MEN...but also for the entire UNIVERSE!

Correctly understood, the meaning of the cross spells doom for the adversary. It’s no wonder he’s tried so hard to pervert it. In Chapter 17 I’ll give you some more detail on just the kind of pains Satan has taken to insure that we wouldn’t catch this picture.

Again, St. Paul was so proud of the message of the cross correctly understood...and the power of it to change. He said in 1st Corinthians 1:17,18:

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God!” (RSV)

Compare this to his Roman letter, Chapter 1, verse 16:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed!” (RSV)

What an incredible statement of “righteousness by faith” or “saved by grace”! Paul is such an authority on this, isn’t he?

It’s also thrilling to understand that this knowledge of God existed in Old Testament times too (the study of the Old Testament is all Jesus had to get His human picture of God!). Please look at Jeremiah 9:24 for example:

“Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.” (NIV)

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This confidence in God has been confirmed by the way Jesus suffered and died!

So...did you find anything different in this chapter from what you've been taught? I'm going to take a little leeway here and discuss or "air" some of the traditional teaching about the cross experience and offer some concepts for you to think about as these are brought to your attention. You may or may not have heard of these:

- What about the appeal: *Jesus died for YOU! He would have gone through it All, just for YOU.* ?
Is that wrong...are we taking that away in this chapter? Is this a "one or the other" concept? Of course not. It's not wrong, it's just not complete and it doesn't go far enough. Jesus didn't die just for you. This is not just about "us". This is cosmic! The whole universe is involved. It's about the Father! It just took such an extreme measure to get the point across to us all.
- What about traditional "cross language"? Help me understand:
 1. "Substitutionary Atonement"- Oh, don't get me going! I'm not sure myself, half the time, what our theologian friends are getting at. This appears to say: "We could never become 'at one' again with our Father. We needed a substitute to achieve this." Now there are two ways to look at this: one riles me. It infers that God is so upset with us that we have to put His Son in front of us to stand in our place and plead for us...because the Father can't find it in His heart to forgive such "scum" as us. You know I think that is poppycock. The other way to take this is that we had to watch Christ die...that we needed such extreme evidence to persuade us that we should learn to trust the Father again and become "one" with Him. That, I think, is substantiated by the 66 books.
 2. "Vicarious Sacrifice" – Don't you just love this language? These terms? This concept is another that can be taken two ways. It suggests that, when it came to death...it was going to be Christ or us. That's true in a way, but the comparison ends there. One way to take this is that God had to have "blood",

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that the balance of justice demanded that if someone offended God they could not live. Therefore Jesus saved our hides by dying in our place and appeasing that angry “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” God. Once again, poppycock. The other way to take this is that a sacrifice was necessary to demonstrate the truth about God being right when He said, “I am the Source of life. If you separate from Me, which you are free to do, you won’t make it.” We saw that even the Son of God, if put in that circumstance, would reap the same result! It’s a physical law that can’t be changed. Mysterious though this seems, it makes sense. Jesus’ sacrifice enables us to see the truth of the matter and choose to live! Had we not seen this, we would have been doomed to be deceived about it. There’s a lot more to this; it’ll suffice for now.

3. “The cross satisfied the demands of the law” – Sure. We’re told that the law demands “death” if you break it. Well, I’m sure we’d all agree that we probably deserve to die if we choose not to live right. But St. Paul tells us in Romans 3:10 that “love” is the fulfilling of the law. Does that mean that Christ’s death on the cross constituted “love”? Whew! I thought I knew what love was! Notice how all three of these notions are models from our legal system? I hope you’re getting the picture already that God’s justice is so different from ours. We’re “by the book” people. If you do the crime, you do the time. But God is merciful! Did you know that, in the King James Version, mercy is mentioned almost 60 times? “Justice” isn’t even mentioned once! The word “just” is used in connection with God, and it merely means He’s “right”!
4. “Dying to satisfy justice” – Here’s another model from our legal system. Whose justice is being referred to here...God’s or ours? This has the flavor of the use of “vengeance” in reference to God. We’ll study more about that later too, but I’ll give you a preview. “Vengeance” to us means “getting even”. It means something much different in reference to God! For God, vengeance is “reclaiming what is His”.

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5. “Paying the price for sin” – All of these concepts are so into legal rules as opposed to developing trust in a relationship. What have we learned God’s aim is...to restore trust? Or to make sure no rules are broken? By the way, who gets paid the “price for sin”? If Christ paid the price, who got the proceeds? Make some sense out of that. Often, we use this term “paying the price” to describe what it cost someone to achieve a goal. Olympic athletes “pay a price” to achieve the stature to compete for the “gold”...to be the best of the best. They sacrifice their social lives, typically, and instead spends hours upon end in the practice of their expertise. This is called “paying the price”. Using this analogy, one can understand that Christ “paid a price” in His sacrifice for us. But just what was that price? One thing we think we know: He came as a human and will always be “flesh” for the rest of eternity. For Him to do otherwise would call His demonstration to the universe that mankind could live a right life into question. He therefore cannot anymore be everywhere present like His Father and the Holy Spirit can. This is a mystery to us. I dare say it’s only the tip of the iceberg in terms of price.
6. “The Blood of the cross” – There is a serious debate about the efficacy of the “blood of Christ” among theologians. Alright, alright...what on earth is “efficacy”? The word means “the power to produce an effect”. Now, no Christian would disagree that the cross experience has had quite an effect on the future of the universe. Our theologian friends, however, squabble over whether it was the “blood” that did it! For the life of me, I cannot understand and have little tolerance for debates of this kind. Does Christ’s literal blood have magical power? We sing, “There’s Power in the Blood”...but what do we mean? Symbolically, “blood” in the Bible has always meant “life”. Certainly there is power in the life that Christ led! Does the word “blood” have any power? Only in the meaning! There’s power in the “meaning” of the blood! There’s power in the meaning of the word! To repeat the words does nothing! To understanding their meaning does everything!

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- Are we suggesting here that the way Jesus died is the way the wicked will die? Will they be “given up”?
Why not? Would YOU be upset if that’s all that happens to the wicked? Do YOU think they should burn in hell forever? How do you think God feels about the death of the wicked? Do you remember His cry in the book of Hosea: “Oh....how can I let you go?”
- Are we saying, then, that God doesn’t kill...hasn’t...won’t?
Oboy...this is a hot one among various Christian schools of thought. How can you say that God doesn’t kill, hasn’t or won’t? Look at the firstborn of Egypt...did they die because they were bad? About the only thing one can offer in defense of God here (does God need defending?) is that the firstborn went to sleep. They suffered the first death. They might not have died had Pharaoh taken a different stance. In some respects, they reaped the results of Pharaoh’s poor choices. God knows their character, how they would’ve led life had they gone on. They will rise again in the great resurrection (see 1st Thess. 4: 13-18), judged by the greatest Lover in the universe. Does death result from consequences of foolish choices? One has only to consider the senseless private plane-crash death of John Kennedy Jr. (John-John) to answer this. This whole area begs another question: Does the Devil do God’s killing for Him? That really doesn’t make sense, does it? The evidence by far supports the fact that our God of love has been left with some difficult choices in His effort to extend to the universe individual freedom of choice. He’s been left with some difficult choices in His effort to demonstrate to the universe the truth about Himself. As we studied earlier, He’s taken some real risks of being misunderstood in order to get our attention long enough to tell us and demonstrate to us some more of the truth about Himself. But He did bring this upon Himself. He takes full responsibility for it and He has taken great pains to make it up to us.
- Since I brought up “the first death”...which death did Jesus die? The first death or the second (which happens at the end of time and lasts forever – See Revelation 20:14)?

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Well, think about this one a minute. How would we know about a death that lasts forever? Forever, though a manageable concept, is not something we've experienced. Some theologians argue that it's important that Jesus died the second death that lasts forever instead of the first death from which we're resurrected. It's necessary to balance out their legal sense of justice. Since we have sinned and earned the displeasure of God such that He would wipe us out forever, and His Son took our place, His Son must die the death that lasts forever. Such a rigid and inflexible stance requires that these people go through some pretty complicated and "mystical" gyrations to account for how Jesus, though dying the death that lasts forever, was resurrected. It doesn't make sense. On the other hand, they argue that if Jesus died only the first death from which we're resurrected, it's not fair or "just". Because the transaction must balance itself out, then Jesus must die the death that results from the final choice to separate from God...ultimate extinction. This debate has gone on endlessly, and it is not my purpose to enter into it. I believe we are still discovering the answer to this dilemma. The important thing to get out of all this is that the death Jesus died answered the controversial questions about how His Father was involved in this process. It answered the important questions about God and His Character.

- If death isn't a penalty, but rather a result, how do we understand Hebrews 9:22 where St. Paul says: "...*almost all things are by law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission*"?

One could certainly make the case for interpretation here...how do you understand what Paul was saying? If you read verses 16 through 22, you find that Paul was talking about the first covenant with God's people in which, under the laws they were given in a language they understood having come out of pagan Egypt, blood sacrifices were offered in the process of confessing and asking forgiveness for sins. I know, I know...it's a long sentence. Read it a couple of times. God

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didn't want these sacrifices. We'll study that in a future chapter. Paul goes on in verses 23 through 28 to explain the difference from the Old Testament process, which pointed to the sacrifice Christ would make on our behalf. In verse 26 Paul says that Christ came to remove sin once and for all through the sacrifice of Himself. We just got done studying how He accomplished that, and it wasn't by appeasing His Father with blood! Remember, it's what the blood means that's important! As has been pointed out, “blood” is symbolic of “life”. The life Christ led as a human being gave us the example of the life we should lead and the dependence we should have on God.

This has been a long and complicated chapter, but a very, very, VERY important one! I want to make one last important point...please focus on this now. I have hinted at it above. A strict legal system concerning sin and death would prohibit resurrection! Under the “Law” as it is often interpreted by legalists, the wages of sin is death. You sin, you die. End of the matter. If Jesus came to “pay” that “penalty”, He wouldn't have been resurrected and we'd ALL be in a lot of trouble. No, Jesus came and died for a much different reason than “paying a penalty”. Aren't you glad to know that?

Chapter #9:

Afraid of God?...Forget About It!

If you're afraid of God...it's time for you to grow out of it! Seriously now, that's almost an insult to Him when you consider the trouble He went through to win us over. The 66 books contain all kinds of evidence that show us God's righteousness (state of being right). Not only does God demonstrate His righteousness to us, He also gives us the freedom to evaluate the evidence and decide on the issues ourselves! Our God is a God of Liberty...a God of Love! Take a look at 2 Corinthians 3:17:

*"...where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom."
(GNB)*

As we discovered in the last chapter, God would rather die than preside over a universe that is not **FREE!**

Remember Romans 8:3? We looked at it in a past chapter; here's what it says: *"What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending His own Son, who came with a nature like man's sinful nature, to do away with sin."* There's one more thing you must remember here...our definition of sin: **separation from God**. He sent His Son to do away with rebelliousness and distrust by winning us over to the truth about God. Remember again that rebellion stems from fear. So in order to successfully win us over, God had to do away with fear! It is **fear** that has turned so many away from God.

OK...get this now: another concept from the last chapter...number 8 –

God gave His life...to make it eternally clear that there is no need for His children to be afraid of Him.

Did you take that away with you from the last chapter? It's one of those things that dawns on you after you've had the chance to digest the beauty of what the crucifixion really stands for. Surely a God who

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would go to such lengths is worthy of our love...our reverence...our worship...and our willingness to listen and obey!

God has worked so hard to establish the truth about Himself in this way because He's had to in order to effectively counteract the efforts of His adversary. Satan pictures God as one who is only interested in our submission. As we've already seen, however, what God REALLY wants is our love and our trust. Satan uses religion and twists the truth to paint a difference between “gentle Jesus” and that Father of His! This stuff is really important because of the circular nature of understanding the truth about God. Your picture of Him affects your interpretation of, say, what happens to the “wicked” at the end of time...just as your picture of what happens to the “wicked” at the end of time affects your interpretation of who God is. Do you get that? Your picture of God affects your understanding of the cross; your understanding of the plan of salvation for you; your understanding of how God relates to you. In the same way, your picture of what happened at the cross; the plan of salvation for you; how God relates to you, a sinner, affects your understanding of God. I suppose I could make that a little more plain...I hope this chapter will do it. That's why we're taking up this topic: “Why be afraid of God?” A more logical question might be “Who should you be afraid of?”

But...doesn't the Bible encourage you to ***fear God?*** I think we can come up with some good examples of that. Let's look at Revelation 14:7 for example:

“Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment has come” (RSV)

This is part of what “popular” message, by the way. That's right, it's the first of the three angels' messages in Revelation 14. If you keep reading through verse 11, you find some very frightening language! We'll study this at length in chapter 16 and find an explanation for such language then. In the mean time, this passage gives a good reason to fear God, doesn't it?

The key to opening the meaning of this passage is to understand the word “fear”. The original Greek word used is “phobas”

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from which we get “phobia” which, of course, means *terror*. The word “phobas”, however, also means “respect” and “reverence”. The interpreters had those words to choose from as well. Why did they pick the idea of “terror”? We’ll see.

Let’s examine another passage in Psalms 128: 1,2:

“Blessed is everyone who fears the lord...You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.” (KJV)

Hmmm. This is in the Old Testament. How are we to make sense out of it? Does it say: *“Happy is everyone who is afraid of or scared by God”*? Well, that’s one interpretation isn’t it? The Hebrew word interpreted for “fears” here is “Yare”. It means “afraid”...but it also means “revere” or “to be reverent”! It’s a similar deal to the passage in Revelation above, wouldn’t you agree? How you interpret this depends on your picture of God, doesn’t it? It has a strong bearing on it in any event!

Now look at Proverbs 9:10:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (KJV)

This is a popular and remembered quote from the Bible. What does it mean? Does it mean: *“To be terrified of God is the beginning of wisdom and learning”*? There are certainly those who would tell you that it is wise to be afraid of God and what He can do to you...how He can punish you! The Hebrew word used in this verse is “Yir-ah” which means “Reverence”. As evidence that a committee of Bible scholars and interpreters agrees with this, we have only to look at the GNB version for a different slant: *“To be wise you must first have reverence for the Lord.”* Remember from chapter 6 (all of it, but look at summary on Pg. 80) that context should determine the meaning of a word or passage. Where there is no respect...no reverence...very little learning may take place. Haven’t you found this to be true in your own experience? You aren’t willing to learn anything from someone you don’t respect or from someone you don’t believe can teach you. An analogy might be the difference in a student’s attitude between grade school and high school or, in many instances, even college.

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Think of the lengths God has gone through over the centuries to gain the respect of His people and *hold it long enough* to tell them more of the truth about Himself. That hasn't been easy, as history bears out.

A famous and familiar example is the story of Mt. Sinai. God came down to speak to His people. Did they all line up quietly to listen to Him? Was there respect? These were those who mumbled against Him because they were wandering around in the wilderness eating the same thing every day and not having very much “fun”. They missed the “fleshpots” of Egypt, the convenience of the city, the excitement of pagan worship and life inside the most powerful nation on the earth at the time. They grumbled against God and taunted Moses every single day with the upheaval of his leadership. It was time for God to speak to them in a language that they understood and in a manner they were accustomed to expecting their God to do.

God therefore came that day with thunder and lightning and some pretty tough rules. Let's check it out in Exodus 19: 20-24:

“The Lord came down on the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. Moses went up and the Lord said to him: ‘Go down and warn the people not to cross the boundary to come and look at me; if they do, many of them will die. Even the priests who come near me must purify themselves, or I will punish them!’” (GNB)

Pretty tough talk, isn't it? God called Moses and Aaron up to give the Ten Commandments. All the people heard was the blast of trumpets, thunder and lightning! They wanted excitement, so God gave it to them! See how they reacted in Exodus 20:18-20:

“The people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.’ And Moses said to the people: ‘Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of Him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.’” (RSV)

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Notice both meanings of the word “fear” in this passage! And no wonder they were afraid with such a display! But did they really need to be afraid? Not according to Moses! Besides, wasn’t this the same God who, shortly thereafter, celebrated the sealing of their covenant together as described in Exodus 24:9-11:

*“Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the leaders of Israel went up the mountain and they saw the God of Israel. Beneath His feet was what looked like a pavement of Sapphire as blue as the sky. God did not harm these leading men of Israel; they saw God, and then they ate and drank together.”
(GNB)*

Wow! Sounds like a picnic with God at the top of the mountain!

So...what was God up to back in Exodus 19? Well, that was one of those risky situations God undertook to gain the respect of His people and hold it long enough to tell them more of the truth about Himself! He risked gross misunderstanding at doing things this way, but it was His effort to meet people where they are and speak in a language they can understand. When people are *hard of hearing*, God will raise His voice! Do you understand that? Shouldn’t we really be grateful for it?

Now notice what His children did also just 40 days later when the thunder and lightning died down. You can read about it in Exodus chapter 32. See what God has had to work with? Getting balance on this has been tough! You raise your voice and you do get reverence. You also get fear. You speak gently...as Jesus did...and you get despised! And so, back and forth it’s gone over history.

Let’s just imagine, for a minute, that you’re a grade school teacher in a classroom full of rambunctious lively students. It’s just after recess. The commotion of their energy still prevails when you smell smoke and see flames lapping up over the door at the back of the classroom. Do you smile and gently coax the little ones back to their desks so you can calmly apprise them that you need their attention for a moment? Do you have the time? Is it important in such an emergency to think about their sensitivities? Or do you stand on the

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desk and state at the top of your lungs: “Class! Stop your fooling around NOW! Johnny! You head up the room at the front door and the rest of you line up behind him on the window side of the room...THIS SECOND! This is a fire drill and I MEAN BUSINESS!” Which shows greater love...not to terrify briefly? Or to raise your voice and take on a stern bearing...run the risk of being momentarily feared and have obedience take place for the wrong reason?

It seems to me that God has had to do this over and over again in scripture as I read the 66 books. Warning after warning after warning! Given what is at stake and knowing what we now know...aren't you prepared to say: “Thank you, God, for raising your voice so many times!”? I know I've said that to my own mom and dad a number of times already!

Well, back to Revelation 14:7 where the first angel shouts that we should “fear God” because He is judging us. Those are awesome words. How thoroughly is He going to judge us...just how much does God know about us? The Bible says in Hebrews 4:13:

“There is nothing that can be hid from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves.” (GNB).

Uh-oh...do you like the sound of that? One of the wisest said in the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes 12:14 –

“God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret.” (GNB)

Wow, huh?!? Does that scare ya? How can it be possible for us to face Judgment against someone so well-informed...much less powerful? Can you do that unafraid? Unafraid of what?(the Judgment?)...of whom?(of God?)

The same John who warns us to “fear God” in Revelation 14...that the hour of judgment has come is the one who explains how it is possible to face the judgment without fear! Consider 1st John 4:16-18 for example:

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“God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in union with God and God lives in union with him. Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on the Judgment Day...There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.” (GNB)

John’s point is **crystal clear** there, isn’t it? You see, if we really know the truth about God...and if we like what we know, then there is *no need to be afraid*...even of the final judgment! Or do you think here that John is referring to only “gentle Jesus...the Son”?

Many Christians derive comfort from the fact that God has given all judgment to the Son:

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” John 5:22 (RSV)

Well! Isn’t that a break!?! Many think so...that they’ll receive more mercy at the hand of the Son than at the hand of the Father. Remember some of those fundamentalist teachings from your youth (if you were so privileged!)? On Judgment Day, you have a “friend in court”! Who is that? Jesus?? Well Jesus’ response to Philip in John 14: 7, 9 seems to take issue with that notion:

“If you had known me, you would have known my Father also ...He who has seen me has seen the Father.” (RSV)

A great many fundamentalists believe that when their case comes up in court, Jesus will be there interceding with the Father. I was taught this when I was young. In my struggle to make sense out of it, this is what I thought:

“Hmmm. God the Father turned over our judgment to Jesus. He must’ve done that because He never experienced being human like Jesus did. That’s only fair. I’m going to be judged by a peer.”

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That’s sound, rational thinking...don’t you agree? One of the errors in this thinking, however, is that it doesn’t stack up against God the Father being all-knowing. Therefore, it doesn’t make sense. I thought it was a nice try, though. Here’s how I understand it now:

“In the great war in heaven, God obviously lost credibility. One-third of His family didn’t trust Him anymore and there were lots of questions in the mind of those who stayed. Jesus was the One to come to His Father’s defense. The Father, as One of the Trinity, doesn’t seem to play too active a part in this whole thing...at least as far as where events on earth are concerned. Most all the Bible references are to Jesus...even in the Old Testament. Jesus said the Old Testament scriptures testified of Him. The Father is on trial here and Jesus has acted for His defense as well as ours. When Jesus went through with the plan of salvation and demonstrated the truth about His Father and Satan, He won credibility back for the Father. The Father has been on our side all along, and His credibility has been suspect for that, too. But Jesus won credibility back. The Father is more than willing to “let” Jesus judge, because they are of one mind on the matter. The Father knows that Jesus is on our side too. And all heaven is convinced. The only ones left who are not yet fully convinced are the inhabitants on this planet.”

So, then...is the Father less loving, less forgiving than the Son? Not according to what I have read in the 66 books! Who says He’s that way...arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe? Remember Satan...the liar and father of lies (see John 8:44)? Are you going to take Satan’s word for it? Always remember Jesus’ words on this subject in the upper room, the night before He died:

“I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you.” John 16:26 (Phillips)

Now here’s another critical point to make on this subject. In the past, I was taught how necessary the “mediation of Jesus” to the Father was on my behalf. There was, supposedly, an entire “sanctuary

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service” developed for God’s chosen people in the Old Testament that demonstrated this “truth”. The evidence I was given for this teaching came out of Romans 8. It’s a passage I’ve heard used by Catholics to justify the need for a qualified human intercessor between God and us. I also heard it used by Pentecostals and other tongue-speaking faiths to justify the idea that unless you can speak in tongues, you’re not saved. Here’s the passage in Romans 8:26 & 27:

“In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people...”(GNB)

Sounds pretty clear, doesn’t it? One can quote from the Bible this way and come up with such doctrine. However, if you read the pertinent portions of Paul’s letter from verse 18 through 39 you get a much different meaning! Remember how you’ve been encouraged to look at these things in their entire context. For openers, the quote above doesn’t complete verse 27. Consider how the whole verse reads:

“And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Holy Spirit is because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will.”(GNB)

Oh boy! That lends a whole different flavor, doesn’t it? Two things ought to pop out at you here. The first time I quoted this passage without the last phrase, it should occur to you or bother you that the Father could see into our hearts, but not know what we are thinking or what we want to say. It implies that He needs to go to the Spirit for this information. I don’t think so. Second, once the phrase “in accordance with his will” is inserted, we become aware that the Spirit and the Father are on the same wavelength regarding this “pleading” thing. In fact, when you read verses 31, 32 and 33, you discover that no one needs to plead with God the Father. He declares us NOT GUILTY! As I mentioned above, the Father lost a little credibility standing up for us like this. In verse 34, we find...well, I’ll quote it:

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“Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right hand of God, pleading with him for us!”)GNB)

The key here comes in understanding what is meant by the phrase “pleading with God for us”. There are obviously two ways to take this: 1) the traditional way that indicates that the Father is upset with us and must be pled with in order for Him to find it in His heart to forgive us...because His sense of justice must be satisfied and his offense and intolerance for sin assuaged (oops! Big nasty complicated word again, sorry). He must be made to feel better about and get over His hurt and His being upset with us for sinning. But, when you read verses 31-33 you discover that He’s not upset in that way and doesn’t hold it against us. On the contrary, He gave His Son up and went through a horrible experience with Him to demonstrate the truth about Himself and to vindicate His posture that all who see this truth and accept it should be allowed to live on forever! That being the case, there is only one other conclusion you can arrive at regarding this pleading business: 2) the enlightened way in view of the great controversy between God and Satan that indicates that Satan is our accuser before the universe. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all pleading together for us! “If God is for us, who can be against us?” It’s just as if we had three attorneys on our behalf. They would all be pleading with each other on our behalf. They are our “pleading” team!

Reading Romans 8 through from start to finish opened my eyes to this truth! There was a veil over my eyes...but it has been removed! St. Paul understood this concept very well and I feel as though I’ve been through the same experience!

“Because we have this hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who had to put a veil over his face so that the people of Israel would not see the brightness fade and disappear. Their minds, indeed, were closed; and to this very day their minds are covered with the same veil as they read the books of the old covenant. The veil is removed only when a person is joined to Christ! Even today, whenever they read the Law of Moses, the veil still covers their minds. But it can be removed, as the scripture says about Moses: ‘His veil was removed

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when he turned to the Lord.’ Now, ‘the Lord’ in this passage is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is Freedom.” 2nd Corinthians 3: 12 – 17 (GNB)

This has excited and thrilled me for some years now! I hope you have the same experience! It is exhilarating!

So, to focus once again, who is it that is against us? Against whose charges do we need to be defended? Satan! He tempts us...gets us to fall for it...and then accuses us before heaven! This is just like the story of the woman caught in adultery in John chapter 8. I’m convinced this is an acted parable. All right...what’s an “acted parable”? It’s a story that actually happened in the Bible that has a deeper meaning than its actual happening and telling. The story is fascinating in its depth. I’ll delve into it a little here to whet your appetite for the kinds of beautiful revelations that can come to you through the Holy Spirit when you read the 66 books...if you’re careful to ask for the Spirit’s guidance each and every time you use the Bible. This story is connected to another regarding a Pharisee named Simon who honored Jesus with a banquet. The connection is revealing in terms of how tender God is in healing us of our maladies.

The “acted parable” story is contained in John 8: 3-11. It’s just a little story, another in those constant confrontations where the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus. Commentators have made much of this story, indicating how Jesus could have been trapped. If He would’ve called for the woman’s stoning according to the Law of Moses, the Pharisees would’ve taken Him to the Roman authorities because only the Romans had the power to condemn someone to death. If Jesus would have taken the woman’s side, the Pharisees would’ve condemned Him before the people as one who didn’t follow the faith of their fathers. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the ignorance of the people in having a knowledge of their own faith is revealed in this instance because the Law of Moses called for the woman and the man caught in adultery to be stoned. Jesus didn’t overtly confront them with this, but it may have been a part of what he was writing in the sand as they all read it and vanished. Another inspired historian revealed that the perpetrator of the crime of adultery with this woman was her own uncle. He was known as Simon the Pharisee. It is this

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little discussed fact that makes the story so interesting and extends it beyond John 8. But first, let's get the acted parable lesson. Just as Satan tempts us, tries to get us to fall for it and then accuses us, so the Pharisees (who had Satan's character) tempted Jesus, tried to get Him to fall for it and then would've accused Him!

OK, what's important about pointing out that the woman caught in adultery was put in that position by her own uncle? Her uncle Simon later had an interesting experience with Jesus. He had contracted a dreaded skin disease which commentators have deemed to be leprosy. Now this was no small embarrassment for a Pharisee! He was a church leader! The church taught that those who were poor or diseased were receiving their just punishment from a God who was upset with them because they were such sinners. To have such a thing happen to a church leader who washed carefully and steered clear of filthy sinners was a catastrophe! Jesus bailed him out by healing him of this dreaded affliction. You can see reference to this in Matthew 26:6. So Simon, in gratitude, thought he would throw a banquet in Jesus' honor. He thought he would “even” himself with Jesus by lending his considerable influence to Him...smoothing His relationship with the Jewish “authorities”. Everything was going swimmingly until “guess who?” shows up. That's right, Mary Magdalene, the woman caught in adultery! She washes Jesus' feet with her tears and anoints them with expensive spikenard. You can read the story in Luke 7:36-50. Simon, of course, is pretty uncomfortable with the whole development. He judges Jesus to be less of a prophet than he originally thought because he thinks Jesus doesn't know the character of the woman who attends Him, the very woman He saved from being stoned to death! What a poor memory Simon had!

Jesus, on the other hand, knew that Simon was hanging in the valley of decision regarding Him, so He told Simon a parable. The parable was designed to subtly make Simon aware that not only did Jesus know who was attending Him, but Jesus also knew that Simon was the one who led her into adultery! Simon was obviously moved by this because we see his name among the faithful in the early church after Jesus left for heaven. He was undoubtedly grateful and moved that Jesus didn't expose him as such an evil perpetrator in front of all his friends at the banquet either! What a fascinating tale!

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That was a nice side trip wasn't it...: a pleasant, but important diversion? Let's get back to the subject of being afraid of God and the judgment. Understanding how the judgment is conducted and what determines whether we're saved or lost gives us further evidence as to why we have no need to be afraid.

The Bible makes it plain that there is nothing arbitrary about the judgment. The Apostle John, for example, said in John 3:19:

"And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." (RSV)

You see...if we have turned down the truth, then:

- We've not been won to trust & willingness to listen
- God has not been able to help us and heal us
- There are no new hearts and right spirits
- We're not the kind of beings it would be safe to admit into the hereafter

There's absolutely nothing arbitrary about this! Let's read some more from John:

"Jesus said in a loud voice, 'whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in him who sent me. Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. If anyone hears my message and does not obey it, I will not judge him. I came, not to judge the world but to save it! Whoever rejects me and does not accept my message has one who will judge him. The words I have spoken will be his judge on the last day! This is true, because I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has commanded me what I must say and speak. And I know that his command brings eternal life. What I say then, is what the Father has told me to say.'" John 12: 44-50 (GNB)

Jesus is saying here: **"This is how the judgment works!: He who rejects me is judged by the TRUTH!** In John 17:17 Jesus again makes it clear that the Father's Word is the truth! So there you have it!

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Judgment just a matter of diagnosing our condition! It fits the “trust/healing model! Our condition is a consequence of our own choices which we have the freedom to exercise. Judgment concerning that condition is also a result, a direct result of what we have chosen. There’s nothing arbitrary about it at all!

All right then...how about what God does to those who have turned down the truth so that He’s been unable to heal them...is that arbitrary? Well... what does God do to those who reject the priceless truth? An appropriate question at this point would be: “What else can He do?” Indeed, He cannot use force. The only fair thing He has left to do is let them go their own way...give them up! Remember what that means from chapter 8? Remember what God’s wrath is from Romans chapter 1?

*“Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie...God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.”
Romans 1: 25, 28 (RSV)*

In the end, God simply recognizes, diagnoses and announces the results... in those awesome familiar words of Revelation 22:11. I’m going to paraphrase them here; you go read them to see if you agree:

“Just go on doing what you do...just go on being who you are...”

Once again, there is nothing arbitrary about that! And there is no need to fear God in this either! As a race of humans, we have made our choice...and we are reaping the results, both good and bad. So, make the right choices! Life is so much better that way...and it comes with an extended warranty!

BUT doesn’t the Bible also warn that the sinner will experience God’s wrath...and be burned forever!? It’s right there in the third angel’s message, isn’t it? Look at Revelation 14:10 –

“He also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath...and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...for ever and ever.” (RSV)

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Hopefully the preceding 65 books of scripture have prepared us to understand these awesome terms!

God's wrath! Remember what that is from our readings in Romans 1; Hosea 5, 9, and 11; and other places? God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway...leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequence of their own rebellious choice! And as He lets them go, He cries (He literally breaks down and cries!) "How can I let you go...how can I give you up...?" Hosea 11:8. THIS is His strange act as referred to in Isaiah 28:21.

Let's step back a bit to Revelation 14:10 again and consider that word: forever! How long is forever? That seems like one of those "dumb" questions, doesn't it? Like a trick question maybe, or one of those intellectual mind benders where you're told that something you read in black and white doesn't really mean what it says! Got your antennae up? Get wary now! It's always good to require these things to be proven or to prove them to yourself. The Bible itself helps us understand its meaning. The Bible is the best interpreter of itself. Page back just a book from Revelation to the little book of Jude. It only has one chapter, and we're going to look at verse 7:

"Sodom and Gomorrah...serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." (RSV)

That's interesting, isn't it? Let me quote it from the Good News Bible:

"Remember Sodom and Gomorrah, and the nearby towns whose people acted as those angels (Satan's) did and indulged in sexual immorality and perversion: they suffer the punishment of eternal fire as a plain warning to all."

"Eternal" or "Forever"...same thing, isn't it? If we want to understand what the Bible means by those words in that context, we have only to locate Sodom and Gomorrah to view how those people are so tormented. Those cities have indeed been located under the south portion of the Dead Sea. Is the fire still burning? No. Doesn't that

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help us understand that the meaning of “Burn Forever” is the effect/result/noun rather than the adverb?

There’s another explanation for this in Exodus 21:6 where Moses was giving the ordinances that people should live by. In discussing the treatment of slaves, he stated that if a slave elected to stay with his master...even after he earned his freedom...”He shall serve him forever” Ex. 21:6 (KJV). In this case forever means “as long as life lasts”. The effect is the same, though, isn’t it? Actually, the term could even be briefer than that. Slaves electing freedom became free in the year of Jubilee! In that instance the period of “forever” meant the remaining period until the Jubilee: a maximum of 49 years versus a lifetime! In any event, it’s certainly not “forever” the way we understand it today, is it?

So, is there support here for the “eternally burning fires of hell”? I don’t think so! But let’s focus on the “fire” for a moment...this “fire” that shall destroy...How many times in the Bible has God’s glory (the brilliance that surrounds His Divine Person) been declared as “fire”? An example of that is contained in Exodus 24:17 –

“Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain.” (RSV)

There are many, many examples of this: Exodus 19:18...Deuteronomy chapters 4,5,9 and 10...2nd Chronicles 7:1-3...Psalms 50:3...Ezekiel 8:2 and more. Look ‘em up! Notice in these passages...”like a devouring fire”...it’s descriptive, comparative. Adam and Eve used to live in it...and so did Lucifer!! It’s life-giving fire!

It’s only because we are, by our own choice, out of harmony with God...that what should be life-giving and energizing is, instead, destructive! God would heal us from this!! He doesn’t want to lose even ONE! See 2nd Peter 3:9 as evidence of this.

Some day soon, every one of us will come face to face with God, whether we’re saved or lost. You can find that in the book of Revelation. Will we be afraid? Should we be? Do you anticipate being afraid?

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What if we're among the lost? We'd look up and see Christ in His human form...will He be angry with us? Or will He be crying: "Why will you die? How can I give you up?"

Like a physician, God is there eager and willing to heal! But He cannot and will not force us to take the remedy! If we don't trust Him, if we're unwilling to listen, He cannot heal the damage done! What else can God do? He has to let us go...and we'll die without Him! But even then, there is no need to be afraid of God Himself. We should be afraid of Satan; afraid of ourselves and our own poor judgment. We should embrace God and trust Him completely and follow His life-giving and life-fulfilling advice. He's on our side!

Many, many people are afraid to die...because they're afraid of God! They've been told things...even partial truths...that they'll come face to face with an angry God. Is it possible to die unafraid of God? The Bible speaks of freeing "those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" in Hebrews 2:15 (NIV). Why fear death? What is it about death that causes fear? The common answer to this question is "fear of God"... "fear of judgment". Is it possible to know God well enough so that you can die unafraid? Again, the beloved Apostle John said:

*"...you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."
John 8:32 (GNB)*

The truth about what? As we studied in the last chapter:

The truth about GOD!

It's the truth about God that makes it possible for you to die unafraid!

Just before Jesus went to His death...He described to his disciples the ideal quality of the relationship God desires to have with His children. It comes as no surprise that this also is contained in the book of John, chapter 15, verse 15:

"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not

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*know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends,
for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to
you.” (RSV)*

Imagine this! God wants to deal or relate to you as His friends!! Only a few have let God achieve this complete relationship with Him. Moses was one. Evidence of this is in Exodus 33:11:

*“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man
speaks to his friend.” (RSV)*

**THERE IS NO NEED TO BE AFRAID OF GOD.
ON THE CONTRARY...IT HURTS HIM FOR YOU TO BE
AFRAID.
IT HURTS YOU TOO.**

Chapter #10:

The Great Reminder...A Celebration of FREEDOM!

So far in this book, we've been careful to look at "the big picture" regarding our relationship to a God presiding over a universe caught in a battle over good and evil. The battle is not over who is more powerful, but rather over who is right. In this sense it is quite unusual as we humans consider battles. God has the power to completely "wipe out" opposition. We've seen, however, that this is not God's way. God has been accused of being less than forthcoming to His creatures and, strange as it seems, God is on trial before the universe. His accuser, Lucifer, has called Him a liar who would withhold good things from His created ones. Lucifer claims that God is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe. We have deliberated at some length, so far, to put this dilemma into perspective...to examine what happened out there in the universe so very long ago (before this planet was ever made) that now affects us daily. It is in this setting that the topic we're now going to undertake must be examined.

In the next chapter, we're going to consider how and why "Law" came about. Why did God give us Ten Commandments...and only ten. How did those ten get to be so complicated? In this chapter, however, we're going to study a phenomenon that is a part of the Ten Commandments. We're going to isolate it and put it ahead of our consideration of the "Law" because of the peculiar and unique part it plays in the cosmic drama that all God's created ones are involved in. It concerns the subject of worship. The whole idea of worship could occupy a book by itself. In the spirit of keeping it simple, however, let's just resort to Webster again. Rather than get to the various definitions, it will satisfy our needs here to note that the word comes from the old English concept of being worthy of respect. It is a form of honor that has been earned. To put "worship" into the context of the great controversy in the universe then, we're looking at who is worthy of universal honor and respect: God? Or Lucifer? We should also note here, that true and honest worship is voluntarily given.

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Our “worship system” on this planet is centered on a day. Have you noticed that? Most the Christian world worships God on Sunday. The origins of how that happened may surprise you a little, but we’re not going to go there in this book. The Muslim world worships God on Friday. Jews and some Christian faiths worship God on Saturday. Other Christian groups worship God on Wednesday. Hindus and Buddhists have special days of worship, but those faiths believe it’s more important to worship God every day. Defenders of Christian faiths, Jews and Muslims would be quick to add that they think the worship of God every day is important also...but that a special day set aside for this purpose is important. This begs the question of arbitrariness, doesn’t it?

What’s the big deal about a day? Tuesday...Thursday...does God really care what day? Why? Or why not? We have chosen the Bible, in this book, as our foundation of truth in pursuit of understanding God, His character and the way He runs His government. The Bible is replete with instructions about a special day of worship to God. It’s called the Sabbath. As is the case with so many teachings that claim to come from the Bible, there is a great deal of argument over this concept. That it is embodied in the Ten Commandments makes it an even more confounding topic. If God told us so long ago in Exodus 20 to “Remember the Sabbath Day”, it would appear to have some significance to Him. Can that be? Whatever could cause God, who is timeless, to have any regard for one particular revolution of planet earth? On the surface...it does sound a little arbitrary, doesn’t it? Let’s get into it.

As you would expect, the concept of worship is 180 degrees from what Satan has tried to get humanity to believe it is. Any time that happens, you can be sure it has particular importance to God. The Sabbath is anything but arbitrary. It’s not a test of our willingness to obey. In fact, it’s the 4th of July for the universe! Excuse me, I’m ahead of myself.

The Sabbath is a major provision that God made to help us through this time of distrust. Unfortunately, it has not always been understood as having been designed to help us in this way. On the

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contrary, it has been widely misunderstood in such a way as to support Satan's charges against God. All the "other" commandments seem to "make sense"...but why does God care about the seventh day? That one seems to be a mystery.

Even among the most devout observers of the Sabbath, the Jews, there has been great misunderstanding...as on a certain Friday almost 2,000 years ago! Remember how they crucified the One they looked for and then negotiated to have His body taken down so as not to profane the day they set aside to worship Him? I'd call that a great misunderstanding, wouldn't you?

If we put the Sabbath in the setting of the great debate between God and Satan and in the setting of all 66 books of the Bible...then, I believe, all arbitrariness evaporates. So let's go to the Bible and see what the "commandment" about the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week, says in Exodus 20:8 and 11.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." (RSV)

Observe what James said about the Ten Commandments:

"But whoever looks closely into the perfect law that sets people free, who keeps on paying attention to it and does not simply listen and then forget it, but puts it into practice – that person will be blessed by God in what he does...Speak and act as people who will be judged by the law that sets us free." James 1:25 and 2:12 (GNB)

There's something here that we're not getting, wouldn't you say? God gives us a body of law that "sets us free"! It doesn't *restrict* us...it sets us free! So many, at the first reading of the Ten Commandments, think that they are all God's arbitrary requirement of us...showing His authority...testing our willingness to obey. They reason through most of them, but this one about the *day* just doesn't seem to fit with the others. Yet we've learned that the message of the Bible is that *there is*

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no arbitrariness in God! Remember the “price God has paid” to deny this charge of being arbitrary: not just with claims...but with **evidence!**

God’s laws were given not to be a burden or to restrict us. They were given to help us, to protect us in the days of our ignorance and immaturity...to lead us back to trust and on to freedom! We’ll spend an entire chapter on this. As we have already learned so far in this book:

God values nothing more than our FREEDOM!

When you go through all 66 books in the Bible and come to the last one, you find God still asking us to remember Him as our Creator! It comes from a passage we’ll examine again and again:

“Honor God and give him glory, for his time has come to sit in judgment. Worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the Creator of the sea and the springs.” Revelation 14:7 (NAB)

This reminder in the last book of the Bible brings to mind that the first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible takes place at the end of creation week. Many people today have great trouble with the concept of creation week. Science has supposedly “proven” that the earth is much older than 6,000 years and that mankind walked on it a lot longer ago as well. TIME magazine’s cover for the week of August 23, 1999 is devoted to the evolution of man. It contains a full feature story on the latest “discoveries of science” on this topic. There is heated debate on this topic and a sizable spectrum of belief in it in some form or other... even among theologians. It is not within the purpose of this chapter to add to the debate over evolution other than to note that the Bible is in obvious conflict with it. Creation week plays a critical role in understanding God. It should come as no wonder, then, that God’s opposition has worked hard to confuse the issue.

Think about the setting of creation week for a moment. It happened while a war was on in heaven! It happened during the time when 1/3 of God’s family decided to distrust Him. In the middle of this crisis in God’s government, He invited His family to watch Him

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create yet another world: OURS! Consider the freedom given after that 6th day:

- Mankind could create in his own image!
- Even animals could do this...bugs too!
- We had freedom, as now, to love and trust God or hate Him and spit in His face!

Where were Satan's charges now...that God was selfish and did not share His creative power with His created beings? God even gave Satan freedom to approach our first parents! He didn't exactly hide Satan's dwelling, even though Satan was at first confined to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

"In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:9 (NIV)

It was near the tree of life...Adam and Eve could see it! Consider this also: God didn't place Adam and Eve in a circumstance where they could be tested beyond their ability to resist. We already know God that well. Satan was only allowed to approach them at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...and they were warned not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. This story and this situation demonstrated the meaning of a precious statement that St. Paul made to the Corinthians that many Christians have memorized:

"But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm." 1Cor. 10:13 (GNB)

It's important to understand here that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not put in the Garden of Eden as an arbitrary test of obedience. It was put there to help and protect! It wasn't placed there before sin had taken place in the universe...it was placed there afterward! The accuser demanded the right to make his case before the newly created. God gave him that opportunity, but confined him to that one place on the earth. Many people teach that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was put in the Garden to test Adam and Eve. If it had been put there before sin took place, they might have an argument. But it was put there after sin to protect the newly created ones, just like every other one of God's gracious laws! Adam and Eve had the entire planet Earth to roam. The only place they could

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encounter Satan was at that tree. They were instructed to stay away from it for their own good.

It was God’s design that, when we come together in love, we would create little people in our own image! That was His original plan, His original idea:

“Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control.” Gen. 1:28 (GNB)

This planet was to be ours...not Satan’s! God thought all this up Himself...an unselfish gift unlike anything the universe had ever seen! Some of God’s family worried that we had been given such privilege. Others sat back in amazement and wondered what kind of God He must be to put things together this way!

The universe that heard the charges brought against God watched all of this! Think what they must have thought when this was finished and God said it was good! What must they have thought about Satan’s charges? Charges like:

- God doesn’t respect the freedom of His creatures
- God is selfish in His use of authority and power

So...now we come to that special day...the one referenced in Genesis 2: 2, 3 –

“ And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” (KJV)

That God “rested” from His work doesn’t mean He was tired! In its context here it is like an attorney saying: “I presented my case and my evidence. I now rest my case.” Are you starting to catch on to this? God completed all “His work” and on the seventh day rested...ceased. He blessed that day...made it awfully special so that the universe would never forget it because:

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On that day, the defense rested its case!

Imagine what that 24 hours was like as the universe celebrated with God! The first seventh day Sabbath on the new planet Earth! It's important to note something here: It was not mankind's seventh day. It was mankind's second day! If the Sabbath was designed to give us a rest every seventh day since our creation, mankind should be observing Thursday! The first Sabbath was God's day of celebration! The whole universe joined with Him in it and we were merely visitors...guests!

God called on His family throughout the universe to reflect on the significance of what had been done; the answers that had been given to Satan's charges; the falsity of his accusations and the truth about freedom, love and generosity on the part of God!

Again, to emphasize, the Sabbath day on earth was given after sin (separation from God as an Authority), not before it. If it was given before sin, it could be viewed as an arbitrary test of our obedience. It was given to us after sin, however, because we all needed it very much!

It must have seemed to the universe that the great controversy had been won! But Satan's most serious charge against our God had not yet been dealt with. No event in creation week had dealt with Satan's most serious charge that God lied to His children when He warned that the consequence of separating from Him (sin) is death. God waited thousands of years to answer that one when He offered Himself through His Son to demonstrate the truthfulness of His word as we studied in chapter eight. He could have left it up to us to provide that evidence...to demonstrate that truth!

Jesus knew why He was dying. He put it all in the context of the great controversy between Satan and God. He knew about Satan's charges...so as He died He said:

"It is finished!" *John 19:30 (KJV)*

Just as God said at the end of creation week..."I've finished the work for this week, I rest my case"...when Jesus died on the cross He said,

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“We finished it all!” Indeed, the defense rested. The evidence was in. Just what was finished? Jesus said in John 17:4 –

“I have finished the work which You have given me to do.”
(New KJV)

And what was this work? It was to reveal God’s character to angels and to men! All the questions had finally been answered!

How significant that the next day after Jesus answered Satan’s most serious charge was the seventh-day Sabbath. Jesus could have gone to heaven on Friday to hear the universe tell Him:

“That’s more than enough! Everything is clear now!”

Instead, He waited over the Sabbath hours! Imagine what the universe was doing over the same time period:

- Surely they paused...and reflected on the significance of what they had seen!
- Surely they celebrated with the Father the costly victory that had been won!
- Surely they thanked Him for the costly evidence that had been presented!

Now...they knew the universe was secure for ETERNITY!

As I now understand it, this is the Sabbath God asked us to remember! We need to pause and reflect on those truths in which the angels rejoiced. This is certainly no mere test of our obedience; it is anything but arbitrary! As caught up in the war zone of the battle for our mind as we are, we need the message of the seventh day:

- Although God is the creator and we are the created, He has been gracious in sharing His creative power with us;
- Lucifer does not have this gift. He’s furious over it and has perverted it’s meaning almost beyond recognition;
- To fall for his sophistry and attempt to live on our own without God is the height of folly. We were not made to exist on our own. We would die;
- God is not our enemy. He’s been desperately trying to win us back to trust and love Him.

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Do we really need that kind of reflection weekly? I think so! This is what Jesus meant when he said in Mark 2:27 –

“The Sabbath was made for the good of man.” (GNB)
(It wasn’t made for Jews! It was made for man!)

This same thing is true for all of God’s laws. As we read all 66 books of the Bible...the meaning of the Sabbath is repeated and enlarged.

At Sinai, in Exodus, the Sabbath is connected with creation. Then, later, John and Paul make it clear that the One who created us is Jesus Christ:

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” John 1:3 (NIV)

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” Colossians 1:16 (NIV)

Think about that a minute...the One who came to save us is the One who made us in the beginning! Who would know better how to heal the damage done!

So, then, every time we observe the seventh-day Sabbath, we are publicly acknowledging to God, our friends and ourselves that we have faith in Jesus as our Savior, as our Creator and as our God! Many wonder about the proper way to worship or observe the day so set aside. It is in this context that we should determine for ourselves how we should observe the Sabbath!

NOW...when the question is raised: “What kind of being is our God? Could the Father possibly be as gracious as the Son?” The resounding reply comes every Sabbath! “God is just as gracious as the Son...for Christ, the One we call the Son...is God!” If Christ is Creator-God...then, if you want to know what God is like...just look at Christ! Every Sabbath is to remind us of theology that is that consequential – that profound!

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There are other ways, of course, in which the Sabbath helps strengthen our faith...and they are beautiful in their design:

*“Keep the Sabbath, my day of rest, because it is a sign between you and me for all time to come, to show that I, the Lord, have made you my own people.”
Exodus 31:13 (GNB)*

“Make the Sabbath a holy day, so that it will be a sign of the covenant we made, and will remind you that I am the Lord your God.” Ezekiel 20:20 (GNB)

*“I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the Lord make them holy.”
Ezekiel 20:12 (GNB)*

This is Christ talking to us as the God of the Old Testament. He points out that the Sabbath is a reminder about a very important truth about our God and His relationship with His people. His people! A short study of these people will reveal them to be a bunch of ingrates! Unholy! Sinful! And yet God says to them: *“I’ve not abandoned you! I’m still working to save and to heal you! I still regard you as my people!”* Who are God’s people today? Are they any better than those of Old Testament times?

Notice now that salvation is more than forgiveness. It is also a healing of the damage done! Up there in Exodus, God said He is making us “holy people”. What does that mean? We’ll play a little “word algebra” here. Webster, and so many others, define “holy” as “without sin”. Remember the simple definition of sin that we started with? It means: “separated from God”. So being “holy” means nothing more than “without being separated from God”! Given what we’ve studied, that makes sense, doesn’t it?

So here are more reasons we keep this special day:

- To show that only the Creator can heal the damage that’s been done...only He can recreate!

The Great Reminder...A Celebration of FREEDOM!

- Only the One who made us in the beginning can restore us to what we used to be!

David acknowledged that Creative Power of God when he wrote:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me.” Psalms 51:10 (KJV)

The creative power is necessary to make us trustworthy children of God one more time. We can't do this by ourselves! Some people try...by self restraint, discipline, etc. But only by faith and trust in our Creator can all the damage be perfectly restored!

This doesn't mean that more elementary reasons for observing the Sabbath don't have a place or validity. What do you tell your children, for example, when it comes to this topic? Don't you speak to them in a language that they can understand...taking into account their experience and allowing for their growth? God did (and does) the same with His children. Moses gave a different reason in the book of Deuteronomy for observing the Sabbath than he did in the book of Exodus for example:

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and for that reason the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:15 (NEB)

Is this valid? Or is it a contradiction? Is it a lapse of memory? No, that doesn't make sense, does it? As we have seen in past chapters, God works with His children within the limits of their own understanding...and He risks being misunderstood Himself in order to get through once in awhile.

The Sabbath is about God...He created us free in the beginning. When we lost our freedom, He used His creative power to make us free again! The exodus was always to remind of this! Note how the Sabbath is always connected to freedom!

St. Paul has an entire discourse in Hebrews on yet another way to consider the Sabbath. In Hebrews chapter 4 he says the Sabbath is a

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type and a foretaste of the rest to come. Paul argued that the Israelites physically entered the Promised Land when they crossed into Canaan...but they did not enter God’s rest...because they didn’t trust Him! He said, therefore, that there remains a Sabbath-like rest to the people of God:

“So there must still be a promised Sabbath of Rest for God’s people.” Hebrews 4:9 (Goodspeed)

“There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God’s people, the seventh-day rest.” Hebrews 4:9 (Jerusalem)

Thayer’s Lexicon (A form of Greek dictionary) defines “sabbatismos”, the word used for “rest” in this passage. According to that Lexicon, this rest is “the rest looked forward to by the true followers of God in the world to come.” If we’ve really been led and won to trust God, we begin to enter that Sabbath-like rest now...and certainly in the new earth we’ll know what that Sabbath rest is all about completely!

The Sabbath, through the years, has answered the four basic philosophic questions of mankind. This is fascinating to me. Here they are:

- Where have we come from? *We’ve been created! We arrived in the Creation and all that came with it!*
- Why are we here? *We’re here as a part of the process to restore the universe to what it was before that great war between Lucifer and God took place! We have a role to play in the vindication of God!*
- Where do we go in the future? *When Christ comes the second time, we’re going to heaven with Him to meet the rest of the family! Then we’re coming back home to a new earth.*
- What kind of person is our God? What does He want from us? *God is just like Christ. He wants us back!*

Is there ANY information Satan would rather that we not have than THIS?

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It should come as no surprise, then, that Satan would seek to confuse the meaning of the Sabbath day!!

There is this “Tie” to God, then, as Moffatt put it in his translation of Ezekiel 20:12 (compare it to the GNB version used above on Page 142):

“I gave them my Sabbath, to mark the tie between me and them, to teach them that it is I, the Eternal, who sets them apart.”

The world has broken this tie. The last message of God to the world is the restoration of this tie and all it stands for! It’s in the Book of Revelation. It’s a message of love and faith...it’s not the legalistic: “*if you don’t keep that day...I’ll kill you!*”

Whenever you hear someone preach that:

- Christ is our Creator
- Christ is our Savior
- Christ is coming again
- God the Father is just like Him

you are hearing the message of the seventh day!

At the end of the 66 books of the Bible, we see the world divided into two camps. The last book of the Bible, Revelation, discusses this. In chapter 12, John presents the great war in heaven. In Chapter 13 he talks about Satan’s final campaign where all but a few will be taken in by him. In Chapter 14 he talks about the few who will not be taken in. Look at how they’re described:

“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”
Rev. 14:12 (GNB)

In that day, intelligent and whole-hearted Sabbath observing will represent faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus. There will be a group that still worships Jesus as Creator and God.

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To reiterate...the Sabbath is not about us...it's about God! Someday God will recreate our environment...and give it back to us. There are several Bible passages that talk about this:

“The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

2 Peter 3:10 (KJV)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

Revelation 21:1 (RSV)

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.”

Isaiah 65:17(NIV)

Will there be any need for the Sabbath in the hereafter? One could make a case for it. Isaiah was impressed to indicate so:

“Just as the new earth and the new heavens will endure by my power, so your descendants and your name will endure. Month by month, at the new moon, week by week on the Sabbath, all mankind shall come to bow down before me, says the Lord.” Isaiah 66:23 (NEB)

If God asks us to celebrate that special Sabbath day in the world to come, what will your reaction be? Shouldn't it be the same reaction here and now?

Chapter # 11:

Why the LAW?...God's Emergency Measures

This chapter is about the steps God had to take to hold things together long enough to demonstrate some of the truth about Himself. When Lucifer plunged the heavenly family into that crisis of rebellion that resulted in a war and massive distrust, emergency measures were required to maintain a semblance of order and respect until the basis for real peace and freedom could be clarified and confirmed. St. Paul came to understand this concept well after developing a close relationship with God over a three year period of “unlearning” his traditional training in Arabia. (See Galatians 1:17 & 18) When Paul wrote his famous letter to the Roman church, he spoke about this topic:

“But now God’s way of putting people right with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence. But by the free gift of God’s grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus who sets them free. God offered him, so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.” Romans 3: 21-26 (GNB)

God will settle for nothing less than peace and freedom based upon mutual trust:

WELL-FOUNDED TRUST AND LOVE!

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This will occur because of all the evidence God has provided us through the years in the history of His Word as well as in the history of our lives.

The EMERGENCY referred to above is the breakdown of trust and trustworthiness. It's the stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen that has made it so hard for God to heal the damage that has been done. The consequences of this breakdown have been *clearly* portrayed all through scripture; throughout history...and we see it every day in the world about us. No one trusts anyone anymore. Wives don't trust husbands and husbands don't trust wives. Why? Employers and employees don't trust each other. Why? People of one religion don't trust people of another religion. Why? Trust is completely missing at the highest levels of government. As this book is being written, we've just had the closest most drawn-out election of the Presidency of the United States in history. The Republicans and Democrats clearly don't trust each other. Why? Does this make for a serene sense of security in the universe? It surely doesn't seem so. Just yesterday I talked with someone trying to raise money in the venture capital market with a sensitive business plan. He has been counseled time and again not to trust anyone with it. So he lives in fear that someone will “steal” his idea. We all live in a state of fear...because trust is gone. Trust in God? You must be kidding.

God proposes to set right (simple concept for justification) and keep right (simple concept for sanctification) all that has gone wrong. In order to do this though, He must win us back to trust and a willingness to listen. He must also heal us of the damage done. You see, forgiveness is not enough...healing must take place! Think about it: do you want to spend the hereafter living next to pardoned (forgiven) criminals who have not been restored to safety? The object or goal of God has been to develop trusting and trustworthy saints. But what has God had to work with over history? People usually fell into these categories:

- Those unwilling to listen at all
- Those who just plain are not listening
- Those so influenced by Satan's lies that they've turned away to other gods

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- Those so influenced by Satan's lies that they don't believe in God at all
- Those so influenced by Satan's lies that they seek to worship the True God as arbitrary; vengeful; exacting; unforgiving and severe! In so doing they offer Him the obedience that springs from fear
- Those who live between the immediately above two extremes
- Consider yourself! Do you fit anywhere in this spectrum?

So, then, it is no wonder that we see God using many and various ways in the Bible...trying to reach us *where we are* in this great emergency...speaking a language we can understand...leading us no faster than we're able to follow. God has run grave risks of being misunderstood as He sought to gain our attention and hold it long enough to tell us more of the truth about Himself!

When we've been hard of hearing, God has raised His voice. We've looked at examples of that in the stories about Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19); Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16); the she-bears (2nd Kings 2); the Flood (Genesis 7 & 8); Mt. Carmel (1st Kings 18) and so many other stories that indicate God's willingness to run the risk of being misunderstood...to lead us to that reverence that is the beginning of WISDOM!

When we were tempted to take the idea of sin lightly; and underestimated the seriousness of its consequences...the One who sees the sparrow fall instituted that system of sacrifices and ceremonies that required the death of millions of His creatures, so that we might be warned in a language we understood! Consider what a distasteful task that was for God.

When we were tempted to accept Satan's lies that sin doesn't lead to death...God sent His own Son to die that death and so demonstrate the truth! The whole Bible is full of these Emergency Measures! It's full of illustrations of the lengths to which God is willing to go. We've seen many of these already. Divorce, for example, remember? God's male "children" were churning through wives like a kid with a Halloween bag full of candy. God didn't design

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marriage to be perverted in this way, nor was He happy with the way divorced women were cast aside as nothing. We looked at that story where the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus over the question of divorce (Matthew 19). Jesus made it clear that such a process was an emergency measure because of the “stiff-necked” behavior of God’s people. God had some pretty scathing things to say about divorce through His prophet Malachi. Check out Malachi 2:13 – 16. If you got right down to it, you could say that the entire Bible is an emergency measure! It was recorded to guide us through this time of distrust and rebellion.

With all these emergency measures to consider, we’re only going to look at two of them in this chapter. They are, however, two of the most important emergency measures...two of the most misunderstood. This will give you a framework with which to examine and understand the other measures.

NUMBER ONE: God’s emergency use of LAW.

If it is true that God values nothing so much as our *freedom*, then why has He made so much use of law? Isn’t law restrictive? If all He asks from us is *trust* and *love*...both which, incidentally, cannot be commanded...WHY did He give us the 10 Commandments which *seem* to demand love and obedience under threat of execution? If God doesn’t really wish to be seen as arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe...why did He surround us with all these innumerable rules?

St. Paul seemed to be on both sides of this issue. His emphasis was on freedom and trust...so much so that he was accused of doing away with God’s Law...or these rules. He, of course, rebutted this in chapter 3 of the letter to the Romans. He said that faith doesn’t abolish the Law. Rather, it establishes the Law by putting it in its proper perspective. And just what IS the right perspective from which to view God’s use of Law? Well, Paul doesn’t leave that up to speculation. He said the following in that little letter to the Galatians:

*“Why then the Law? It was added because of transgressions.”
Galatians 3:19 (RSV)*

Why the Law? ...God's Emergency Measures

That seems pretty clear, doesn't it? It was added because it was needed! People were goofing things up so they needed a little guidance. Isn't that the way it works yet today? Every criminal incident perpetrated by someone using a gun brings us ever closer to gun control legislation. Paul went on to explain in that chapter just what the purpose of the Law has been:

"So the Law has been our attendant on our way to Christ, so that we might be made upright through faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer in the charge of the attendant." Galatians 3:24, 25 (Goodspeed)

The King James Version refers to the "attendant" above as a "schoolmaster". The Greek word used (paidagogos) actually referred to the slave that took children to school and protected them along the way. They needed that help until they were "grown up". Do you get this picture?

What Law was Paul talking about in these passages? Theologians have argued that it was just the ceremonial law or ordinances given to Moses. Others argue that it is indeed the moral law. Some argue ALL law...even the Ten Commandments. Well...let's consider how God gave the Ten Commandments in the first place. One day He gathered His misbehaving children together at the foot of Mt. Sinai and He said:

- I want all the murdering to stop!
- Yes, and all the hating to stop too...
- And all the stealing and the cheating and the lying, the immorality...just stop it!
- And I want you to stop going after other gods too!

Come on! What an emergency there was in His family when He had to ask His children to stop doing all those things! The whole Decalogue...all Ten were given because of transgression!

Have you ever had to do this in your own home? I did once. I'll never forget it. My teenage son realized, one day, that he was a "free agent". At first by a little...and then in ever greater proportions, he decided to live life in a much different way than he had been trained to live it. I was working hard and late. He knew I was upset with him

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and he avoided our inevitable confrontation. Finally I had to write him a letter and put some things down that never had to be spoken in our house before. I set forth thirteen rules:

- *No females permitted in your room or on the premises if your parents are not present.*
- *When you bring a female companion to our home, you will observe a code of propriety that requires you to refrain from physical contact (including wrestling, back-rubbing, sitting on top of one another, and similar conduct).*
- *No parties unless previously arranged with your parents and chaperoned by them.*
- *No smoking, drinking, drugs or lewd magazines or such material permitted in the house. This includes your not coming home drunk or high.*
- *No telephone calls made on your parents' or business telephones, and no telephone calls referred to your parents' or business numbers.*
- *No use of your parents' vehicles for any reason.*
- *No “borrowing” or use of your parent's assets unless previously approved by them and returned in good condition in a timely manner. This goes for your brother's belongings as well.*
- *Flexibility and understanding on your part that, if we have visitors on occasions (Christmas, grandparents, etc.), your bed may be given as an act of family graciousness and hospitality.*
- *You will secure the household at any time that you leave it and no one else is present in it.*
- *You will not play music loudly either in your room or in other places in our home so as to cause a disturbance.*
- *You will honor the day the family worships God together if and while you are in our midst.*
- *You will conduct any affairs or transactions that you know are not in keeping with the standards of our household outside and away from it (and hopefully without our knowledge).*
- *You will keep peace with your mother. She is under a great deal of stress and will be for some time.*

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This was part of a letter that I absolutely had to write. What a terrible emergency there was in my family that I had to ask my son to stop doing all those things. My other two teenagers didn't join him in this...but he affected the entire family with his behavior. It wasn't hard for me to make the leap between that experience and the one I observed God embroiled in.

The Law was added because of sin. Do you remember how we defined "sin" at the beginning of these lessons? Webster simplified it down to three little but profound words: "separation from God". You see...there was no need before sin entered the universe for God to say to His loyal angels: "*I want all this behavior to stop!*" They didn't need a law to do what is right. They did right simply because it was right. It made SENSE! Today, my son whole-heartedly agrees with the letter I wrote to him so long ago. He wants the same standards for his family because he can see that it is a right and safe way to live.

So, when sin entered the universe...the day came when God had to speak of Law...and then the awesome day came when God had to say that sin (rebelliousness...a break from love and trust ...lawlessness) results in death!

There are *such dangers* inherent in the use of Law. Consider these:

- The assumption that doing right merely means obeying the rules
- The assumption that sin is merely disobeying the rules
- The idea that the penalty for breaking the rules is that the maker of the rules will execute you
- The understanding that God made possible forgiveness so you won't have to be executed by executing someone else in your place who paid your legal penalty. This is referred to as justice.
- What if you turned down the above offer of forgiveness? Then you are painfully executed...all the more so because of your refusal to accept the gift.
- Obedience that springs from fear!

All of these are gross misunderstandings! Spend some time thinking about this.

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It's imperative that we look at all 66 books of the Bible and see that God does NOT want adherence to rules! He wants us to do right because it is right...because we see it...we get it...we admire it and we want the lifestyle! Jesus demonstrated this as He walked the earth. He admired His Father and didn't make a move without consulting Him on it. Jesus is our example!

“It was to this that God called you, for Christ Himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in His steps.” 1st Peter 2:21 (GNB)

Back to the question one more time: “WHY, then, the Law?”

It was added to protect us until we had a better understanding and better motivation! We ought to thank God for the Law! Some of the Law seems stern, but we needed all of it. The Law was an emergency measure. It is NOT needed when you are a new creation...are you comfortable with that? It is written on your heart and becomes a part of who you are and how you live. You don't need it written down anywhere to follow anymore. Consider Paul's conclusion about it in that same chapter 3 of Romans:

*“Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the law? No, not at all; Instead, we uphold the Law.”
Romans 3:31 (GNB)*

Paul also makes it plain that such rules are for misbehavers:

*“We know that the law is good if a man uses it properly.
We also know that law is made not for good men but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful...”
1st Timothy 1: 8,9 (GNB)*

There's an implication in this verse that the Law is bad if a man uses it improperly. The Law certainly can be used improperly. Jesus spent a lot of time trying to convince the Pharisees of this fact! A favorite translation of this verse comes from Moffatt:

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"We also know that the Law is not meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control." - 1st Timothy 1, 8, 9 (Moffatt's Translation)

Where do principles and self-control come from? If you have principles and self-control...do you need to be told to love God?

That's probably enough on God's emergency use of Law.

NUMBER TWO: God's emergency measure use of the system of animal sacrifices.

This certainly is a much misunderstood area. It's important to note that this system wasn't really against God's people in that it needed to be taken away. Rather, it was for God's people to teach us things we needed to know. It wasn't intended as a preferred method of teaching for God. His people were the ones that wanted it...we'll see that a little later. Sacrifices were given to remind us of sin (separation from God) and its grave (no pun intended) consequences!

"But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." Hebrews 10: 3,4 (GNB)

Misunderstood, however, these very same sacrifices (and ceremonies) turned many away from God!

Think again, for a moment, about what happened on that special Passover weekend in 31 AD. You know, the Friday when Christ was crucified, the day He rested and the day He was resurrected.

- Did the theologians and officers of God's church that celebrated this special Sabbath even know the "One" represented by the lamb?
- Did the church back then any longer understand the true meaning of the ceremonies in which they participated?
- Did they understand God's plan of salvation?
- Did they even know God Himself?

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Many Old Testament Prophets had tried to make clear the meaning of this sacrificial system. That’s right: the prophets in the Old Testament understood the symbolism and why God had given these rules and ceremonies. Let’s look at some evidence of this:

“ For on the day that I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them, nor give them command regarding burnt-offering or sacrifice; but this command I gave them, ‘Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.’ ”

Jeremiah 7:22,23 (American Translation)

Notice above that the system was not preferred by God!

“In those days...men shall speak no more of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; they shall not think of it nor remember it nor resort to it; it will be needed no more.” Jeremiah 3:16 (NEB)

So, Jeremiah tells us that the system is not needed any more! In Old Testament times, the tablets with the Ten Commandments were kept in the Ark of the Covenant. John the Revelator saw such an ark in heaven. He refers to it in Revelation 15:5 as the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony”. The Greek word used there that was interpreted in English as “testimony” is “*Maturion*”. It actually means “the Decalogue kept in the tabernacle”. Will it be a museum piece for us? What was the purpose for this sacrificial system anyway? What did God intend all along? Jeremiah again provides us the answer:

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying: ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me. Jeremiah 31: 33,34

Hosea, a “little” prophet or “minor” prophet not only taught this, but he demonstrated it in his life. He expresses what God told him:

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"It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hosea 6:6 (Phillips)

"I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me." Hosea 6:6 (GNB)

Again, I want to emphasize, God never wanted to use this "system"! The Bible says so in several other places:

"Samuel said. 'Which does the Lord prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him.'" 1Samuel 15:22 (GNB)

"You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them; you are not pleased with burnt offerings." Psalms 51:16 (GNB)

"The Lord says, 'I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry. People of Israel, I did not demand sacrifices and offerings during those forty years that I led you through the desert.'" Amos 5:21 – 25 (GNB)

Well! If God didn't demand or want those sacrifices...who did?? A hint is provided if we just read the next verse in Amos 5:

"But now, because you have worshiped images of Sakkuth, your king god, and of Kaiwan, your star god, you will have to carry those images when I take you into exile in a land beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is Almighty God. Amos 5:26, 27 (GNB)

AH-HAH! The Israelites wanted sacrifices...just like those in the heathen population around them! So God responded to their choice! This was an emergency measure to talk to His people in language they

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understood...to meet them where they were...to take them only as fast as they were willing to be led!

But notice God's preference. He has only wanted us to “know” Him again. What does that mean...to “know” Him? Does it mean to recognize His voice...His face? It means to love Him, to trust Him, to be willing to listen again. That's all He's ever wanted...or ever will want.....

FOR ALL ETERNITY!

All the emergency measures we see used in all 66 books of the Bible are designed to lead us back to this fact!

OK...back to the sacrificial system again...and a very tough question:

If God is so gracious...if He is love personified...why does the Bible picture the need for MEDIATION? Do we really need an intercessor...someone to stand between us and an angry God?

Where do we get such ideas from? Well, there are “proof texts” in the Bible that some people use to support such a position. The Famous Chapter 53 of Isaiah has this passage:

*“And so I will give him a place of honor, a place among great and powerful men. He willingly gave his life and shared the fate of evil men. He took the place of many sinners and prayed that they might be forgiven.”
Isaiah 53:12 (GNB)*

But there's more to support this:

“In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will... Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or

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rather, who was raised to life and is at the right side of God pleading with him for us!" Romans 8: 26, 27, 34 (GNB)

The same kind of language is used in the Book of Hebrews:

"And so he is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through him, because he lives forever to plead with God for them." Hebrews 7:25 (GNB)

So...it seems pretty clear from these passages that someone needs to plead with God on our behalf, doesn't it? Satan loves to have us misunderstand this! Nothing can distort a true picture of God more than this misunderstanding does! Satan would love for us to believe that, were it not for Christ's (or Mary's...or the saints...or the sanctity of the Mass) constant intercession, the Father could never find it in His own heart to forgive and heal! Come on...we know this isn't true!! Yet...priestly intercession runs all through the scriptures, especially the mediation and intercession of our own Lord! What's up with this? Could it be that this also is an emergency measure especially tailored to meet our own needs? Do we need this until we come to know God better and realize the incredible news:

There is NO need for anyone to stand between us and OUR GOD?!

We have had an enemy between...and the damage has been devastating! Is it possible we need a friend between us and God? If so...WHY?

Let's go back to the stories in the Bible...the experiences of those who went before us...and see what we can find. Remember back in Exodus chapter 19 at the foot of Mt. Sinai when God had to raise His voice again to get the attention of His people? He spoke to them directly, and they didn't like it! They were afraid,...distrustful!

*"They said to Moses, 'If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die.'
Moses replied, 'Don't be afraid; God has only come to test you and make you keep on obeying him, so that you will not sin.' But the people continued to stand a long way off, and*

“Oh My God!”

*only Moses went near the dark cloud where God was.”
Exodus 20: 19-21 (GNB)*

They begged for an intercessor! A mediator! Remember, now, God wanted to speak to them directly...but He’s always given His children what they chose! The fact is, though, God DID speak to them and they didn’t die! They just didn’t want to push the issue:

“Today we have seen that it is possible for a man to continue to live, even though God has spoken to him. But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire will destroy us. We are sure to die if we hear the Lord our God speak again... Go back, Moses, and listen to everything the Lord our God says. Then return and tell us what he said to you. We will listen and obey.” Deuteronomy 5:24, 25, 27 (GNB)

Again you can see here that the people pleaded for a mediator...for a friend between them and God! They wanted and thought they needed this...God did NOT! Fortunately for them, Moses was just such a friend. Was there anyone between Moses and God? No. Look at the record regarding this:

*“If any man among you is a prophet I make myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is at home in my house; I speak with him face to face, plainly and not in riddles.”
Numbers 12:6-8 (Jerusalem)*

“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Exodus 33:11 (GNB)

Years later, the *Creator* tried to encourage His disciples to believe that He wanted to speak to them as His friends:

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” John 15:15(RSV)

Why the Law? ...God's Emergency Measures

Now Jesus didn't want "blind" obedience! His whole life and His testimony bore witness to this. He was long tired of these emergency measures. He clearly expressed what He considered the ultimate in His relationship with us...even though we still were not ready to understand it. He wanted His disciples to obey because they agreed...because they admired God for His wise and gracious ways! That's the obedience of a FREE person! It's intelligent obedience! That's a redundant statement...intelligence is obedience, and obedience is intelligence! You see, when you're friends, no one needs to come between! Some of our church forefathers partially understood this when they penned the hymn: "Nothing Between". The disciples were clear that nothing was needed between them and Jesus. They weren't afraid of Him. But they were not so sure about the Father! They wanted Jesus to tell them more about the One they thought responsible for all the sacrifices and the blood! In the upper room, Jesus tried to teach them that there was no need for this apprehension:

"I have been speaking to you in parables – but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that day comes, you will make your requests to him in my name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you." John 16:25,26 (Phillips)

Think about this once: Who stood between God and Judas? Judas had passed the point of no return...and there was still no one between him and God!

"He who has seen me has seen the Father!" John 14:9 (RSV)

Hopefully WE can be convinced about this finally...like Thomas:

"Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" John 20:28 (RSV)

Chapter #12:

Is God's Law a Threat to Our Freedom?

The Law...the LAW...THE LAW! Aren't you tired of hearing about it? We sure had a re-acquaintance with it as a result of the 2000 Presidential election! The Ten Commandments have enjoyed a rejuvenation of popularity in the United States though. I grew up in the sixties when Madeline Murray O'Hare chased prayer out of the public schoolroom. Liberals fought for and achieved a "stronger separation of Church and State". For the longest time, liberal theology has beaten upon conservatives in religious circles regarding a preoccupation with "the Law". Recently, a judge was forced to remove a sculpture of the Ten Commandments from an Alabama Courthouse. Evangelicals pride themselves in their certainty of being saved by grace, arguing that the Law was "done away with" on the cross. Yet they would confuse those whom they proselytized in requiring that certain of those standards "discussed in the Ten Commandments" be adhered to if one was to be a member of their church organizations.

More recently, conservatives organized at the "grass roots" to try to legislate morality and decent behavior in the United States. Differences with liberal theologians as well as differences between Protestants and Catholics have been set aside to fight for the sanctity of the lives of the unborn. More and more clerics have run for public office. The recent revealing of the dubious moral character of William Jefferson Clinton, coupled with random killings of youth on youth at high schools around the country like Columbine, have caused the pendulum to swing sharply right. There's now a call to have the Ten Commandments posted in every school in the United States. Pat Buchanan came back in vogue for awhile and gained enough momentum to break from the Republican Party. In a past election he headed the Independent Party as their candidate and based his platform upon moral and family values. If elected in the year 2000, Pat promised to run the country according to the Bible. George Bush said the person who had most influenced him in his life was Jesus. Al Gore said that the way he approached a difficult problem was to ask himself: "what would Jesus do?".

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What's all this got to do with this chapter? Well...more than meets the eye. There's a little different slant to this topic. Please bear with me, I promise it will be worth your while.

Question: *Is there anything more precious to intelligent human beings than FREEDOM: Freedom from tyranny; freedom from fear; freedom to do whatever you want...within reason, of course?*

We know that God wants us to be free! The past eleven chapters have anchored that down pretty well, don't you think? The *Good News* is that God values nothing higher than our freedom! He wouldn't have gone through everything that He has...put us through everything that He has...put the universe through everything that He has...created Lucifer, even...if that wasn't the case. Not all His children believe this, of course. Lucifer was able to persuade one-third of His family that God is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe! How many people in this world still believe that? Even among very devout religious people? The vast MAJORITY!

For thousands of years, God sought to reveal truth. In the last chapter, we considered the emergency measures God has taken to talk to us in a language we can understand; meet us where we are; and lead us as far and as fast as we are willing to go. The most notable of these emergency measures has been the Ten Commandments. God's extensive use of law *seems* to be opposed to *freedom*... but we'll soon see that as a gross misunderstanding. Let's look at some of the things said in the Bible that *seem* to confuse this issue:

*"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments... You are My friends if you do what I command you."
John 14:15 & 15:14 (RSV)*

Whoa! What kind of friendship demands obedience? This almost sounds childish: "You can be my friend if you do things MY way!" How do you fit "keep my commandments" with "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free!" (John 8:32)? We're free so long as we do exactly what we're told...is that it?

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Is this really such a contradiction? Or does it depend on how we *understand* what it is that God wants us to do? Or maybe it depends on how we *understand* the reason why He even had to ask us in the first place? I BELIEVE...(and I hope, by this time, that you do too!)...that all God’s laws...particularly the “10”...were given for our best good! And they were given *especially* to preserve freedom...not to infringe upon it! This truth has been so drastically misunderstood.

Let’s go back to look at another example that took place 1,400 years after Sinai. The Son of God Himself came to live among the people who had been especially entrusted with this revelation of God’s will formulated in the Ten Commandments. Of all people, they should’ve understood that it was an emergency measure! Moses was their authority. They *revered* Moses...and still do for that matter. When Jesus came to us, He found His people *totally preoccupied* with God’s laws and *totally preoccupied* with their obedience to every possible detail!

- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *“Don’t make graven images.” It took ‘em a long time, but after the Babylonian captivity they learned their lesson well. They didn’t do that anymore.*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *which day was the Sabbath! The highest duty they held was to obey all 10 commandments.*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to pay tithe! Matthew records them tithing the lint they accumulated in their belly buttons!*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to obey the laws of hygiene. He commented on their straining gnats from goat’s milk; washing after contact with the Gentiles*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to search the scriptures. They did it all the time! But they did it for the wrong reason:*

“You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me!” John 5:39 (GNB)

They thought they could become experts on “the rules” and earn their eternal life! But Jesus clarified that

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the Scriptures were about Him...not about US.

- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to be careful in their association with unbelievers. They took this to such an extreme that they became exclusive and insular. They washed their hands vigorously each time they came in contact with an “unbeliever”.*

They all could say, like the rich young ruler: “All these things we obeyed from our youth up”. You would think that Jesus would be pleased with such rigorous obedience, wouldn't you? You'd also think such people would recognize Him and welcome Him!

All heaven watched the *incredible* scene as those who claimed to love God's Law denounced the Law Giver as a Law breaker! Jesus ventured to suggest that while they were working so hard to obey that actually they were obeying for the wrong reason! Because they were obeying for the wrong reason, they really weren't obeying at all! They weren't too happy with this opinion...it was extremely offensive to them! Jesus went even further and suggested that if only they knew the God who had given the Law...they would keep the Law for an entirely different reason! Knowing the God that had given the Law would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time!

The idea that God's people misunderstood their calling was not new! The Old Testament prophets had mentioned it in the very Scriptures the Jews held so sacred...in Amos and Isaiah, for example:

“Listen to this, you that trample on the needy and try to destroy the poor of the country. You say to yourselves, ‘we can hardly wait for the holy days to be over so that we can sell our grain. When will the Sabbath end, so that we can start selling again? Then we can overcharge, use false measures, and fix the scales to cheat our customers. We can sell worthless wheat at a high price. We'll find a poor man who can't pay his debts, not even the price of a pair of sandals, and we'll buy him as a slave.’”
Amos 8: 4-6 (GNB)

Jesus quoted and commended Isaiah:

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“The Lord said, ‘These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.’” Isaiah 29:13 (GNB)

“How right Isaiah was when he prophesied about you! ‘These people’, says God, ‘honor me with their words, but their heart is really far away from me. It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach man-made rules as though they were my laws!’” Matthew 15:7,8,9 (GNB)

God’s laws were not understood, but rather were perverted to human standards and egocentric (self-centered) interpretations. It makes you wish God would’ve made yet one more commandment: “Thou shalt not misinterpret, misquote or erroneously teach any of the previous Ten Commandments I have just given you!” Rote! Memorized motions and traditions! Unthinking worship...what an insult this was to God!

So, Jesus set out to tell the truth about His Father and reveal the kind of obedience that is really pleasing to Him. Recall what Jesus did at such great risk on the Sabbath...it was all so innocent and good...*He healed people and helped them!* Those gloomy legalists that headed His church were shocked! They denounced HIM for disobeying the law! “No!” Jesus said...”I didn’t come to destroy or misrepresent the law...I came to fulfill it (live it completely)...to explain it to you *clearly!*” By teaching and explaining, especially on the Sabbath, Jesus set out to correct the wide misunderstanding of God’s Law. He said: “The Law was given for you to be an advantage, not a restriction!” This happened the day He was defending His disciples for stripping wheat and corn to eat on the Sabbath. As Jesus considered their rules and regulations just for the Sabbath alone, He said the following in Matthew 11:28 – 30 (Goodspeed’s Translation):

“Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened, and I will let you rest. Let my yoke be put upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-minded, and your hearts will find rest, for the yoke I offer you is a kindly one, and the load I ask you to bear is light.”

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He was referring to the Law here! Law Lite! This was coming from the One who wrote the Law and the One who sure should know what was intended! But how did the church leaders react to this? “Blasphemy!” they said! “He’s a heretic!” they cried. “What a false picture of God!” they taught in shrill voice. And finally they screamed: “Crucify Him!”

Christianity took wing under such conditions. When the disciples finally figured out what Christ was trying to get through to them in those short 3 ½ years, they were themselves astounded. They became fearless promoters of freedom! The organized church came at them with a vengeance, you can read about it in the book of Acts. Through the spreading of the truth about God, they moved others to be as bold as they in furthering the communication of it. One of the church’s greatest persecutors became one of Christianity’s greatest orators. We know him as St. Paul, but he was first known as Saul.

As a Pharisee...a renowned Pharisee...Saul went from town to town in Israel ferreting out Christians and coercing them to come back to Judaism under pain of death. He was the scourge of Christianity and came to be most feared! You see, Saul also obeyed God for the wrong reasons. He worshipped a tyrannical God who would be pleased to see people

- Persecuted
- Imprisoned
- Stoned to death

to force them to obey! That’s the kind of God he worshipped. He had many texts of Scripture, he thought, to support his position. He conducted his own evangelism in the name of that God! That’s *why* he felt free to use so much force! What does this remind you of? Wasn’t there another period of history some hundreds of years later that lasted for hundreds of years, where such evangelism was conducted? Where so many on various sides were treated the same way in the name of God (Protestant or Catholic)? Don’t we see it today...in Serbia and Albania? In Ireland? In India and Afghanistan? Will we see it again in the United States?

On the Damascus road, Saul saw “The Light”! It really made a dramatic difference in his life too. Just what was it though? When he

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takes the name Paul and literally joins the side of Christianity, we note the following:

- He did NOT change his Bible
- He did NOT change the name of His God
- He did NOT change the day that he worshipped
- He did NOT change his diet
- He did NOT change his dress

What did he change? Did he change anything? Oh yes...he changed his picture of God! He changed his understanding of who God is! From then on, who has spoken more eloquently about **FREEDOM** than Paul? He spoke also about faith, grace, love and trust. “But don’t misunderstand me about this” Paul said. “My emphasis on these things does NOT abolish the Law!” See Romans 3:31.

Among those who believe in God...you’ll generally find little disagreement over whether God should be obeyed or not. The problem with obedience comes in the different reasons people have for obeying God. Which of these do you prefer?

- I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and the power to destroy.
- I do what I do because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him. (*This one sounds pretty good...doesn’t it?*)
- I do what I do because I have found it to be right and sensible to do so, and I have increasing admiration and reverence for the One who so advised and commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity. And being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has always proved to be so sensible, when He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding.

Permit me to quote a woman author for whom I have great respect. This is her description of true obedience:

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God

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from a sense of obligation merely – because he is required to do so – will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey...True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right – because doing right is pleasing to God..
Christ's Object Lessons, pages 97 & 98.

Paul told us why God made so much use of Law. Remember from our previous chapter? “It was added because of transgression” Galatians 3:19. All of Galatians Chapter 3 states that it was added to guard, guide and lead us back to a right relationship with God so that we would learn to do right because we agree that it is right...NOT because we're ordered to obey. In Galatians 3:24, Paul calls the Law our “Schoolmaster” in the King James Version. In the original Greek the word interpreted “Schoolmaster” is “Paidagogos”. That comes from “Pai” from which we get pediatrician...pedodontics...child, and “Agogos” which means a leader. The word “Paidagogos” means “leader of children”...that's what the Law is! It's designed for people who behave like children! How we have behaved and misbehaved as children...and how we have needed the guidance of God's Laws *to preserve FREEDOM!*

Surely by now, we can see a very gracious God who has used all these emergency measures for man's best good! There's nothing arbitrary about them. They make good sense and they *deserve* to be obeyed! We must understand why we had to be so instructed by these measures. Remember the following from the last chapter:

“We know, of course, that the Law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Yet, we also know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control...”
1st Timothy 1: 8,9 (GNB)

If you have self-control...you don't have to be ordered to behave! It's a way of life...a literal lifestyle...that comes to you how? Through the Law? No, no, no. Through the Spirit that reminds us of Christ's

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example. It comes through the Spirit of Freedom, not just for oneself, but for all.

It's logical, at this point, to entertain the question of whether we should even need secular law or not. We could ask the same thing of it (Why, then, the law?) and get pretty much the same answer (It was added because of transgression!). That's usually the reason our legislators enact laws. But consider some of St. Paul's comments in his letter to the Galatians again:

“You, my brothers, were called to be free...The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:13,14,18,22,23 (NIV)

If this was really a way of life with us, would we need any laws to govern ourselves? Think of some by yourself...laws that govern, say

- Banking
- Taxation
- Transportation
- Criminals
- Probate
- Divorce?
- Real Estate

The list could go on and on, couldn't it? Why would we need any one of them?

Some people want God to command and control them for the rest of eternity; to take and keep control. This seems so humble and safe, doesn't it? But think about it now...it's telling God that we don't want the freedom He's paid such a price to give us! How can we hand freedom back and say: “No...I don't want self-control, thank you very much. I want You to control me.” ??? God did not make us that way, or else we wouldn't be where we are and we wouldn't have come through what we have. Lucifer wouldn't have made the choices he did if God “controlled” him. There's something about “love” and “freedom” that we have a lot to learn about yet. Now GET THIS

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POINT PLEASE: God has so much as said, "When you're fully under the influence of my Holy Spirit (something you have to choose to do), I won't control you! You will have recovered the dignity and joy of *self control*!

Come on now...isn't that MARVELOUS! **FREEDOM** once again!!

Now, St. Paul wasn't talking New Theology here in the New Testament, that "love" is the fulfilling of the law...that you should love your neighbor as you love yourself. That concept goes way back to the Old Testament. Moses was the first to state this in the Bible. Half of it is found here:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)

The other half of the same message is found here:

"Do not hate your brother in your heart...But love your neighbor as yourself." Leviticus 19: 17, 18 (NIV)

Paul was merely quoting the man instrumental in quoting the Ten Commandments as he heard them from God in the first place. Jesus quoted Moses in the same way:

"Jesus answered 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39...also found in Mark 12 and in Luke 10 (GNB)

When you come to understand that Jesus is the God of the Old Testament, as revealed by John in his first chapter, and other places in the New Testament, you come to the fascinating realization that Jesus was quoting Moses...who got it from Jesus Himself long before!

Now you really can't command these kinds of things, can you? How can you command love? Well...you *might* put them in the form

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of a command as an emergency measure...but that's all it is! Emergency measures do NOT provide the lasting motivation that God desires! As stated before...the concept of obedience is so misunderstood...but so is the concept of love. Consider the gross perversions of the love experience! “Making love” is a much different concept to God than it is to today's average United States' adult! You should consider why Satan attacks it so. It must be pretty important for us to understand! That's why Paul explained *True Love* the way he did in 1st Corinthians 13:4 – 6:

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.” (RSV)

Imagine a community in which people really live this way! To live in a place where, not only will people never do the wrong thing, they won't even *want* to! That's the meaning of Commandment number 10! That's evidence of being completely healed! That's real freedom! It reminds me a bit of John Lennon's song: *Imagine*. It's apparent that John rejected the picture of God that was given to him: “No one to kill or die for, and no religion too.” I can't blame him or millions of others for rejecting the misrepresentation of God that was given to them, the ugly misinformed picture of God that Satan has somehow inspired within and without Christianity.

Commandment number 1 says that we'll all love the same God. What kind of God would that be? Every member of God's family will admire the God who values nothing higher than the *freedom* of His children!

- A God who has paid such a price to prove it!
- A God who asks only for mutual love and trust!

This will produce real unity, peace, security and freedom! Seen in this light, the Decalogue is a guaranty of Freedom because God says He will always run His universe in keeping with these principles. He would rather DIE than have it any other way. The difference between our obedience of Law now and our obedience then is that we won't have to be told any longer! That's the meaning of the Law being

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written on our hearts...where we do our thinking! We will "internalize" God's Law as a way of life.

Are you thinking about that goofy Law...number 4? How to "internalize" the Sabbath Day? How does that fit in with this? What is the purpose of that Day anyway; what does it have to do with Freedom? Do you remember the significance of it from chapter ten? You might want to go back and refresh your memory on it. Right now, we need to be reminded of it...it's a help to us, not a test of our obedience. Look at Isaiah's understanding of it:

"If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the Sabbath a day of joy and the Lord's day a day to be honored, if you honor it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the Lord." Isaiah 58:13 (NEB)

JOY! That's one of the gifts of the Spirit of Truth! What truth is it we found that brings us such joy? It is the truth about our God...that He loves us just as much as Jesus does...that He is not the Deity His enemies make Him out to be!

If you were ever asked why it is that you obey God...assuming that you do...what answer would you give? Remember the potential responses we considered above on page 168? What speaks best on behalf of God? Bible interpreters have had a hard time with God's character...consider Deuteronomy 6:25 for example:

"If we faithfully obey everything that God has commanded us, he will be pleased with us." (GNB)

This comes from a very modern translation. It still sounds like we have a God here that needs appeasement. If we mess up in one thing, God won't be pleased. If He's not pleased...then what? It depends on your picture or understanding of Him, doesn't it? There's a footnote to this verse in the Good News Bible that restates this verse as another possible interpretation of the original Hebrew:

"The right thing for us to do is to obey faithfully

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everything that God has commanded us.”

That’s has a little different flavor to it, doesn’t it? How does it fit with your picture of God from the Bible?

James is thought to be the legalist among authors of the Bible. Martin Luther certainly thought this. He grouped James with Hebrews, Jude and Revelation at the end of the Bible as books he thought didn’t really have much to say about Jesus. He thought them to be a little different than the rest. But look at James 2: verses 8 and 12:

“You will be doing the right thing if you obey the law of the Kingdom, which is found in the scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself’...Speak and act as people who will be judged by the law that sets us free.” (GNB)

One day we will stand in front of God and say: “God...we would do all these things from here on...whether You ask us to or not...because we agree with You that they are sensible and right!” And I can imagine God’s response:

“Good! At last you’re free! Now you’ve learned the truth...the truth will set and keep you free!”

Chapter #13:

How God Treats Sinners

Superstitious people avoid the number thirteen. That chapter number thirteen should focus on this topic seems to fall right in line with this thinking! Even more so when you consider how superstitious people generally are about God! Well, you're in for a treat this time. This is one of my favorite chapters in this book because it's one of the most precious. It may have been more appropriately entitled, "How God treats His wayward children". I used the title above for good reason, though, because the traditional teaching is so diabolical. What is the tradition here? I'll tell you: "God burns sinners forever in hell". He does this because He has to...justice demands it. God operates under the principle of *lex talionis* which means "an eye for an eye...a tooth for a tooth". There are modifications of this traditional teaching that allow for less burning or less torture if one hasn't been as bad a person. All this is taught from the Bible. I believe, however, that it is taught out of context. Even Billy Graham agrees with me now!

TIME magazine featured Billy Graham on its cover for the November 15, 1993 issue. It was entitled "A Christian In Winter – Billy Graham At 75". TIME's Richard N. Ostling interviewed Billy about a variety of ideas that he believes remain firmly based upon the Bible. One of them, concerning hell, caught my eye. Here are his exact words:

"The only thing I could say for sure is that hell means separation from God. We are separated from His light, from His fellowship. That is going to be hell. When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it. When the Scriptures uses fire concerning hell, that is possibly an illustration of how terrible it's going to be – not fire but something worse, a thirst for God that cannot be quenched."

Oh all right! Billy Graham doesn't even know who I am...and he doesn't exactly agree with me. But he used to preach hellfire and brimstone sermons in earlier years. You see, Billy's been studying and talking to God for the greater part of his life. He has changed his

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understanding and picture of who that God is. He has rejected Satan’s picture of God. On that, we very much agree!

This chapter is so convincing about the love of God! As usual, we’ll look at evidence to demonstrate that. To start things off, let me ask you this question:

What do you think it will be like to stand before God and realize that He knows everything about you?...EVERYTHING!?

Yes, God has the ultimate “hard drive”...He knows it all. And all of us will stand before Him one day with this realization. Look at how the Apostle John described the final judgement:

*“Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sits on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence and were seen no more. And I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and then another book was opened, the book of the living. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.”
Rev. 20:11,12 (GNB)*

Awesome scene...don’t you think? Wow! The books! Many of us take this language so literally...do suppose they really have “books” like this in heaven? We have computers! Don’t you think things in heaven are just a little more advanced than we have them here? John was just trying to make a cogent point with the mechanical understanding he had at the time. That’s the language he understood...and God has always talked to people in this way.

Back to the issue. Forget sinners a minute. Even among the saved, is this “facing God” thing going to be a very comfortable experience? Consider what St. Paul said about this:

*“There is not even one who is righteous...For all have sinned, and all fall short of God’s glorious ideal.”
Romans 3:10, 23 (Twentieth Century New Testament)*

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This just doesn't seem like such a good basis upon which to face Him, does it? So...I repeat the question I posed to you above: Even though we're saved...forgiven: ***Will God haunt us with His very able memory of that "past" in which we all share?*** I believe the answer to this question depends on your picture of God. I said we'd look at some evidence to demonstrate the truth about God in this matter. What better evidence than looking at how Jesus (in human form) treated even the worst of human sinners? We agree that Jesus is fully God, don't we? Then if we want to know how God will treat us, Jesus would be a pretty accurate barometer, wouldn't you think? We'll look at a few stories to see what we can glean of the truth about our God.

The first story I'd like to consider is a famous one: THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY. We always focus on the woman as the sinner in this story. I want to encourage you to examine how Jesus treats her pious (hypocritical) accusers as well. Oooooo! What's a fourth-grade word for "pious" or "hypocritical"? Parents, why not explain to your children that these men were evil liars that pretended to be good. You're on your own handling the word "adultery". Ok, then, turn in your Bible to the Book of John, Chapter 8 and read verses 1 – 11. What brought this situation about anyway? The answer is right there in verse 6. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus so that they could accuse Him. That's what this thing was all about in the first place. But Jesus gives us a dramatic lesson from it. He provides evidence of how He responds when the hypocritical accuser, Satan, brings our case before Him. This is an important story, so please permit me to quote at length from a favorite author:

“...A group of Pharisees and scribes approached Him, dragging with them a terror-stricken woman, whom with hard, eager voices they accused of having violated the seventh commandment. Having pushed her into the presence of Jesus, they said to Him, with a hypocritical show of respect, ‘Moses in the Law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?’

Their pretended reverence veiled a deep-laid plot for His ruin. They had seized upon this opportunity to secure His condemnation, thinking that whatever decision He might make, they would find occasion to accuse Him. Should He acquit the woman, He might be charged with despising the law of Moses. Should He declare her

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worthy of death, He could be accused to the Romans as One who was assuming authority that belonged only to them. Jesus looked for a moment upon the scene – the trembling victim in her shame, the hard-faced dignitaries, devoid of even human pity. His spirit of stainless purity shrank from the spectacle. Well He knew for what purpose this case had been brought to Him. He read the heart, and knew the character and life history of everyone in His presence. These would-be guardians of justice had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus. Giving no sign that He had heard their question, He stooped, and fixing His eyes upon the ground, began to write in the dust.

Impatient at His delay and apparent indifference, the accusers drew nearer, urging the matter upon His attention. But as their eyes, following those of Jesus fell upon the pavement at His feet, their countenances changed. There, traced before them, were the guilty secrets of their own lives. The people, looking on, saw the sudden change of expression, and pressed forward to discover what it was that they were regarding with such astonishment and shame.

With all their professions of reverence for the law, these rabbis, in bringing the charge against the woman, were disregarding its provisions. It was the husband's duty to take action against her, and the guilty parties were to be punished equally. The action of the accusers was wholly unauthorized. Jesus, however, met them on their own ground. The law specified that in punishment by stoning the witnesses in the case should be the first to cast a stone. Now rising, and fixing His eyes upon the plotting elders, Jesus said, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.' And stooping down, He continued writing on the ground.

He had not set aside the law given through Moses, nor infringed upon the authority of Rome. The accusers had been defeated. Now their robe of pretended holiness torn from them, they stood, guilty and condemned, in the presence of Infinite Purity. They trembled lest the hidden iniquity of their lives should be laid open to the multitude; and one by one, with bowed heads and downcast eyes, they stole away, leaving their victim with the pitying saviour.

Jesus arose, and looking at the woman said, 'Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?' She said, 'No man, Lord.' And Jesus said unto her 'Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.'

The woman had stood before Jesus, cowering with fear. His words, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone,' had come to her as a death sentence. She dared not lift her eyes to the Saviour's face, but silently awaited her doom. In astonishment

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she saw her accusers depart speechless and confounded; then those words of hope fell upon her ear, 'Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.' Her heart was melted, and she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins.

This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to the service of God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady which is unto death everlasting. This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers. With self-sacrificing love and devotion she repaid His forgiving mercy.

In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the Character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reached to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, 'Go, and sin no more.'

It is not Christ's follower that, with averted eyes, turns from the erring, leaving them unhindered to pursue their downward course. Those who are forward in accusing others, and zealous in bringing them to justice, are often in their own lives more guilty than they. Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein."

The Desire of Ages, pages 460 – 462.

What a story, huh? What "stuff" Jesus had to deal with while He walked among us. How disappointed He was in His "church"...His "chosen people". OK, let's analyze this story a little bit.

Notice how Jesus was confronted with such incredible hypocrisy? Right off the bat the woman's accusers said "we caught her in the act!" They caught her in the act all right! They participated! Where was the man who was also to be punished according to the law?

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of a fellow Israelite, both he and the woman shall be put to death."

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Lev. 20:10 (GNB)

“If a man is caught having intercourse with another man’s wife, both of them are to be put to death. In this way you will get rid of this evil. Suppose a man is caught in a town having intercourse with a girl who is engaged to someone else. You are to take them outside the town and stone them to death. The girl is to die because she did not cry out for help, although she was in a town, where she could have been heard. And the man is to die because he had intercourse with a girl who was engaged. In this way you will get rid of this evil.” Deuteronomy 22:22-24 (GNB)

They were pretty strict back then, weren’t they? Wow! The point to be made, however, is the dishonesty of the woman’s pious accusers!

Notice how Jesus reacted to this entire scenario...how he answered their questioning. Especially observe His treatment of this scandalized, half-naked woman...terrorized at what she expected her fate to be. How graciously and generously the Son of God sought to recover the dignity and self-respect of the woman...especially in that culture! It is indeed a marvel. So was His treatment of her accusers, in a different sort of way. They certainly had no mercy coming, yet He did not publicly expose them for what they were. I find myself wishing that He did!

But what does it say about God, that He did not expose those self-righteous accusers? Could it be that God finds no pleasure in embarrassing His children? Weren’t those accusers also members of His family? They were the leaders of His church!

The second story I’d like to consider branches off of the first story, in a way: SIMON THE PHARISEE. This story is found in Luke 7: 36-50 and Mark 14: 3-11. Read it so that you’re familiar with it and come back. Simon of Bethany was counted a disciple of Jesus. He was actually one of the few Pharisees that openly joined Christ’s followers. But he initially did it for political reasons. He hoped Christ was the Messiah, but he hadn’t yet recognized Him as a Saviour...a personal Saviour. He had been healed of leprosy, and that’s what had

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drawn him to Jesus. He wanted to show Jesus his gratitude and thought he would throw Jesus a feast...a social affair...to meld Him into the church establishment, perhaps to smooth things out with leaders so suspicious of Him. Jesus was really getting popular and notorious. He had performed many miracles by this time...just the kind of thing that impressed people...the “right” people. Jesus always visited Lazarus when in Bethany, and all those attending the feast were excited that, perhaps, Lazarus would accompany Jesus. Again, permit me to pick the story up here by referencing my favorite author on subjects such as these:

“...At the table the Saviour sat with Simon, whom He had cured of a loathsome disease, on one side, and Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, on the other. Martha served at the table, but Mary was earnestly listening to every word from the lips of Jesus. In His mercy, Jesus had pardoned her sins, He had called forth her beloved brother from the grave, and Mary’s heart was filled with gratitude. She had heard Jesus speak of His approaching death, and in her deep love and sorrow she had longed to show Him honor. At great personal sacrifice she had purchased an alabaster box of ‘ointment of spikenard, very costly’ with which to anoint His body. By now many were declaring that He was about to be crowned king. Her grief was turned to joy, and she was eager to be first in honoring her Lord. Breaking her box of ointment, she poured its contents upon the head and feet of Jesus; then, as she knelt weeping, moistening them with her tears, she wiped His feet with her long, flowing hair.

She had sought to avoid observation, and her movements might have passed unnoticed, but the ointment filled the room with its fragrance, and published her act to all present. Judas looked upon this act with great displeasure. Instead of waiting to hear what Christ would say of the matter, he began to whisper his complaints to those near him, throwing reproach upon Christ for suffering such waste. Craftily, he made suggestions that would be likely to cause disaffection.

Judas was treasurer for the disciples, and from their little store he had secretly drawn for his own use, thus narrowing down their resources to a meager pittance. He was eager to put into the bag all that he could obtain. The treasure in the bag was often drawn upon to relieve the poor; and when something that Judas did not think essential was bought, he would say ‘Why is this waste? Why was not the cost of this put into the bag that I carry for the poor?’

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Now the act of Mary was in such marked contrast to his selfishness that he was put to shame; and according to his custom, he sought to assign a worthy motive for his objection to her gift. Turning to the Disciples, he asked, ‘why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Judas had no heart for the poor. Had Mary’s ointment been sold, and the proceeds fallen into his possession, the poor would have received no benefit....Mary heard the words of criticism. Her heart trembled within her. She feared that her sister would reproach her for extravagance. The Master, too, might think her improvident. Without apology or excuse she was about to shrink away, when the voice of her Lord was heard, ‘Let her alone; why trouble ye her?’ He saw that she was embarrassed and distressed. He knew that in this act of service she had expressed her gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins, and He brought relief to her mind. Lifting His voice above the murmur of criticism, He said, ‘She hath wrought a good work on Me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but Me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying.’... ‘Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.’ Looking into the future, the Saviour spoke with certainty concerning His gospel. It was to be preached throughout the whole world. And as far as the gospel extended, Mary’s gift would shed its fragrance, and hearts would be blessed through her unstudied act. Kingdoms would rise and fall; the names of monarchs and conquerors would be forgotten; but this woman’s deed would be immortalized upon the pages of sacred history. Until time should be no more, that broken alabaster box would tell the story of the abundant love of God for a fallen race....

Simon the host had been influenced by the criticism of Judas upon Mary’s Gift, and he was surprised at the conduct of Jesus. His Pharisaic pride was offended. He knew that many of his guests were looking upon Christ with distrust and displeasure. Simon said in his heart, ‘This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner.’

By curing Simon of leprosy, Christ had saved him from a living death. But now Simon questioned whether the Saviour were a prophet. Because Christ allowed this woman to approach Him, because He did not indignantly spurn her as one whose sins were too

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great to be forgiven, because He did not show that He realized she had fallen, Simon was tempted to think that He was not a prophet. Jesus knows nothing of this woman who is so free in her demonstrations, he thought, or He would not allow her to touch Him.

But it was Simon's ignorance of God and of Christ that led him to think as he did. He did not realize that God's Son must act in God's way, with compassion, tenderness, and mercy. Simon's way was to take no notice of Mary's penitent service. Her act of kissing Christ's feet and anointing them with ointment was exasperating to his hard-heartedness. He thought that if Christ were a prophet, He would recognize sinners and rebuke them.

To this unspoken thought the Saviour answered: 'Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee... There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.' And He said unto him, 'Thou hast rightly judged.'

As did Nathan with David, Christ concealed His home thrust under the veil of a parable. He threw upon His host the burden of pronouncing sentence upon himself. Simon had led into sin the woman he now despised. She had been deeply wronged by him. By the two debtors of the parable, Simon and the woman were represented. Jesus did not design to teach that different degrees of obligation should be felt by the two persons, for each owed a debt of gratitude that never could be repaid. But Simon felt himself more righteous than Mary, and Jesus desired him to see how great his guilt really was. He would show him that his sin was greater than hers, as much greater as a debt of five hundred pence exceeded a debt of fifty.

Simon now began to see himself in a new light. He saw how Mary was regarded by One who was more than a prophet. He saw that with keen prophetic eye Christ read her heart of love and devotion. Shame seized upon him, and he realized that he was in the presence of One superior to himself.

'I entered into thine house,' Christ continued, 'thou gavest Me no water for my feet;' but with tears of repentance, prompted by love, Mary had washed His feet and wiped them with the hair of her head. 'Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman' (whom you despise) 'since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet.' Christ recounted the opportunities Simon had to show his love for his Lord, and his appreciation of what had been done for him. Plainly, yet with delicate politeness, the Saviour assured His disciples that His

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heart is grieved when His children neglect to show their gratitude to Him by words and deeds of love.

The Heart Searcher read the motive that led to Mary's action, and He saw also the spirit that prompted Simon's words. 'Seest thou this woman?' He said to him. She is a sinner. 'I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

Simon's coldness and neglect toward the Saviour showed how little he appreciated the mercy he had received. He had thought he honored Jesus by inviting Him to his house. But he now saw himself as he really was. While he thought himself reading his Guest, his Guest had been reading him. He saw how true Christ's judgment of him was. His religion had been a robe of Pharisaism. He had despised the compassion of Jesus. He had not recognized Him as the representative of God. While Mary was a sinner pardoned, he was a sinner unpardoned. The rigid rule of justice he had desired to enforce against her condemned him.

Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart. Stern denunciation would have hardened Simon against repentance, but patient admonition convinced him of his error. He saw the magnitude of the debt which he owed his Lord. His pride was humbled, he repented, and the proud Pharisee became a lowly, self-sacrificing disciple....

When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.

Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every

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trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration.

The Desire of Ages, pages 557 – 568.

Now you have a hint as to why this person is one of my favorite authors! What a revealing and tender story! Come on now, don't you just love these stories? Aren't you amazed by what they reveal about God? How compelling! Let's briefly analyze this one some more.

Notice Simon's attitude at the beginning of this story. He was grateful to Christ, in a sense...in a political sense. But, as you can plainly see, a sense of obligation is simply not good enough.

How about the deal with Simon and Mary...did you know about that one? Theologians agree: Mary was the woman taken, and Simon was the perpetrator! Imagine him despising her the way he did...such unfathomable hypocrisy! Such a double standard! But note how Jesus, the "representative of God" handled this whole sensitive affair. Sense the feelings and knowledge that Mary and Simon had of each other! Did Jesus blow the lid off and take Simon down at his own party? You can bet Simon would have done that to someone if he had the opportunity. No, Jesus awakens Simon's awareness gradually, in a subtle way, with tenderness, with a parable! When Simon understands, he is converted! Then he has the right attitude. Then he has the right motivation to go on living a right life for the right reasons!

So, look at the evidence one more time. Notice the methods God uses. What does it say about Him? Does God publicly humiliate people...sinners? And isn't He supposed to be our example?

OK, we'll look quickly at two more stories. First, THE PARALYTIC AT THE POOL – You can find this one in the Book of John, Chapter 5, verses 2 through 15. Read it and come back.

It's a strange story in a way, and revealing again about the times Christ lived in. How perverse were the teachings of His church that poor, diseased people thought God sent an Angel once in awhile to stir the waters of the pool at Bethesda. The first one to make it into the pool after that was healed. What an arbitrary, severe picture of the way

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God works. Further, the church taught that God was punishing the diseased for their sins...that's why they were sick. Again, what a vengeful and exacting picture of the way God works. Jesus came to straighten out these erroneous perceptions. And so, this story.

Thirty-eight years this guy was in this spot! Can you even imagine that? And how did Jesus handle the situation? Did he lecture the guy on the youthful self-indulgence that caused his condition? (That's what you get when you smoke and drink and dive into premarital sex with every skirt you see!) No, there was no derision, no condemnation or contempt. Jesus shows us a key in working for those whom He would save:

- How can you expect someone down and out to recover dignity and self-respect when you deprive that self-respect?

Jesus recovered the man first! Later he told Him to stop sinning:

“Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said, ‘Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.’” John 5:14 (GNB)

What, in essence, was Jesus informing that man? Was Jesus saying: “You’re lucky Bud. I got you out of that jam with my Father. But if you keep upsetting Him by carrying on that way, heaven help you!” Is that what Jesus was saying here? I think NOT! Jesus was informing him that what he experienced was a consequence of his actions...what naturally occurred as a result of how he was living. If he continued living that way, his body wouldn’t be able to handle it.

Another story: THE UPPER ROOM...THE NIGHT BEFORE – The part of this story that I want you to focus on is Jesus’ treatment of Judas. The story is in all the gospels, but I refer you to John chapter 13. The whole chapter is good to read, but you can start at verse 18 and go through verse 30. Now before you start reading that, I want to set the stage a little. I want you to notice the mindset of this group of followers...those Jesus chose to carry on His mission after He went back to His Father. Only Luke records this:

“But, look! The one who betrays me is here at the table with

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me! The Son of Man will die as God has decided, but how terrible for that man who betrays him! Then they began to ask among themselves which one of them it could be who was going to do this. An argument broke out among the disciples as to which of them should be thought of as the greatest.” Luke 22: 21 – 24

Notice the order in which this all happens...how they go from “Who’s going to do such a thing...is it I?” to “Not me...I’m Jesus’ best buddy. I’m the most dedicated of all of you!” Great group Jesus picked out here, a real humble bunch, aren’t they? OK, now go read the story.

Does Jesus expose Judas here? It almost seems like it...but it also seems like the disciples just didn’t “get it”, don’t you think? It causes me to want to ask another question: Just why does Jesus bring up His betrayal anyway? It took me a little while to catch this:

*“I tell you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe the I Am Who I Am.”
John 3:19 (GNB)*

Jesus knows His group well. They are not of a frame of mind for any of this. But after it would all be over, the Holy Spirit would bring to mind those things He said. The Holy Spirit would comfort and encourage them, leading them into the truths Jesus was teaching that night:

“I have told you this while I am still with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you. John 14:25, 26 (GNB)

THAT’S why He brought it up!

Notice how tenderly Jesus treated His group of disciples:

- Did He hassle them over their childish and selfish behavior?

NO!

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- Did He berate them for not planning to have a servant present to wash feet...or to pick up on the job themselves?
NO!

Think about what He did in the Upper Room...How He did it and Why...and What this says about our God!

- Jesus said a LOT in the Upper Room that night...John records five whole chapters of it, from Chapter 13 through Chapter 17
- Some things were said in words...some done in deeds, but all of them revealing a grave misunderstanding on the part of the disciples about the Father. Read Chapter 14 and see for yourself.
- This was Jesus' last chance to influence those He'd tried to train to carry on His work...and you could sense the urgency of His words.
- What a revelation this was of God! And what fools the disciples were! Do you think we would have done any better than they?

Let's go back to the part about Judas a minute. There's some real "meat" in this story of how Jesus tried to reach His betrayer. Look at the "cover" that Jesus was able to use

- To prophecy for their encouragement and insight later on;
- To make a last appeal to Judas!;
- To blow the whole thing by the group for yet another lesson they would think long and hard about later:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you have to do.’ No one at the table understood what he meant by this. Some supposed that, as Judas was in charge of the common purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to make some gift to the poor.”

John 13: 27 – 29 (GNB)

Of all people...Judas deserved to be exposed! So...why didn't God do that? Well...if you think it over for awhile...the same question could be asked of God concerning Lucifer and the great rebellion so very

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long ago in the heavens. Why didn't He expose Lucifer right then and there? We've studied the answer to that over all of these chapters. Recall in chapter eight that it was not until the death of Christ that the character of Lucifer was clearly revealed to the angels and the unfallen worlds. Lucifer, or Satan (the accuser) had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not seen the nature of his rebellion. So, perhaps, would events have been misunderstood had Christ exposed Judas for the character he was. Besides, that's not God's way! God knows that eventually the truth comes out. It always does. Judas exposed himself just like Lucifer did!

Remember the story of the time when Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus was going through some genuine agony and temptation concerning His following through on His mission. He was praying into the night asking for help and He asked His close friends to pray for Him as well. Remember what they did? They fell asleep! When Jesus found them that way, did He scold them? The story is in Matthew 26, verses 36 through 46. You'll find, in verse 41, that Jesus didn't scold. He even made excuses for the three of them. What a memory Peter, James and John could have had...for eternity! Look at what their memory of the event will be instead.

Speaking of Peter, his case is well worth examining in the context of the subject of this chapter. Just a few hours after making His great declaration of following Jesus into the jaws of death (Mark 14: 27, 29, & 31) he was cursing and swearing that he didn't even know this Christ! That story is also in Matthew 26, right after the praying incident in the garden. By the time the rooster crowed, Peter was immediately reminded of the words of Jesus. He was thunderstruck by the incident! It happened just as Jesus said it would only a few hours before. His first reaction was one of shock. He was stunned that he had stooped to such weakness for he thought himself a much stronger person. At the crowing of the rooster, Jesus turned around and looked straight at Peter. You can read about it in Luke 22:61 and 62. Peter was taken aback as he looked up at Jesus and saw Him looking directly back. Peter saw on His battered face such a look of compassion and forgiveness. It pierced his heart like an arrow. He realized with bitter

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grief how well his Lord knew him and how accurately Jesus read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself. It was too much to bear, so Peter rushed, heartbroken from the hall. We could go into this story in such depth, but this is sufficient enough for our purpose in this chapter. Remembering John 14:9: *“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father...”*, ask yourself this question: What does this story say about our God? What does it reveal about the way He treats His erring children?

Note the difference between Peter’s reaction to “being found out” and Judas’ reaction. What do you suppose made the difference? One let his pride take over to intentionally do what he set out to do. He trusted in his own judgement, especially about himself. He rejected the goodness, mercy and opportunity offered him. He was emboldened by his opinion of himself and thought he could “force Jesus out of the closet” to become the king and conqueror over Rome. He set himself above the one he purported to serve. The other was shocked and appalled at what was revealed to him about himself. He was broken over it. He was humbled by it. He questioned his self-sufficiency and found a truth to guide him safely for the rest of his life. He knew now not to question the judgement of his Lord. He learned how much he needed Jesus.

Let’s not leave Peter and his experience yet...there’s so much more to learn. Put yourself in his place that weekend:

- He’d made a colossal fool of himself, and John was there to see it! Suppose John told the others?
- He did get back together with the others, whether John told them what happened or not. He didn’t forsake the group nor did they forsake him. Maybe John didn’t say anything!
- Peter was eager to learn whether Jesus really rose on Sunday...Why...do you suppose? Do you think he was worried about his position in the group? Or was he merely curious? Or was he sorry...maybe he wanted to apologize? Or was there any other motivation?
- Who was the first to see Jesus though? Oh NO! Why her?

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Mary the whore...Mary the demon-possessed...Mary the embarrassment of the group! Would we have elected her for that honor? God did! What's that say about Him? We need to remember this too: *Mary had to care enough about Him to be there to accept that honor!*

The story inside this story of Mary discovering the resurrection is beautiful. You can read it in John chapter 20. Verse 17 is often so misunderstood here. "*Don't touch me! Don't touch me or I cannot ascend to my Father!*" A traditional teaching in many churches is that Mary could literally have prevented Jesus from going to His Father for approval had she touched Him. Her sinful touch would have tarnished Jesus so that its offense could not have been tolerated in the presence of the Father. What would that say about our God? It doesn't make sense, does it? One should read other versions of the Bible here that show the true meaning of the Greek. Jesus said:

"Do not hold on to me because I have not yet gone back up to the Father." John 20:17 (GNB)

"Don't hold Me up any longer" in other words! Mary was touching Him, she was embracing Him in disbelief and overwhelming joy! Isn't that more consistent? Doesn't that make a lot more sense? And also notice here what Jesus calls those "disciples" who let Him down so hard in His hour of need and abandoned Him:

*"...go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to Him who is My Father and their Father, My God and their God."
John 20:17 last part (GNB)*

How about the message that Mary was to bring from the angels in the tomb? Remember how she found it empty, and the angels asked her what she was looking for? They said something special to her in Mark 16: 7:

"Now go and give this message to His disciples, including Peter: 'He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'" (GNB)

“Oh My God!”

And Peter! Did you ever stop to think what this experience says about the angels and the way they feel toward us? Can you see the smile on their faces when they added the words: “Including Peter”!?!

There are so many other examples to look at...but ask yourself now:

**Is this not the kind of God with Whom we may spend eternity...
If we learn to trust Him?**

If we spend eternity with Him, will we ever have to be concerned about His memory? You see He’s promised not only to forgive us but to forgive and forget!...to treat us as though we’d never sinned!

*“For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back”
Isaiah 38:17 (RSV)*

*“You will trample our sins underfoot and send them to the
bottom of the sea!” Micah 7:19 (GNB)*

There are many more references to this in the Bible! Here are a few favorites:

*“If you kept a record of our sins, who could escape being
condemned?” Psalms 130:3 (GNB)*

*“Our message is that God was making all mankind His friends
through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and
He has given us the message which tells how he makes them
His friends.” 2nd Corinthians 5:19 (GNB)*

*“There is no condemnation now for those who live in union
with Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1 (GNB)*

There is no pretense or forgetfulness in any of this! God and the angels have watched our every deed! Just imagine the adjustment the angels have had to make! We’re treated just as though we’ve always been God’s loyal children!

How God Treats Sinners

So then...would it appear from this that God is “soft” on sin? Remember our definition of sin: “separation from God”! Is He soft on that? Don’t be silly! That doesn’t make sense! Look at what it’s cost Him:

- 1) to answer such difficult questions about these issues;
- 2) to meet the emergencies it has caused in His family!

Recall that on some occasions, even “gentle Jesus” had to call sin by its right name and denounce it in strong terms. But let me ask you:

- Did He do this to Mary?
- How about to Judas?
- Peter then?
- Matthew the tax collector?
- Zaccheus the thief?
- Nicodemus or Simon? (If you picked these, you’re warm!)

Jesus rarely spoke what might be termed harsh words...and when He did it was always reserved for the leaders of His church...the teachers of the “truth”...the preservers of the “faith”:

“How terrible for you teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You sail the seas and cross whole countries to win one convert; and when you succeed you make him twice as deserving of going to hell as you yourselves are! How terrible for you, blind guides!” Matthew 23: 15 & 16 (GNB)

That’s pretty strong language, isn’t it?

But even in the final, awesome death of the wicked...God respects the freedom and individuality of His creatures! In all 66 books, He’s made it plain that He doesn’t want to lose ANY...not one!

“The Lord is not slow to do what He has promised, as some think. Instead, He is patient with you, because He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins. 2nd Peter 3:9 (GNB)

“...as surely as I, the Sovereign Lord, am the Living God, I do not enjoy seeing a sinner die. I would rather see him stop sinning and live. Israel, stop the evil you are doing. Why do you want to die?” Ezekiel 33:11 (GNB)

“Oh My God!”

“This is good and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth....God wants everyone to be saved.” 1st Timothy 2: 3,4,6 (GNB)

Like a physician though...He can't force us to be well. We have to be willing to take the medicine, undergo the cure. It can't happen unless it happens voluntarily in an atmosphere of freedom. Healing will not take place otherwise, and trust will not be restored.

If we press God on this...if we prefer to leave Him (sin)... He will respect our decision and sadly let us go! As we leave Him for the last time though, and reap the consequences of our actions, I think we'll hear Him crying:

*“How can I give you up?...How can I abandon you?”
Hosea 11:8 (GNB)*

OK, we're almost done. Let's look at one more story concerning God's attitude toward His wayward children. It's a familiar parable, one you've heard over and over again. It's in Luke 15 – The Prodigal Son. Read it quickly and come back. Notice the word “Prodigal” is not used in the Bible. “Prodigal” has its origins in the Latin “Prodigus” and comes from the old French “Prodigere” which means “to drive away and squander”. It means “recklessly extravagant; characterized by wasteful expenditure”. Even so, the word is not in the Bible! Have you read it now? It's the ending I want to focus on. I want you to note what it says about God the Father:

*“While he was still a long way off his father saw him and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him and kissed him. The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him...and let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’”
Luke 15: 20-24 (NEB)*

How God Treats Sinners

- What was the father doing...what's the implication?
- Who are the father's servants? (Hint: Luke 15:7)
- Get my best suit! My best one!
- Do you see the "definition of sin" in this passage?

Israel was God's "prodigal" throughout its history, but Israel did not come home. God's feelings toward that people were never expressed better than in Hosea...

*"But come home, Israel, come home to the Lord your God!
Take words of repentance with you as you return to the
Lord....I will heal their unfaithfulness, I will love them with all
my heart." Hosea 14: 1,2,4 (Phillips)*

But they didn't come home. Look at God's reaction:

*"My people are bent on turning away from me;...How, oh how
can I give you up Ephraim! How, oh how can I hand you over
Israel!" Hosea 11:7,8 (Phillips)*

God will sadly let us go...if we insist! I understand that God will miss us if we're lost...but He will miss us for eternity...forever! Just think of the void brilliant Lucifer will leave in the infinite memory of God! It will pain Him always. But there's more. He will cry and mourn the loss of one-third of His family. He will be stricken over the loss of His chosen people who did not choose Him! Will He also grieve for you?...Me?

For some of us...I hope all who read this book...this magnificent picture of God...these stories...this evidence...will lead us to turn back and

TRUST HIM!...and thereby become trustworthy!

God is a kind, loving, relentless parent! He is not the God His enemies paint Him out to be! **This is the Good News!**

*"Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to
repentance?" Romans 2:4 (RSV)*

This is the truth to guide us home and set us free!

Chapter # 14:

Perfect? Did you say PERFECT?

There is a teaching in Christianity that troubles many people. It is referred to as “Perfection”. The concept is that we must become perfect if we’re going to satisfy the requirements of “getting into heaven”. Oddly enough, and certainly unfortunately, the idea comes from something Jesus said during His famous Sermon on the Mount. Those who teach this topic quote Christ in Matthew 5:48 –

You must be perfect – just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (GNB)

That’s a daunting thought to anyone...ANYONE! How are you going to be as perfect as GOD?

Recall that, in this book, I am promoting the “trust/healing” approach to examining such questions, as opposed to the “reward/ punishment” approach. A more appropriate way to phrase the whole idea of “perfection” and the questions surrounding it may be to ask: “Can God heal you completely or not?” This chapter will look at the idea of “perfection” from that perspective, remembering the great controversy over God’s character and the way He runs His government. God has been accused of being something less than perfect!

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”(KJV) Is that a threat or a promise? Whether these words from Jesus are forbidding (as in threat) or encouraging (as in promise) depends on our picture of God again, doesn’t it? But we’ve read thirteen chapters already to get to know our physician Father. It’s been apparent so far that He longs to make His children well, hasn’t it? Our part is not to heal ourselves, but to cooperate. Remember what Jesus asked the paralytic at the pool in the last chapter? In the KJV Christ asks, *“Would you like to be made whole?”*(John 5:6). Well who wouldn’t...right? Perfection, in this context, is a generous offer, not a burdensome command!

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How could we turn such an offer down?!? On the other hand, how do we cooperate?

Alright...consider this: when Jesus was here He demonstrated the truth about His Father and the plan of salvation. Know how He did it? He spent most of His time HEALING rather than preaching. That's true! Christ longs to and will heal us if we let Him.

Let's try to bring this up to date a little. Suppose you're diagnosed seriously ill with lung cancer...you've spent most of your life smoking. You're sitting in your physician's office having just heard this startling news. What would you rather hear from your doctor?

1) *I forgive you for smoking* – Does that cut it? Would this heal the damage that's been done? You would die forgiven. Would that help? **Or**

2) *I can make you completely well...if you'll cooperate* – That's despite your lifetime of error...completely healthy again!

How would you respond? That seems like a dumb question, doesn't it? Surely you wouldn't say: "Nahhh...really Doc. All I want is forgiveness." Does that make sense? Wouldn't you say, "Doctor...if that is true...how can I cooperate? What do you want me to do?"

Let's go on with the analogy...the doctor continues: "This will require some changes...but if you trust me *enough* to follow my instructions, I can absolutely guarantee that you will be perfectly restored!" Would your response be:

"Wait a minute!...I thought cooperate meant to let YOU do it all. How about a miracle then? If I have to work to get well...I'm gonna look for another physician!"

“Oh My God!”

I know we're encouraged today to get second opinions... but would you do this? Wouldn't you want to cooperate? Sure, medicine tastes icky...and some procedures are painful and, at best, inconvenient. But this is YOUR LIFE you're talking about here. Wouldn't you be willing to do anything?

As Christians, we need much more than physical healing. The greatest damage has been done to our

- ability to live together in peace & freedom;
- ability to trust & be trustworthy and loving.

Once again, is it enough to die forgiven? Is that how the neighborhoods are going to be in heaven...filled with pardoned criminals? Like that idea? If the universe is to be safe again...mustn't we be somehow changed as well? I suppose if you think that God threatens His children with eternal torture as a penalty for sinning...then forgiveness is a pretty good enough goal, isn't it?

Consider what a hellish shadow this belief has cast upon God and the true plan of salvation!

Heaven will be peopled with healed, changed, trustworthy saints! God proposed to set right everything that has gone wrong. Can you blame Him? Would you want Him to do anything less?

The word “Salvation” means, essentially, healing. The concept does, at least. You have to go back to the original Hebrew and Greek to get this. The Hebrew word translated “salvation” is *Yeshuw'ah*. That means delivered to health. It comes from the root word *Yasha* which means “to be safe or free!” David sometimes used the word *Yesha* which meant “Liberty”! Fully 70% of the references to salvation are in the Old Testament. The Greek word translated “salvation” is *Soteria*. That word means “to rescue to health, healing.” It comes from the root word *Soter* which meant “a deliverer”. *Soter* also comes from *Sozo* which meant “to heal or make whole”. **To be saved is to be healed!**

What do you think...do you like where this is goin'?

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In the legal or reward/punishment picture of God, you see, to be saved is to be forgiven. In the trust/healing picture of God, salvation is the healing of the damage done. Which makes more sense to you? The trust/healing view is truly made plain in scripture if you study. Luke 18:42 has Jesus' comment to a blind beggar. Let's examine it with the trust/healing view:

"Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." (KJV)

"Receive your sight: your faith has healed you." (NIV)

Both versions refer to the Greek "Sozo" as defined above!

So, back to that knotty little comment from the sermon on the mount:

"You must be perfect." (GNB)

"Ye therefore shall be perfect."

(American Standard)

"You are to be perfect." (Goodspeed)

All of those are versions of Matthew 5:48. You can't tell if it's a promise or a command! It's just a future statement. Its interpretation definitely depends upon your knowledge of God! Is this a terrifying statement? Or should it thrill you to pieces? How do we find out which is the right way to look at this? By now you should know! As in the chapters before, we should be looking for illustrations (or stories!) in scripture to reassure us about the One who said we are to be perfect!

Let's look at a father and son illustration: the cases of David and Solomon. I'm going to pick on several little passages here where God describes David:

"If you will serve me in honesty and integrity, as your father David did, and if you obey my laws and do everything I have commanded you, I will keep the promise I made to your father David when I told him that Israel would always be ruled by his descendants.

(1st Kings 9:4,5 GNB)

“Oh My God!”

*“I took the kingdom away from David’s descendants and gave it to you. But you have not been like my servant David, who was completely loyal to me, obeyed my commands, and did only what I approve of.”
(1st Kings 14:8 GNB)*

*“And by the time he was old they had led him into the worship of foreign gods. He was not faithful to the Lord his God, as his father David had been....He sinned against the Lord and was not true to Him as his father David had been....If you obey me completely, live by my laws, and win my approval by doing what I command, as my servant David did, I will always be with you. I will make you king of Israel and will make sure that your descendants rule after you, just as I have done for David.”
(1st Kings 11: 4,6,38 GNB)*

“If you serve me faithfully as your father David did, obeying my laws and doing everything I have commanded you, I will keep the promise I made to your father David when I told him that Israel would always be ruled by his descendants. (2nd Chronicles 7:17,18 GNB)

Now these passages don’t say that David was perfect, but they sure imply that he was! Look there at 1st Kings 14:8 where God says that David did only what He approved of! How much do you know about David? He was a bloody man. Nothing got in his way! He made love to another man’s wife and then had the man (Uriah the Hittite) put in the front lines of a battle so that he would be killed! What would your church do with David? How on earth could God describe him that way? Because David let God completely heal him...that’s how!

What was the difference between David and Solomon? Many of the passages above were directed at Solomon, chiding him for not being like his father David. Solomon lived in relative peace. God permitted Solomon to build the Temple...a privilege He denied David! But Solomon slipped. The pagan women in his life gradually took him down...farther and farther into paganism

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until he was sacrificing his own children to the god Molech! Near the end of his life, though, Solomon stuffed his pride and repented. He truly broke down before the Lord, heartbroken and despondent that he could sink so low. Did Solomon get treated like a second-class citizen after all that he did? Hardly. God honored him by permitting him to write another book in the Bible! That's right! He wrote Ecclesiastes after his almost terminal folly. What kinds of people wrote books in the Bible?

“For no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.”
(2nd Peter 1:21 GNB)

See how you have to put this stuff together? How could God describe Solomon this way? Because Solomon let God completely heal him...that's how! The record doesn't speak that well of David or Solomon or of many others like them...but what does that record say about our God? Were David and Solomon perfect? No...this is just more evidence that God treats us as though we had never sinned!

That's the kind of God that wants us to be perfect! Is there any need to be afraid of Him? For that matter, is there any need to be afraid of being

PERFECT?

Depends, huh? What does it mean to be perfect? How perfect does one have to be? Looks like David and Solomon kept the bar pretty low! Surely we could hurdle THAT one? If you're asking that question, you're still not getting it!

OK...describe someone perfect. Now don't get physical. You know I don't mean a “10” man or woman...you know what I mean. Have you ever come across anyone “perfect”? I heard of a physician offering this analogy: “Visit any medical college and view a cadaver once. They never do anything bad!” Of course they never do anything good either...but that's a popular view of perfection! Does it make sense?

“Oh My God!”

In the days of the early Greeks, there were philosophers of every persuasion. In their golden era, the highly educated had the time to contemplate perfection...“the honest man”. Among them was one called Simon Stylites. He wanted to make sure that he didn’t harm anyone or do any wrong, so he perched himself atop a pillar. That’s all he did was sit up there day and night. His story became famous and he was admired for his passion to purpose. He actually had a following! Those people were really of no use to anybody...but they never did anything wrong! They were called the “Stylites”...or the order of the “pole sitters”.

The actual Greek word that is interpreted “perfect” throughout the New Testament is “*Teleios*”. It meant “complete; whole; mature”. So why was it interpreted “perfect”? Well, some interpreters even got the two concepts interwoven. Consider Norlies translation of Matthew 5:48:

“You must become spiritually mature, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

When a person is converted...won over to trust God again...and the whole marvelous procedure of healing begins...the change is so great that it’s like being born all over again! Jesus tried to get this idea through to Nicodemus that night they met:

*“Jesus answered, ‘I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again!’”
(John 3:3 GNB)*

That’s why Paul interpreted baptism the way he did in Romans 6:4:

“By our baptism we were buried with Him in death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we also should live an entirely new life.” (Weymouth)

A couple of Catholic scholars added a wonderful footnote to this passage: “St. Paul alludes to the manner in which baptism was

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ordinarily conferred in the primitive Church, by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the descent of the body into the grave, and the ascent is suggestive of a resurrection to a new life.” (Kleist and Lilly). Could it be said any better than that? So, even at this beginning stage of the Christian life, God treats us as if we had never sinned!

We often refer to new church members as “babes in the truth”. Sometimes we even do this when converts have some considerable Christian background in one denomination and convert to another (tsk, tsk). The point to be looked at here is...does God desire that we stay children in the faith...or does he desire that we grow and mature? (Hey! Isn’t “mature” one of the substitutes for “perfection” in interpreting the Greek word used there – *teleios*? See above.) Christ said something interesting that *seems* to be on point here...at least it is often offered in response to this question:

*“...I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 18:3 GNB)*

St. Paul had some things to say about this! I love the way he went after these kinds of issues! He was disturbed to find that, after only a few months, converts were still “babes in the truth”. He had some hard words for the converted Jews in the church whom he held responsible for knowing more than others because of their background. He said they were mentally, physically and spiritually retarded! Actually he got stickier than that:

“Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truth of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity!” (Hebrews 5:11 through 6:1)

“Oh My God!”

In other words: “It’s time to grow up and become perfect!” Whoa! What does that mean again? It means complete; whole; mature!

Given the end times we live in prophetically, is there *time* for new converts to “grow up”? One of my favorite authors on spiritual matters stated: “Some of us have had time to get the truth and to advance step by step, and every step we have taken has given us strength to take the next. But now time is almost finished, and what we have been years learning, *the newly converted* will have to learn in a few months. They will also have much to ‘unlearn’ and much to learn again.” What do you think about that concept: having to “unlearn”? Have you ever had that experience...in your secular life...where you discover that “things just don’t seem to work the way you were taught”? I find that true in economics, for instance. The political environment and the dynamics of technology have changed so much that the economy functions in a manner quite different from the way I was taught in graduate school. I’ve also discovered that religion “works” much differently than I was taught. Somehow I missed the simplicity that is the beauty of an individual experience in search of God. I’m glad I finally discovered it!

Getting back on point...St. Paul gave loads of advice to those he introduced to the Gospel. He wrote the following to the Ephesian followers:

“His gifts were made that Christians might...arrive at real maturity...We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching, and of the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to speak the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ.”
Ephesians 4:11, 13-15 (Phillips)

The whole letter he wrote to the Ephesians says that the purpose of church is: To help people grow up to perfection/maturity. The Bible tells us, in various places, why this is necessary. In Daniel 12, for example, that prophet explains that the time of the end will be one of such confusion, beyond that ever encountered. Only

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those who have established a relationship with God will understand what is happening. The book of Revelation corroborates Daniel. Christ, in Matthew 24 and other places, also said the same thing. St. Paul explained this concept to all his converts. The deception that will try mankind will come within as well as without the church! If we're still "babes in the truth", we'll never survive this trauma. We'll be wandering after "teachers" and "gurus" without any personal direction...without any personal knowledge...without the personal certainty we'll need to sustain our faith in the God who loves us so. Take a look around you. Don't you notice that in your environment?

The Lord, in mercy, is waiting for us to grow up...and be settled in the truth about Him as Job was. Think about this now: It's not an arbitrary requirement that we grow up...*it's absolutely necessary if we're to survive!* We can't afford to be satisfied as "babes in the truth", led to the water to drink every weekend, relying on our minister or priest or teacher to remind us "what we believe in". We must grow up and be able, ourselves, to distinguish between right and wrong.

So, then, what should we be working on together?

- How to "say" prayers?
- How to participate in the church service?
- What kind of music we should have in church?
- The "proper" order of the church service
- Sermon Topics?...The pastor's/priest's ability to entertain?
- How our children should behave in church?
- What day we should really come to church?
- How to "memorize what we believe" so that we can regurgitate it to someone else?
- How to dress...what to wear?
- How to eat and exercise?

WHAT...of these things above...will help us grow and mature in Christ? What do we have to perfect?

“Oh My God!”

There is another way of looking at perfection...as *perfect obedience to God's law. The perfect person is perfectly obedient!* That scares the daylights out of most people. Another way to say the same thing, so that it is much better understood, is: *The mature person recognizes his privilege to learn at the feet of an all-knowing, all-loving God!*

Perfect obedience can come out sounding pretty arbitrary unless you take a deep look at God's Law...as we already have in this book...and recognize that it is not a threat to our freedom. Quite the contrary! All God asks from us is love and trust. That's easy, isn't it? Well...that depends on what all is meant by “love and trust”. St. Paul had a definition for it:

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.”

1st Corinthians 13: 4,5 (GNB)

Oh yeah...sure. That's easy. Well...it is the description of a grown-up person though, isn't it?

So...here's the heart of perfection then: *To really obey God's Commandments is simply to grow up...to act like a grown-up...to be a safe and pleasant person to live next door to.* C'mon...how bad is that? The big remaining question is: How does one grow up like this?

As we've studied in so many scriptures already, it starts with a faith in God again. Some say that we're saved by that faith! Well, it does help heal us. You may have noticed that the view of the role of faith in this book is just a little different than what is traditionally taught. If you want to review it again, go back to Chapter 3, specifically pages 26 & 27. Faith, as we've studied, means trust...it means love...it means admiration... and that all leads to a willingness to listen to God!

Typically, discussions about laws are so singular...so focused on our human experience...empirical evidence produced

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and reproduced so many times and so often that we recognize an immutable pattern in them:

PHYSICS – “Whatever goes up must come down”...”For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”

NATURE – “Carnivores have to eat too”...”Four seasons in Wisconsin...only one in southern California.”

MEN – “If you live, you pay taxes”...”An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”

In like manner, there is a law (fact) in this orderly universe as God has designed it: that we will inevitably become like the person we worship and admire. Don't you see this in yourself and your friends? When I was a bit younger, I wanted to be like Elvis. At my ripe old age, I still play in a Rock and Roll band...and I still get accused of being an “Elvis Wannabe”. I thought he was “cool”, so I mimicked his movements, his voice, his hairdo, his sneer...you know the drill. People do it all the time. It can have a very negative affect on you...if the one you admire is a negative model. It can have a very positive affect on you if the one you admire is a laudable model. St. Paul noticed this nineteen hundred years ago:

“And then with unveiled faces we can all behold, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. And we become changed into His likeness from glory to glory, through the Spirit of the Lord working in us.” 2nd Corinthians 3:18 (Norlie)

We examined previously how the Spirit works. The Spirit brings us the truth...the true picture of God...the evidence in Scripture and in life! Do you get it? We like what we see and we become changed! Of course, as I noted, this works two ways:

“Those who make (idols) will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” Psalms 115:8 (NIV)

Parents...you've experienced this...and you've seen your children experience it. Ever have your daughter come home dressed like Madonna? Who is it today? Britney Spears? I'm dating myself here...but you get the idea. If you don't know who Madonna is

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anymore, look her up in history on the Internet. She was an oversexed pop singer. Grandparents...you've seen this operate on two levels now...that's even more confirmation!

So...what about those of us who admire God? We're gonna be just fine aren't we? Whoa now...that depends! What do you think God is like? Do you buy the “Arbitrary, Exacting Vengeful, Unforgiving and Severe” picture that is painted by, not only God's enemies, but many who call themselves His friends? If that's the God you love and admire...and you become like that...I don't know that I'd want to live next door to you in heaven! History has born out how people with this picture of God conduct themselves. Go study the “Dark Ages” once, and see how those pious, dedicated, zealous followers of God conducted themselves. You don't even have to take such pains...just go to a little province in Serbia called Kosovo. The Catholics, Protestants and Muslims there each have a concept of God that they believe in and kill for.

Your picture of God is SO important!!

Remember Saul's experience on the road to Damascus? He was zealously defending his religion when God struck him blind. The episode had a drastic effect on him. After his sight was restored, he became a follower of Christ. Before he could be used in spreading the gospel effectively, he was whisked off to Arabia for three years (Gal 1:17)...to “unlearn”. When he came back, he was a changed man. But what changed?

- He wore the same clothes, ate the same food
- He read the same Bible
- He worshipped on the same day

OK, ok...his name changed...from Saul to Paul. Was that it? NO! His understanding of who God was...what God was like...what God wanted... how God conducted Himself...**HIS PICTURE OF GOD CHANGED!** He admired it and became changed into its likeness. That's the kind of change I want in my life! It can only happen when you see God as He really is...as His Son revealed

Perfect? Did you say PERFECT?

Him to be...as all the testimony of Scripture has shown. If you like what you see, then, the LAW is that you'll become like Him!

We just talk too much about perfection...and not enough about God. We're preoccupied with our performance instead of the truth about our God. It took him awhile, but St. Paul sure got it right! Here's what he learned and the counsel he had for us:

*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”
1st Corinthians 11:1 (RSV)*

That's perfection for you!

Chapter# 15:

PRAYER: Talking to God as to a Friend!

It should come as no surprise to anyone, at this point, that the concept of prayer might be a little different in truth than that to which we have become accustomed. I can't believe I constructed that sentence. Let me try again: It shouldn't surprise you that prayer is a misunderstood concept, especially after what you've read so far! Just what is a prayer anyway? Webster says that a prayer is "an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought". Another definition used is "a set order of words used in praying". Yet another definition that applies is "the act or practice of praying to God or a god". All of these definitions miss the mark by a wide margin, because they infer that prayer is a "one-way" conversation. Uh-oh. Do I mean to tell you that you can actually talk with God...that God responds? Always? I think so. At least, that has been my experience. Yes, I'm serious, and yes, you can experience this too. It's not "magic" and it has nothing to do with tricks or semantics. Are you at least curious about this? I hope so. I want to make one very broad statement that I think you'll understand after all that you've studied to this point:

The way we pray depends on the kind of person we believe our God to BE!

What is the meaning and purpose of prayer? A leading expert on the subject of prayer...one called Jesus...had this to say about it:

"Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him." Matthew 6:8 (GNB)

Well, if that's the case...why even bother praying? This comment from Jesus begs the question: "Is the primary purpose of prayer to lodge our request with God?" I suppose the place to go to get that answered is right back to the expert! In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus said:

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven: may your holy name be honored; may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need. Forgive us the wrongs we have done,

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*as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the evil one.”
(GNB)*

Many of you know this “prayer” well. It has been entitled “The Lord’s Prayer” and it has even been put to music. It’s a beautiful passage, a lovely saying...don’t you think? That’s about all it means to so many. It’s been analyzed again and again for its content and preached and preached about in sermon after sermon...to make sure that we get every kernel of meaning out of it. That’s nice, if this is all you think we’re meant to say to God. That’s appropriate if you think that this is the ONE AND ONLY address Jesus set forth for us to bring to His Father. For some of us it becomes a “modus operandi” to get God’s attention and appease Him. I remember when I used to get this saying as a penance for being naughty. I’d have to say 10 “Our Fathers” and 10 “Hail Marys”. I was taught that repetition was the proper way to pray to God:

“Now I lay me down to sleep....”
“God is good, God is Great....”
“Bless us O Lord, for these Thy gifts...”

This was referred to as “saying grace”. What’s grace? That’s a whole topic in itself, but it isn’t prayer!

Now don’t get upset with me here. I’m not making “fun” of anybody. The above prayers were ‘ok’ for me to learn as a child...to get me started. That’s nothing to be ashamed of or shy about. Even the Disciples were slow to begin with! Jesus taught that famous prayer to many in the Sermon on the Mount. At that time, only four of the Disciples had been “called” by Jesus (Peter, Andrew, James and John). Later on, they asked for the same lesson. After many instances of observing Jesus in prayer, they asked him to teach them again:

*“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples’. Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say this:
‘Father: May your holy name be honored;*

“Oh My God!”

may your Kingdom come. Give us day by day the food we need. Forgive us our sins for we forgive everyone who does us wrong. And do not bring us to hard testing’.
Luke 11: 1 – 4 (GNB)

This is milk! It’s a nice prayer and it has real sentiment...but it’s MILK! You know what I’m talking about when I say it’s “milk”? I mean there will come a time in your growth process when you will be “weaned” from it.

Let’s turn back to the “expert” again. Jesus is our example. Peter told us that in his first letter:

“Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in His steps.” 1st Peter 2:21 (GNB)

It would seem logical, then, that Jesus would’ve left us some examples of what prayer is. The one He initially taught the disciples was just getting off the ground! The Bible records lots about Jesus in prayer. There are dozens of references. We’ll just look at two here:

“He went up into the hills by himself to pray.”

Matt. 14:23 (GNB)

“All night He continued in prayer to God.”

Luke 6:12 (GNB)

So, He went by Himself and prayed to His Father...sometimes all night! Wow! What do you suppose He was saying all night long...multiple reps of the “Our Father”? I’m not being facetious or disrespectful here. Some people actually think that this is what Jesus was doing and they teach this! Whatever could lead to such an understanding? Here are some possibilities:

- A literal interpretation of the Bible as “word inspired” instead of “thought inspired”;
- Legalism...a method of getting or earning something from God;
- A lack of growth...not searching any further in the Bible for other possibilities.

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WHAT WOULD KEEP SOMEONE AT THIS CONCEPT LEVEL?

Or...

Were Jesus' conversations with His Father so real that the night hours simply slipped away? Have you ever had this experience with a dear friend or family member? Do you see where I'm going with this?

We've been here before, making a point and reinforcing it. That kind of repetition is good because you have to read it and think about it a few times before it sinks in (at least for me!). When you've been taught to think "one way" about a practice in your life, you have to "unlearn it" in order to change and improve. That's a challenge all of us face in whatever our endeavor. The older we become, the more we get classified as an "old dog". You know, the kind you can't teach "new tricks"! The key to getting this concept about praying with God is to understand the true relationship He wants with us. To repeat it:

"...I call you friends." John 15:15 (GNB)

Everything depends on whether or not GOD IS OUR FRIEND! You might think that to be an exaggeration, but I stand by the statement! The way we pray reveals to others and ourselves the kind of person we believe and understand our God to be.

Let's do some "sanctified" imagining for a minute. Imagine you are with me here in my study. I have a nice room with carpet, a desk and a sofa in it. As you and I talk, imagine God walks into the room and sits down on the sofa to visit with us for an hour. C'mon, do it!

- Would we invite anyone else over? How about our close friends and relatives at least? ("Hello Mom? You're not gonna believe who dropped in!")
- Would we ask God to talk with us? Or would we interview Him? Who would talk first?
- When He got up to leave...would we have prayer?
- Would it matter to you if it were the Father or the Son?

Remember that it did to Phillip...and the rest of the 12 Disciples. They had some pretty sorry teaching about who the Father was and what He was like. This led Jesus to emphasize a point that seems to be missing in most Christian theological teaching:

“Oh My God!”

*“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well...
Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”
John 14:7,9 (GNB)*

*“I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, for
the Father loves you Himself.” John 16:26 (Goodspeed)*

Remember the early days of the “Emergency Measures” (chapter 11) when everyone (of His chosen people) was afraid of God? Yet we know that Abraham and Moses achieved the ultimate friendship! It’s recorded here:

*“The Lord would speak with Moses face to face, just as a
man speaks with a friend.” Exodus 33:11 (GNB)*

*“ You are our God. When your people Israel moved into
this land, you drove out the people who were living here
and gave the land to the descendants of Abraham, your
friend, to be theirs forever.” 2nd Chronicles 20:7 (GNB)*

*“But you, Israel my servant, you are the people that I have
chosen, the descendants of Abraham, my friend.”
Isaiah 41:8 (GNB)*

All those centuries before...Moses knew that you don’t have to be afraid of God! After God gave the emergency measures at Mt. Sinai and all His children were fearful, Moses said:

*“...Don’t be afraid! God has only come to test you and
make you keep on obeying Him, so that you will not sin
(separate from Him).” Exodus 20:20 (GNB)*

Nearly a century after Christ appeared on Earth, John expressed this great truth in a very clear way:

*“There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear...
fear has to do with punishment.” 1st John 4:18 (GNB)*

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Paul continued this eternal thought in his letter to the Romans. You recall that famous question he asked in chapter 8:

*“If God is for us, who can be against us?
...not God...not Christ Jesus”!
Romans 8:31,32,34 (GNB)*

If you were ushered right now into the presence of God...would you be afraid He might hurt you? Hit you? How about being consumed by His blazing power? Do you trust Him with that POWER? Is He trustworthy?

Truly, the way in which we approach God some day (and we ALL will!) will reveal the kind of person we've been persuaded that our God really is! It's important for you to consider the forces that are influencing you in this regard. All right then, knowing all of this...let's go back to my study and continue our imagined visit with God seated in our presence.

- Would it dawn on us that angels...perfect as they are... stand in awe of this person?
- Could my study...my house, contain His glory? Would it burst out of the windows and seams in the construction and flood the entire neighborhood? Would others be drawn over out of wonder?
- When we started talking...would we never stop? But isn't that what we do when we pray? When we were done speaking, would we say “amen” and then go about our business...or eat...or sleep? Again, isn't this what we do when we pray? Would that make sense if God were here? Would it be polite?
- Would we have a conversation? We would wouldn't we? And doesn't that mean at least two people speaking?

So, how do you converse with a God you cannot see? And why doesn't He appear anyway? What accusations do you suppose the evil one would make if God did appear to us in person? Doesn't it strike you a little ironic that the evil one doesn't appear either? Oh, sure...in the movies. But that's not Him...that's not the beautiful

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angel once stationed at the very side of God perfect in beauty and still very beautiful, intelligent, talented and powerful!

Think this out now...how could we have a two-way conversation with our God? Didn't He provide for that somehow? What other “emergency measure” has He provided for us to have that would enable 2-way? C'mon...we even call it “God's Word”, don't we?! If we wish to hear God speak...very clearly in our minds...He usually does so through the Bible! If you're not reading, you're missing out! We commune with God through the study of the Scriptures kept over the milleniums. Don't you find prayer more meaningful while reading your Bible? I talk to God in those times...really. I read something that scares me because I see myself in it and I say to God: “Oh Father...I'm weak here...just like David was. Help me to be faithful and to learn the hard lessons David did without going through all the mess he was in.” God responds in ways shown in the last chapter, showing me that He'll treat me the same way He treated David, if I'm as true as David was. Think about the standard that David set once. It doesn't mean that I can “get away with a lot”. It means that I'd have a hard time going so far that God couldn't reach me with His love, if I was willing (like David) to respond to God. It means that I could fall in love with God, admire Him and become changed just like David did! God and I talk about that, I can assure you. Read the Bible and listen for the impressions of the Holy Spirit, then respond!

So...back to my study. God's on the sofa. What do we say to Him...what language do we use? Do we speak in tongues or some angelic language because that's what God prefers...even though we don't understand it? Does that make sense? Ok, then how about this:

*“We prithee Lord...that thou woulds't bestow upon us
unctions from on high”*

What do you suppose His reaction would be? Is that the way we usually speak? Then why do we use language like that when we pray? Did the Disciples talk that way maybe...or Moses or David or Abraham? I don't think so. And what's an unction anyway?

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OK, ok then...let's try again. How would/should we talk to God? Well, how do you talk to a friend? How did Jesus address Him: "Sir! Father Sir! Jesus here, at your service, SIR!" I'm afraid not. Jesus said "Abba, Father", or Dear Father. It was an endearment! Paul supports this in Galatians 4:5-7 (GNB):

"...we might become God's sons. To show that you are His sons, God sent the Spirit who cries out "Father, my Father!" So then, you are no longer a slave but a son. And since you are His son, God will give you all that He has for His sons."

So...back to my study. God's still on the sofa. What would we talk about? We're face to face with Him! Would you say:

- Thank you, God, for my groceries! And by the way, here's my list for tomorrow...Amen!
- Thank you for the house and the nice study! Did it have to come with payments though?
- Bless the missionaries in the far flung corners of the earth...and the evangelists and those who take our message from door to door.
- Go ahead...you put in the well worn phrases.
- Would you write something down and recite it for Him?

All right, let's step out of my study then. Have you ever gone to the Boerner Gardens in Whitnall Park? (Oops! I hadn't thought that you, as a reader, may not live near here) Have you ever been to some beautiful park or garden area near where you live...or some other such place in nature? Isn't it appropriate, especially if you're alone, for you to comment to God about the aroma of the roses or the sound of the warblers...the strength and stateliness of an oak tree, the handsome ruggedness of a mountain range...how wonderful to create this way! I've done this riding a chairlift up the mountain when I've been skiing. The beauty and majesty made me feel so near God. Isn't that great, motivated, candid conversation with God? Or would you say:

"We thank thee for the beauties of nature that surround us"

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and then move on. We’ve got our own pat phrases to cover this stuff! But if we were truly friends with God, wouldn’t we take the time to discuss these things candidly...and get more specific? Might we even question: “Why thorns on roses anyway?” “Why the horrific smell of that cute little animal with the white stripe down its back?”

Job did this! He questioned God and his friends were so afraid for him! But he honored God by his confidence in Him! That’s one of the primary themes of the whole book!

“If only my life could once again be as it was when God watched over me. God was always with me then...and the friendship of God protected my home...I call to you, O God, but you never answer; and when I pray, you pay no attention!”
Job 29:2-4 and 30:20 (GNB)

It was statements like these that worried Job’s friends. They fretted: “Who in blazes are you...Job...to question God!” Remember the hard time they gave him, all the representations about God that they made. But remember also how the book ended and how it turned out for Job. God was a little upset with Job’s “comforter friends” and the way they represented Him:

“You did not speak the truth about me the way my servant Job did!” *Job 42:7 (GNB)*

Job went after God, as one would a friend who had for some reason turned away. We could do the same. There are tough questions we could all ask God about accidents that happen to His own people...to innocent children. You know yourself many instances of these circumstances that have either happened directly to you or to someone you’ve observed. You can’t live in this war zone Earth and not have come across it. Have guardian angels dropped the ball? Did God order them out of the way? God welcomes the questions. He also asks for the patience and faithfulness of a friend. I believe the God we have come to know in these chapters might very well say to us:

“Trust Me,...please! I can’t explain it all to you just now, but I hope you trust Me enough to be willing to wait ‘til that day that I can make it plain to you. I hope you found enough evidence and enough reason for trusting Me that much.”

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We'll take this kind of comment and entreaty from friends...from relatives...but not from GOD! Why? Why not trust the God who goes on to tell us...to promise us:

"You know I would NEVER allow you to be tried and tested beyond what you are able to bear!" 1st Corinthians 10:13 (GNB)

Goodspeed's interpretation or paraphrase of this verse is so precious:

"God can be depended on not to let you be tried beyond your strength."

You see, if you read and study your Bible, you may realize that God could and does go on to say:

"You also know that in ALL things...I work for your good!" Romans 8:28

When you come to know God well...you'll see that He even provokes questioning! A good example of this...a story that illustrates it is contained in Genesis 18 verses 16 – 33. The story is that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read it once! Can you believe God's friend Abraham would speak to Him this way? Note verse 25:

"Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that. If you did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is impossible! The Judge of all the earth has to act justly!." (GNB)

That takes a little familiarity with God, doesn't it? Would you ever dare say something like that to God...right to His face? Was God offended at Abraham? Well, if He was, He sure got over it because thousands of years later He impressed James to write these words about Abraham:

"Abraham was called God's friend." James 2:23 (GNB)

God and Moses were pretty direct with each other too. Remember when God said: "I'm sick of these people...I've had it! Step aside Moses. I'm going to destroy this bunch and start all over with you and yours." That's my paraphrase of Numbers 14: 11-12. Now notice how Moses responds to this right afterward:

"But Moses said to the Lord, 'You brought this people out of Egypt by your power. When the Egyptians hear what you have done to your people, they will tell it to the people who live in this land. These people have already heard that you, Lord, are with us, that you appear in plain sight when your cloud stops

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over us, and that you go before us in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill all your people, the nations who have heard of your fame will say that you killed your people in the wilderness because you were not able to bring them into the land you promised to give them. So now, Lord, I pray, show us your power and do what you promised when you said, ‘I the Lord, am not easily angered, and I show great love and faithfulness and forgive sin and rebellion.’” Numbers 14: 13-18 (GNB)

So, is this bold or what? Moses showed his jealousy for God’s reputation! Again...was God offended? If so, He got over it because He spoke face to face with Moses as a man speaks with a friend (Exodus 33:11, GNB).

Even Peter once dared to say “NO” to God! Do you remember that story? It’s in Acts 10, you should take the time to read it. Actually Peter told God “NO” three times in this story. Given his experience in denying the Lord three times before...this is pretty amazing. Can you catch the quiver in Peter’s voice as he objects in this story? Once again, did God get on Peter’s case for this? NO! This is just the kind of relationship God wants to have with us! When you reach this point,...prayer can’t be just a trite formality...but rather honest conversation about the things that matter to us the most!

Above all,...conversation with God must be Honest! God can’t help you until you’re honest with Him and bring Him the real stuff! Probably no one in Bible history did this any better than David. When he was depressed, he sure said so:

*“Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at
an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?...
And I say, ‘it is my grief that the right hand of the Most
High has changed.’” Psalm 77:7-10 (RSV)*

There’s lots of this out of David! This is only half way through the Psalms. Near the end of the Book you begin to see how David resolved his depression:

*“O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God...Do I not hate
them that hate thee, O lord? And do I not loathe them that
rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count
them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart!*

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*Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”
Psalms 139: 19,21-24 (RSV)*

He's pretty honest here, isn't he? He wants vengeance because he hates! He knows that God knows His thoughts, so he lets it out! In the very next breath though...he invites healing! He knew he needed a new heart and a right spirit...truth in the inner man!

If you should watch a loved one die and cry out to God: *Why...God, WHY?"* Would God be offended? Or would He put His arm around you and say:

“I know what you’re going through, I understand how you feel. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t feel that way. Some day, I’ll make it plain to you. I wish I could right now, but please trust Me...enough to be willing to wait.”

You have to know God well to achieve this in your prayer relationship...the Spirit takes you there (Romans 8:26 RSV). The Spirit helps us know the truth about God and about ourselves...so we can tell the truth to God. It comes through practice and experience.

“Never stop praying”. 1st Thessalonians 5:17 (Norlie)

Chapter# 16:

GOD’S LAST PLEADING WITH HIS CHILDREN

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, contains what many believe are mysteries concerning the last days of the earth. A great deal of fascination and intrigue surrounds this book and its contents. A great many “scholars” have benefited from the attraction of this book. Bible studies or evangelistic meetings are usually well-attended if the topic happens to deal with the “mysterious” book of Revelation. Theologians heatedly debate the interpretation of its verses. Religious TV personalities each seem to have their own “slant” on what this book is about.

A “key” to this wonderful book lies in the final warning messages brought by three angels in the fourteenth chapter. As one might expect, they are referred to as the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:

1. The first is an eternal message of Good News...about the Everlasting Gospel: “Honor God and give Him Glory...the hour of His judgment has come! Worship the Creator.”
2. The 2nd message is: “Satan’s empire has collapsed...his rule is over!”
3. The 3rd is: “Be finally warned! Make your choice and reap the consequences.”

Now if you read these messages in verses 6 through 12, you’ll see some different wording. But this is the meaning of those messages.

MUCH has been said, written, taught and preached about these messages. The third or last message is a final warning...an awesome warning. It’s no wonder it contains some pretty fearsome wording...awful things about drinking the “wine” of God’s fury poured full strength into the cup of His “wrath” such that it brings eternally burning torment! Whoa! Given all the background we have by now...how are we to understand this?

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This isn't our first brush with the book of Revelation. We dove right into it in our very first chapter, remember? We talked about the war in heaven. In Chapter 12 of Revelation, St. John talked about the conflict of distrust that took place in God's family. Fully one-third of them sided against God! This same book of Revelation that talks about the beginning of the war also talks about its end...and its resolution. It includes a wonderful prediction of the second return of Christ and the restoration of the planet! There are some pretty awesome events that will transpire before it all ends! One thing we know for sure by now: we can trust the God we've come to know, worship and admire not to leave His children unwarned. So we've got these three angels...each bringing a special message of warning and invitation. Let's look at them in detail in Revelation 14: 6-12:

"Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice: 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas and the springs of water.' A second angel followed and said: 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon The Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.' A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.' This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." (NIV)

Wow...huh?!? Doesn't this seem to fly in the face of our previous deliberations over a friendly God? One who doesn't torture or use force? What do we do with this? How do we explain these hellfire and brimstone terms? Well, the fact of the matter is that this stuff has

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been discussed elsewhere in the Bible. We’ve examined quite a lot of it in previous chapters. But we need the previous 65 books of the Bible in order to understand the 66th book!

Well...let’s look more closely at the messages then. We’ll start with Revelation 14:7...with that intriguing language that says: “Fear God”. Just what does that mean? I know, I know...I can just hear you thinking: “What do you mean by ‘what does that mean?’” Looks pretty black and white doesn’t it? But what did we learn about being afraid of God? Didn’t we learn, starting with Abraham and Moses, that there is no need to be afraid of God? Why, all of a sudden, are we supposed to “fear” Him at this point...at the very end? Remember how important we said it was to examine such statements in the context in which it is put? How else might “Fear God” be put anyway? Is there another way to say it? Or is there something we’re not getting here?

Let’s not forget our use of logic. Before we get to the language of “fear”...we’re told something else about the first angel’s message. The first angel has the everlasting gospel to proclaim to the earth. That’s the “good news” right? Would it be “good news” to be terrified of God? That doesn’t make sense does it? But if this is God’s last pleading with us...couldn’t it have been better said? Why not the first part of the first angel’s message combined with the very last part of the third angel’s message? Why was it necessary for God to use such fearsome language?

It helps to back up a little in the book of Revelation, to consider what’s been said already. In Revelation chapter 12, we’re taken back to the war in heaven and all of Satan’s effort to deceive both angels and men. Chapter 13 goes on to point out Satan’s final effort to deceive. This time, though, Satan’s focus is primarily the earth. Revelation here describes Satan’s almost complete success...except for a few. It describes the powers and the organizations that work with him...they’re symbolized. It describes Satan’s final campaign...when everyone loyal to him receives a mark. We’ll examine this in some detail in our next chapter.

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In Revelation 14, then, we have God's last pleading with his children! Given what is contained in chapters 12 and 13...doesn't it make sense...isn't it logical and fitting that God would warn against these things?

Ok...lets' back up one more time to the first message again...the one that brings Good News (the everlasting gospel)! Is there anything new here...anything different? THIS news has always been the truth; will always be the truth and will always remain the truth. It will also always remain the basis for our freedom and trust throughout all eternity! What could such an important message be? What IS the eternal gospel...this eternal Good News?

Probably the best way to answer this question is to turn to an expert, none other than St. Paul. Probably no one thought he knew the Gospel better than St. Paul thought he did! Some believers in his own church with his own background disagreed with his version of the Gospel. They went around to the various other churches Paul had raised up and confused the members. Actually, that's the main reason he wrote his letter to the church at Galatia. Look at what he had to say to the members there:

"If anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. I now repeat what I have said before; if anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast!"
Gal. 1: 8,9 (NEB)

That seems pretty stiff, doesn't it? He says it once, and then he repeats it! He really meant it! Other versions of the Bible use words other than "outcast":

- Phillips – "a damned soul"
- Greek – "Anathema"
- Good New Bible – "Condemned to hell"
- Living Bible – "Let God's curse fall upon him"
- NIV – "eternally condemned"

Wow! Was Paul convinced of the rightness of his position or what? He was also convinced of the dire consequences of perverting this

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truth! The concept of turning to *another* gospel was abhorrent to him. He talked about the deadly consequences of turning from the truth in the very first part of his letter to the Romans where he points out that God’s wrath is finally letting those who resist Him have their way. It results in the kind of world we live in, full of selfishness and depravity.

Paul was literally stunned to see so many Christians, after being set free from the meaningless requirements of false religion, so willing to go backward. He could not believe their willingness to go back to the *indignity; fear; bondage and ignorance* they experienced while they were misinformed about God! So he gets right into it with the Galatians:

“I am surprised at you! In no time at all you are deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ, and are accepting another gospel. Actually, there is no ‘other gospel’, but I say this because there are some people who are upsetting you and trying to change the gospel of Christ!”
Galatians 1: 6,7 (GNB)

He goes on to ask how they could be so foolish...when they compared the *Good News* he had just given them with what he had led them to give up:

“You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus on the cross!” *Galatians 3:1 (GNB)*

Now note something pretty interesting here: the Galatians had swapped their previous paganism for the truth that set them free. Then they swapped that precious truth right back for yet another form of paganism...a paganism practiced and taught in “the church”! The false teachers taught them that there was a need to appease an angry god...a teaching central to all forms of paganism! We’ll see that in a moment. There’s another kernel to get from Galatians 3:1 above: Paul there relates the cross to the gospel. These terms recur in Paul’s speech for the purpose of bringing out vital truth about what the gospel is.

Paul continues in Galatians 4:8 and 9:

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“In the past you did not know God, and so you were slaves of beings who are not gods. But now that you know God... how is it that you want to turn back?” (GNB)

Here is something that I find most important in Paul’s teaching: Paul relates the knowledge of God to the cross and the gospel. They’re all about the same thing!

Paul sympathized with the poor Galatians. What could be expected of new converts when some of the leading Christians in Jerusalem themselves were contradicting and compromising the Gospel of Christ?!? You can read about this in Acts 21, and I so urge you to do so. Stop a moment here and read Acts Chapter 21 to get a historical feel for the battles that took place among the “works-oriented” Jews who were converted to Christianity in Jerusalem. The Jews, after all, were formerly “God’s Chosen People”. It was expected that they would have an “edge” in this new faith... and they should have had one! Read that chapter and come back. You might also note, after reading this, that the same behavior is still going on in God’s church today. Even Peter reverted to some of his narrower views... and Paul was moved to correct Peter! That’s right, you can see that in Galatians 2 verse 11 and onward. He did this to Peter publicly! In his face! How could Paul do this? How could he feel right about it...this same Paul who wrote in 1st Corinthians 13 that “love is never rude...love never insists on its own way”? The same Paul who wrote in Romans 14: “Don’t judge... “let everyone make up his own mind”...”who are you to criticize another?”

When it came to the Gospel and those who would suppress it or pervert it...gentle Paul spoke with awesome power and frightening conviction. Man! Did he get upset when agitators and legalists tried to get new members to adopt circumcision:

*“I wish that the people who are upsetting you would go all the way; let them go on and castrate themselves!”
Gal. 5:12 (GNB)*

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That’s pretty intense! The portion of the letter that this was written in was about preserving freedom! Paul, like his God, was a real fanatic about that! The letter to the Galatians is a real eye-opener. When you have the time, I would also encourage you to read it in one setting. It’s only six short chapters, but it’s chock full of the strongest statements about truth you’ll ever read!

So, what is this truth, this gospel, this good news that Paul guarded with such fervor? I keep asking that. Through the centuries it has been so misunderstood and caused such controversy! What did Paul consider to be such a contradiction and perversion that he could be so strongly moved to speak such language? It’s time for us to do a little exercise here. What do YOU think the Good News is? Write it down below in the space provided.

That should have been enough space. If you need more than that it’s time to go back to square one and review it again. Here’s what most people write:

*God has forgiven my sins
Jesus is coming again
I am saved by grace
Jesus died for me, I don’t have to die*

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These are all true statements...**but!** Don't you hate that when someone agrees with you or agrees with what you said and then adds: "but..."? This is important to get, though, so please hang in there. It's time to think this through:

If God is as His enemies have made Him out to be – **arbitrary; exacting; vengeful; unforgiving and severe** – eternal life would be misery...would it not?

We'd be walking on eggshells all the time, worrying about what would set God off and when it would happen! So whether God has forgiven your sins; whether Jesus is coming again; whether you're saved by grace; or whether Jesus died for you or not...whether any or all of these are good news depends upon the kind of person we believe our God to be!

I regard the most fitting, appropriate and truest answer to that question about the Gospel as this:

The Good News is: God is not the kind of person that Satan and his minions have made Him out to be!

That the Good News should be related to the issues in the Great Controversy over God and His Character and the way He runs His government is perhaps suggested by Paul's reference to include angels in Galatians 1:8. Wasn't it an angel from heaven that began the circulation of misinformation about our God? Will it not be an angel from heaven masquerading as an angel of light that will seek to deceive us at the end and turn us against our God? See 2nd Corinthians 11:14 for evidence of this.

From the time this "Great Controversy" got started, God Himself was accused and brought to Judgment! That's right! God Himself! What kind of God would allow Himself to be judged by His creations? A very special, unique, one-of-a kind God...that's what kind. And the Good News is, once again, that God has won His case against all these false allegations regarding His character and the kind of God He is!!

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Saint Paul said he was proud to be a bearer of this Good News:

“Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the Good News...For the message about Christ’s death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God’s power.”
1st Cor. 1: 17, 18 (GNB)

Paul felt that he knew what the Gospel was all about...and the above passage is the substance of his version of the Good News:

*Christ’s death on the cross = **Power***

Now, combine this with Romans 1: 16 and 17 where Paul says this **salvation power** that is the Gospel has a *revelation* as its source:

Notice how

- Good News
- Power
- God’s Righteousness
- The Cross

are all tied together! Read Romans 3: 21 – 26

There is nothing at all new in this...the Everlasting Gospel...it is all over the Old Testament too. Here’s an example to illustrate:

“Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 9:24 (NIV)

All right then: Let’s combine all of this – The Good News is about God, His righteousness! It cost the death of Christ to prove it...and it has great power to move people to repentance and faith!

It has such Great Power because it is:

The Truth!

It has such Great Power because it is:

Such GOOD NEWS!

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That’s the meaning of Romans 3: 25 and 26:

“For God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation...This was to demonstrate God’s own righteousness...to show that He Himself is righteous and that He sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus” (Maxwell)

I can’t leave this alone without bringing out what Paul said in Rom. 5:10:

“We were God’s enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life?”

Paul confessed with shame that he had formerly misrepresented God even to the extent of believing Satan’s lies...so that he’d use force and persecution...even stoning to compel people to obey! After Paul learned and accepted the Good News, he devoted the rest of his life to telling the

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about God! Who has written more eloquently about freedom and truth than Paul? WHO? He had come to learn, know and live Jesus’ words:

“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!”
John 8:32 (Williams)

With Jesus, the truth has always been about His Father. If God were the person His enemies have made Him out to be, there would be no freedom! There would only be the bondage of fear!

Yes, Paul knew and felt so strongly about this truth! He took it everywhere he went. The documentation to Galatia is such a precious, revealing record of this. He took freedom to them. They loved it at first and then they got “blown away”. Paul told them to stand fast in their freedom!

“This is the freedom with which Christ has made us free. So keep on standing in it, and stop letting your necks be fastened in the yoke of slavery again.” Gal. 5:1 (Williams)

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Paul once thought that God wanted the obedience that springs from law and fear. But he came to know that God wants much more than that! God wants obedience all right...but He wants the obedience that comes from trusting in His righteousness! This can only come from people who are free! Free to choose that they agree with God about the right way to live. And these agree so fully that they don't even need to be told to do so! It becomes a way of life with them. Look at Paul's understanding of his commission in Romans 1: 4 and 5:

“Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom I have received grace and a commission for His Name's sake to win men to the obedience that springs from faith.” (Weymouth)

This theme runs throughout the entire letter to the Romans. What produces this kind of obedience? Isn't it the Good News about our God...the kind of “person” He is? The Good News about:

- What He really wants from us
- How worthy He is to receive this
- How highly He values our freedom

These all lead us to a willingness to listen (obey). These all lead to loyalty. These all lead to what we started this chapter with in Revelation 14:12 –

“Here are they who keep God's commandments and maintain their loyalty to Him.” ...and to His Son!

So...the 1st Angel comes with the Everlasting Gospel...the Everlasting Good News...what is it, do you remember?

God is not the person His enemies have misrepresented Him to be! So there is nothing to fear!

This is winning, loving news about God. Other versions of the Bible interpret “Fear God” in a more appropriate context, as: “Honor God” or “Have reverence for God”.

I can be dogmatic...adamant and immovable about this. You never hurt anyone with this view!! God values nothing higher than the freedom of His children...that's the essence of the 1st Angel's

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Message. The 2nd Angel simply says: “*the opposition has collapsed in corruption and defeat!*” The 3rd Angel, then warns of the consequences of preferring Satan’s lies over this magnificent **TRUTH!** Now the language in here is tough, the words are indeed fearsome! But Satan would have us believe that they came from an *angry* God. That is a gross misunderstanding, which Satan specializes in. Consider what we’ve studied - all the previous words of Scripture have prepared us to understand the terrible consequences of sin:

- We watched Jesus die on the cross
- We’ve seen the lengths God goes to...
to spare those who reject Him
- We’ve looked at story after story

And here, in Revelation 14, we have God raising His voice one more time... one last time. Can we trust it? I would hope so by now! The real question is: are we going to listen? That God raises His voice in such an important, drastic, last ditch effort to warn can’t be held against Him any more than one can hold it against a parent warning a child at the edge of a cliff...or a school teacher warning the kids to get out of a burning school. Remember those stories?

These messages are an invitation as well as a warning. God can’t let us pass through this danger unenlightened as well as unwarned! We’ve been prepared to understand these words... remember the words in Hosea? “Oh...how can I let you go?” The God that wrote Revelation 14: 9 – 11 also wrote 1st John 4: 16, 18:

“God is love...There is no fear in love.” (Williams)

He used St. John to write both!

So then, those of you reading this that already are Christians, remember your commission given in Matthew 24:14 to preach and teach this good news about God and His Kingdom (especially the way He runs it) throughout the world. Then the end will come.

“And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world...and then the end will come.” (GNB)

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Can you think of a greater honor than joining with the loyal angels to do this? God’s last pleading with us is to do exactly this:

“This calls for endurance on the part of God’s people, those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying: ‘Write this: Happy Are those who from now on die in the service of the Lord!’ ‘Yes indeed!’ answers the Spirit. ‘They will enjoy rest from their hard work, because the results of their service go with them’.” Revelation 14: 12 & 13 (GNB)

Chapter # 17:

Satan's Final Effort to Deceive!

This chapter takes another look at the enemy's last, greatest and most subtle attempt to mislead God's loyal people into joining his side. The student of history will remember the evil one's previous attempts at this. The book of Revelation is replete with scenarios past tried and yet to come. Satan is described there as "the Dragon". He is furious and frustrated with his past repeated failures. In Revelation 12 we see that he was not strong enough to take heaven (verse 8). He also failed to destroy the Man-Child of the woman (verses 3-5) and he failed to destroy the woman herself (verse 16). What is left to him is the waging of war against the remainder of her descendants (verse 17). It's interesting to note that "the Dragon" goes away instead of confronting the situation here. Now Satan is no "dummy". He has enough feedback to know that he doesn't have the strength to defeat the purposes of God. He has used force, trying to persuade people through intimidation and persecution. Force has its limits and persecution has often backfired. Some people's faith even became stronger under threat. In the face of violent opposition, people have turned to efficient prayer charged with importance and fervency.

Given the above, it should come as no surprise that Satan will bring in deception refined almost to perfection so that people will not be able to tell which side is right whether they are dealing with Christ or Satan. In the very last days, things will not be as they seem to be. Revelation 13 talks about these deceptions in some detail, describing the dragon as a counterfeit of God the Father; the "sea beast" as a counterfeit of God the Son; and the "land beast" as a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. It is not the purpose of this book to present the deceptions and develop the symbolism. We will instead attempt to expose Satan here and try to discover how mere humans can hope to resist his most cunning persuasion.

What is this final effort to deceive all about? It's simple, really. It's about what it's always been about: choosing sides. So...how do we prepare ourselves to resist Satan's last and best shot to convince us of the truthfulness about his lies about God? Just as important, how do we prepare ourselves to resist Satan's efforts to

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persuade us to join his side as the great controversy comes to an end? “Impossible, I’d never do that!” you say? Might I remind you that history also warns us of over-confidence. Even God’s chosen people in the Promised Land were misled into crucifying their Lord and then hurrying home to keep the Sabbath holy! They read their Bibles, paid their tithe, watched their diet – and hated Jesus’ picture of the Father! Is it possible we could be similarly deceived?

The book of Revelation indeed covers much of what happens at the end of time. In the last chapter, we discovered God’s last pleading with us in Revelation 14, right after the telling of Satan’s miraculous deceptions in Revelation 13. That chapter tells us not only about Satan’s efforts, but also about his success in persuading (almost) the entire world to believe his lies about God. It’s hard to conceive of such insanity, although we have had some pretty recent vivid human examples (Hitler and Stalin, for example). Satan’s plans and purpose for us are identical to that of the “crazies” he has sponsored over history. But the announcement of Christ: “It is finished” sealed Satan’s ultimate failure long ago. That was no easy task for Christ! Consider the temptation to call the forces of heaven to His side...or even to just plain assert His power as God and kick Satan’s behind a good one! Since the day Lucifer accused His Father, these two had become enemies engaged in a great battle. Jesus was true to His Father’s character...demonstrating the truth about Lucifer with evidence and giving all involved the freedom to choose whom they would recognize as right.

Indulge me here, as I quote from one of my favorite authors on the origin of evil. It will be well for us to pause here and get a good feel for the struggle between Christ and Lucifer...how it began...what it blossomed into and the importance of Christ’s actions.

“To many minds the origin of sin and the reason for its existence are a source of great perplexity. They see the work of evil, with its terrible results of woe and desolation, and they question how all this can exist under the sovereignty of One who is infinite in wisdom, in power, and in love. Here is a mystery of which they find no explanation. And in their uncertainty and doubt they are blinded to truths plainly revealed in God’s word and essential to salvation....

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Others, however, fail of a satisfactory understanding of the great problem of evil, from the fact that tradition and misinterpretation have obscured the teaching of the Bible concerning the character of God, the nature of His government and the principles of His dealing with sin....Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion....

"Before the entrance of evil there was peace and joy throughout the universe. All was in perfect harmony with the Creator's will. Love for God was supreme, love for one another impartial....

"The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love – homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

"But there was one that chose to pervert this freedom. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and who stood highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven....

"Lucifer might have remained in favor with God, beloved and honored by all the angelic host, exercising his noble powers to bless others and to glorify his Maker. But, says the prophet, 'Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.' (Ezek 28:17KJV) Little by little, Lucifer came to indulge a desire for self-exaltation. 'Thou hast said, ...I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation....I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.' (Ezek. 28: 6 and Isaiah 14: 13, 14KJV) Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of His creatures, it was Lucifer's endeavor to win their service and homage to himself....this prince of angels aspired to power which it was the prerogative of Christ alone to wield.

"All heaven had rejoiced to reflect the Creator's glory and to show forth His praise. And while God was thus honored, all had been peace and gladness. But a note of discord now marred the celestial

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harmonies....The heavenly councils pleaded with Lucifer. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker, and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance. Lucifer allowed jealousy of Christ to prevail, and he became the more determined.

“Pride in his own glory nourished the desire for supremacy. The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as the gift of God and called forth no gratitude to the Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation, and aspired to be equal with God. The Son of God was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father. ‘Why?’ questioned this mighty angel, ‘should Christ have the supremacy? Why is He thus honored above Lucifer?’

“Leaving his place in the immediate presence of God, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. Working with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealing his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God, he endeavored to excite dissatisfaction concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that they imposed an unnecessary restraint. Since their natures were holy, he urged that the angels should obey the dictates of their own will. He sought to create sympathy for himself by representing that God had dealt unjustly with him in bestowing supreme honor upon Christ. He claimed that in aspiring to greater power and honor he was not aiming at self-exaltation, but was seeking to secure liberty for all the inhabitants of heaven, that by this means they might attain to a higher state of existence.

“God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, nor even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission. Such efforts as only infinite love and wisdom could devise were made to convince him of his error. The spirit of discontent had never before been known in heaven. Lucifer himself did not at first see where he was drifting; he did not understand the real nature of his feelings. But as his dissatisfaction was proved to be without cause, Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong, that the divine claims were just, and that he ought to acknowledge them as such before all

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heaven. Had he done this, he might have saved himself and many angels. He had not at this time fully cast off his allegiance to God. Though he had forsaken his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office. But pride forbade him to submit. He persistently defended his own course, maintained that he had no need of repentance, and full committed himself, in the great controversy, against his Maker....

"The fact that Christ had warned and counseled him was perverted to serve his traitorous designs. To those whose loving trust bound them most closely to him, Satan had represented that he was wrongly judged, that his position was not respected, and that his liberty was to be abridged. From misrepresentation of the words of Christ he passed to prevarication and direct falsehood, accusing the Son of God of a design to humiliate him before the inhabitants of heaven. He sought also to make a false issue between himself and the loyal angels. All whom he could not subvert and bring fully to his side he accused of indifference to the interests of heavenly beings. The very work which he himself was doing he charged upon those who remained true to God. And to sustain his charge of God's injustice toward him, he resorted to misrepresentation of the words and acts of the Creator. It was his policy to perplex the angels with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah....

"God, in His wisdom permitted Satan to carry forward his work, until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed; that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. Lucifer, as the anointed cherub, had been highly exalted; he was greatly loved by the heavenly beings, and his influence over them was strong. God's government included not only the inhabitants of heaven, but of all the worlds that He had created; and Satan thought that if he could carry the angels of heaven with him in rebellion, he could carry also the other worlds....

"His power to deceive was very great, and by disguising himself in a cloak of falsehood he had gained an advantage. Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character or see to what his work was leading.

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“Satan had been so highly honored, and all his acts were so clothed with mystery, that it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work. Until fully developed, sin would not appear the evil thing it was. Heretofore it had no place in the universe of God, and holy beings had no conception of its nature and malignity. They could not discern the terrible consequences that would result from setting aside the divine law. Satan had, at first concealed his work under a specious profession of loyalty to God. He claimed to be seeking to promote the honor of God, the stability of His government, and the good of all the inhabitants of heaven. While instilling discontent into the minds of the angels under him, he had artfully made it appear that he was seeking to remove dissatisfaction. When he urged that changes be made in the order and laws of God’s government it was under the pretense that these were necessary in order to preserve harmony in heaven.

“In His dealing with sin, God could employ only righteousness and truth. Satan could use what God could not – flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government before the angels, claiming that God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. Therefore it must be demonstrated before the inhabitants of heaven, as well as of all the worlds, that God’s government was just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper, and his real object, must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works.

“The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the law and government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah. Therefore it was necessary that he should demonstrate the nature of his claims, and show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked.

“Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan.... The inhabitants of

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heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear rather from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated....

"For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might forever be placed beyond all question.

"Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects upon both men and angels would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority.... Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin and suffering its consequences....

"When it was announced that with all his sympathizers he must be expelled from the abodes of bliss, then the rebel leader boldly avowed his contempt for the Creator's law. He reiterated his claim that angels needed no control, but should be left to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right. He denounced the divine statutes as a restriction of their liberty and declared that it was his purpose to secure the abolition of law; that, freed from this restraint, the hosts of heaven might enter upon a more exalted, more glorious state of existence.

"With one accord, Satan and his host threw the blame of their rebellion wholly upon Christ, declaring that if they had not been reprov'd, they would never have rebelled. Thus stubborn and defiant in their disloyalty, seeking vainly to overthrow the government of God, yet blasphemously claiming to be themselves the innocent victims of oppressive power, the archrebel and all his sympathizers were at last banished from heaven.

"The same spirit that prompted rebellion in heaven still inspires rebellion on earth. Satan has continued with men the same policy which he pursued with the angels. His spirit now reigns in the

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children of disobedience. Like him they seek to break down the restraints of the law of God and promise men liberty through transgression of its precepts. Reproof of sin still arouses the spirit of hatred and resistance....

“By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, causing Him to be regarded as severe and tyrannical, Satan induced man to sin....

“In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.

“In the contest between Christ and Satan, during the Savior’s earthly ministry, the character of the great deceiver was unmasked. Nothing could so effectually have uprooted Satan from the affections of the heavenly angels and the whole loyal universe as did his cruel warfare upon the world’s Redeemer. The daring blasphemy of his demand that Christ should pay him homage; his presumptuous boldness in bearing Him to the mountain summit and the pinnacle of the temple; the malicious intent betrayed in urging Him to cast Himself down from the dizzy height; the unsleeping malice that hunted Him from place to place, inspiring the hearts of priests and people to reject His love; and at the last to cry, ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’ – all this excited the amazement and indignation of the universe.

“It was Satan that prompted the world’s rejection of Christ. The prince of evil exerted all his power and cunning to destroy Jesus; for he saw that the Savior’s mercy and love, His compassion and pitying tenderness, were representing to the world the character of God. Satan contested every claim put forth by the Son of God and employed men as his agents to fill the Savior’s life with suffering and sorrow. The sophistry and falsehood by which he had sought to hinder the work of Jesus, the hatred manifested through the children of disobedience, his cruel accusations against Him whose life was one of unexampled goodness, all sprang from deep-seated revenge. The pent-up fires of envy, malice, hatred and revenge burst forth on Calvary

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against the Son of God, while all heaven gazed upon the scene in silent horror....

"The guilt of Satan stood forth without excuse. He had revealed his true character as a liar and a murderer. It was seen that the very same spirit with which he ruled the children of men, who were under his power, he would have manifested had he been permitted to control the inhabitants of heaven. He had claimed that the transgression of God's law would bring liberty and exaltation; but it was seen to result in bondage and degradation.

"Satan's lying charges against the divine character and government appeared in their true light. He had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, and had declared that, while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice. Now it was seen that for the salvation of a fallen and sinful race, the Ruler of the universe had made the greatest sacrifice which love could make; for 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' (2nd Corinthians 5:19)

"God had manifested His abhorrence of the principles of rebellion. All heaven saw His justice revealed both in the condemnation of Satan and in the redemption of man. Lucifer had declared that if the law of God was changeless, and its penalty could not be remitted, every transgressor must be forever debarred from the Creator's favor. He had claimed that the sinful race were placed beyond redemption and were therefore his rightful prey. But the death of Christ was an argument in man's behalf that could not be overthrown. The penalty of the law fell upon Him who was equal with God, and man was free to accept the righteousness of Christ and by a life of penitence and humiliation to triumph, as the Son of God had triumphed, over the power of Satan....

"But it was not merely to accomplish the redemption of man that Christ came to the earth to suffer and to die. He came to 'magnify the law' and to 'make it honorable'. Not alone that the inhabitants of this world might regard the law as it should be regarded; but it was to demonstrate to all the worlds of the universe that God's law is unchangeable.... The death of Christ proves it immutable.... The sacrifice to which infinite love impelled the Father and the Son, that sinners might be redeemed, demonstrates to all the universe – what nothing less than this plan of atonement could have sufficed to do –

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that justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God....When the Judge of all the earth shall demand of Satan, ‘Why have you rebelled against Me, and robbed Me of the subjects of My kingdom?’ the originator of evil can render no excuse....

“The whole universe will have become witnesses to the nature and results of sin.... A tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested before them as fathomless love and infinite wisdom.”
Taken from “The Great Controversy”, pages 492 to 504.

Thanks for bearing with me there. The above dialogue certainly lends perspective to what we’ve been studying and the nature of the one who would deceive us now at the very end doesn’t it? All the questions about God and how he runs His universe have been answered! The loyal angels got the message long ago and they’ve been celebrating ever since! Think of how Satan feels each time he hears the angels’ incessant singing about God’s righteousness! It’s recorded right there in that book of Revelation in Chapter 4: 8 and 11; chapter 5: 9 through 14 and chapter 15: 3 and 4. Look at this praise! This is what the book of Revelation is truly about: God’s own righteousness! Sure it contains prophetic details and references to our entire history on earth. But the purpose for it all is therein revealed, and that is its import! That’s why it’s called “REVELATION”! Paul knew this when he wrote his letter to the Romans:

“God offered him, so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that He is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.” Romans 3: 25, 26 (GNB)

This is about who God is as opposed to what He has done. It’s a “revelation” of God’s character. Satan has to listen to this praise all the time and it drives him into a rage!

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Even before the victory at the cross...as Jesus watched His disciples grow...learning the truth about His Father...Jesus said that He saw Satan fall upon the earth like lightning. It's true, these were Jesus' own words:

*"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."
Luke 10:18 (RSV)*

Imagine Satan listening as Jesus told this to His disciples! It was so insane for him to start this war so long ago in heaven. It's even more insane, however, to continue it...now that he knows he's lost! No one in the universe is willing to listen to his charges about God anymore...the universe beyond us is convinced. It appears we're the only ones yet that need convincing! Satan therefore concentrates his destructive efforts on us! Only here on earth are any of us willing to listen...many of us even willing to agree with Satan!

So...the great warning was given us about the great war that has continued here:

"Be glad, you heavens, and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left." Revelation 12:12 (GNB)

That warning sounds familiar to Bible readers. Compare it with the warning Peter gave in his letter:

"Be alert! Be on watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him. 1st Peter 5:8,9 (GNB)

The apostle John warned that Satan's final efforts to deceive will apparently be rewarded with complete success...because the whole world is described as worshipping him...the very thing he has wanted all along:

"The beast was allowed to make proud claims which were insulting to God...It was allowed to fight against God's

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people and to defeat them...All people living on earth will worship it, except those whose names were written before the creation of the world in the book of the living...This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God's people.”
Revelation 13: 5,7,8 and 10 (GNB)

That business about endurance and faith on the part of God's people sounds familiar too, doesn't it? That's because it's contained in the third angel's message that we read about in the last chapter:

“This calls for endurance on the part of God's people, those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus.”
Revelation 14:12 (GNB)

So...you can see above that those remaining loyal to God, then, are the special targets of Satan's final deceptions! Revelation 12:17 describes these loyal people in much the same language as in Revelation 14:12:

“All those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to the truth revealed by Jesus.” (GNB)

Again, note that these are the special objects of Satan's wrath! The remnant, the ones left over...the few.

Logic would seem to dictate that if we would count ourselves among “the few”...those loyal to God no matter what, disbelieving the lies of Satan and his system of forced worship...we would do well to:

- Notice Satan's successes over the centuries in deceiving people;
- Especially his success in deceiving “Saints”!

We're not talking here about deceptions that may concern the usual “gross” sins people commit...those *things* that “saints” would never think of doing! We need rather to focus on the insidious methods Satan has used to turn even the saints and angels against our Heavenly Father...even while they profess to be His chosen and loyal followers:

- Recall Lucifer's success in heaven...right in the very presence of the Father!

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- There's lots of stuff recorded in the Law and the Prophets and the Writings about Satan's deception of God's chosen people on this earth...in the promised land!
- After the "discipline" of Babylon...God's people never worshipped graven images again. Oh, how they read their Bibles...paid their tithe...watched their diets...and were so very careful not to be contaminated by association with unbelievers!
- Oh, how they awaited the coming of the Messiah! The Christ! Yet when Christ came to live among them:
 - They denounced His picture of the Father
 - They said it was heretical and unbiblical;
 - They even said He had a demon!
 - And, of course, they crucified Him!

Think of telling God that He has a demon! Yes, they did that:

"The Jews answered Him, 'Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?'" John 8:48 (NIV)

Such gall...such temerity...such arrogance! All because of the way He described Himself! While they said this, they (the teachers of the law, the leaders of the church) seemed so devout! They seemed so eager to be known as God's true people...even working so hard to win others to the "truth". Their truth! Let's look at the debate in John 8:31 – 48:

"So Jesus said to those who believed in him, 'If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!' 'We are the descendants of Abraham,' they answered, 'and we have never been anybody's slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying, "you will be free"?' Jesus said to them, 'I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever. If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me, because you will not accept my teaching. I talk about what my Father has shown me, but you do what your father has told you.' They answered him, 'Our father is Abraham.' 'If you really were Abraham's children', Jesus replied, 'you would do

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the same things that he did. All I have ever done is to tell you the truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me. Abraham did nothing like This! You are doing what your father did.’ ‘God Himself is the only Father we have.’ They answered. ‘and we are His true sons.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God really were your Father you would love me because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to listen to my message. You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow you father’s desires. From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is only doing what comes naturally to him, because he is a liar and the father of all lies. But I tell you the truth, and that is why you do not believe me. Which one of you can prove that I am guilty of sin? If I tell the truth, then why do you not believe me? He who comes from God listens to God’s words. You, however, are not from God, and that is why you will not listen.’ They asked Jesus, ‘Were we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon in you?’” (GNB)

See how that set up? These “guardians of the faith” were the only people Jesus had any harsh words for when He walked among us. There were, of course, good reasons for this! Jesus went on to comment on their evangelistic efforts in Matthew 23:

“How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You sail the seas and cross whole countries to win one convert, and when you succeed, you make him twice as deserving of going to hell as you yourselves are!.... You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill and cummin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice, mercy and honesty....Blind guides! You strain a fly out of your drink but swallow a camel!” verses 15, 23 & 24 (GNB)

Notice His “praise” for the way they kept the law here! They had accepted Satan’s picture of God...and missed the whole point of God’s

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use of these emergency measures...and what God really wanted from them! In all their care for the law (The Mishnah (a commentary) and the Gemarah (a commentary on the commentary!) and the Cabala (a secret numeric interpretation of events to come)) they were so concerned to be God's obedient saints!

The above caused a very serious problem for them on Crucifixion Friday! It all started at the beginning of that day:

"Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman Governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover."
John 18:28 (GNB)

All that lying and torture and kangaroo court justice of the night before...and they were concerned with "being clean" for the Passover! What did the Passover mean to them? "Deliverance from the oppressor!" But what was it supposed to point to? "Deliverance by the lamb!" They just didn't get it, did they? Since it was also Friday, these "paragons of virtue", these "protectors of the faith" were presented with yet another problem:

"Now it was the day of preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down."
John 19:31 (NIV)

To have bodies hanging on a cross was a defilement of the Sabbath, in their estimation. Therefore they wanted the soldiers to break the legs of those crucified so that they couldn't support themselves to get their breath. They would suffocate and die. Then the bodies could be taken down. "So let's kill 'em quick because those bodies up there will offend God on His Sabbath Day. Can't have that!" My...such deft understanding of the God of love! And after the bodies were taken down, the church leaders hurried home to keep the Sabbath Day holy! Think about this now...perhaps one of the most glaring ironies in

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history: Having nailed their Savior to the cross, they ran home to keep the Sabbath in honor of the very One they crucified!

Were they deceived...or what?

These same people watched Jesus' behavior as He suffered the torture of the cross...they literally heard Him say:

- “I forgive you”!
- “John...please look after mother”
- “Yes, thief, you’ll be with Me in the Kingdom

Jesus behaved precisely as the Old Testament prophecies said He would! These teachers...these guardians of the faith...these preservers of the chosen read the Old Testament all the time! They were so deceived by Satan's lies, that they were totally unmoved by this! Instead, they understood that Jesus was the One who had accepted Satan's lies about our God! Subtle...huh? Don't think that could happen again, do you?

At first, Saul (later Paul) shared the same picture of God that his Pharisee brethren had. His evangelistic methods showed that he, too, had been deceived. He saw nothing wrong with using force or fear, incarceration or stoning to win converts to the kind of God he worshipped. But remember what happened to Saul?

Jesus had very serious words for hard-working evangelists and soul-winners who were actually convincing people of the false picture of our God:

“Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do. When the Judgement Day comes, many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God’s message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!’ Then I will say to them ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!’” Matthew 7: 21 – 23 (GNB)

“We were never really friends...you never really knew the kind of person I am!” What a sad realization that will be...to be so deceived!

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If that kind of thing happened the first time Jesus came here...don't you think we'll get a repeat performance? The act will really be good this time! God has tried in many and various ways to get us to see this truth about Himself. Likewise, however, Satan has also in many and various ways sought to keep us from this truth...coming to know this truth that is so essential to our making intelligent and right choices! Remember that God could only use righteousness and evidence to demonstrate the truth, whereas Satan could employ flattery and deceit; pomp and circumstance; coercion and torture; smoke and mirrors; outright miracles and bribery; claims and lies; etc., etc.

Satan is a being to fear in terms of his ability to influence us unduly. What really scares me about his methods is that he has demonstrated that :

He will seek to deceive us into turning against the truth about God even as we might be claiming to believe it!

History reveals this to be true; the "chosen" fell into this trap! Think about that as you review your experience and that of your interaction with other members you attend church with! It's so perverse, isn't it?

Recall, now, that the special target of Satan at the end of time will be the "remnant"...those left over...the loyal saints. History also records that one of Satan's most successful deceptions has been leading God's people into a certain grateful satisfaction that:

"The Lord has blessed us with so much light that we really don't need to pursue it any further. We have enough!"

Well, indeed "WE" wouldn't call this pious self-satisfaction! We'd probably condemn it (as you are in your mind right now)! We would rather hear this more along the lines that:

"We are so thankful that God has so favored His remnant with so much truth."

We become conservative and seek to discourage even further inquiry and further investigation.

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I once knew a devout Christian man (no need to mention the denomination he belonged to...what difference should that make?) who had an interesting approach to the topic of religion and spiritual concerns. He was a partner in the world-renowned (and now world-notorious) accounting firm of Arthur Andersen & Co. I was a lowly “staffer” at the time. One day we had to travel by car to a client to make a presentation. The trip took two hours and the conversation varied all over the place. One of the other staff people in the car eventually steered the discussion to the topic of religion. Everyone but the partner had an opinion on a question raised. When he was “pinned down” for an answer he finally said: “I have finally settled on what I believe and follow. I don’t want to hear anything else because it will just confuse me!” Do you sense the “oxy-moron”-like sentiment of that statement? If he had really settled on what he believed, why would anything confuse him? Indeed, that is the test of whether you have truly settled on what you believe!

In the same vein of thinking, one of my favorite authors wrote:

“God intends that, even in this life, truth shall be ever unfolding to His people....Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion....When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in times past, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what.”
Gospel Workers, pg.297-298.

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Rattle that around in your head awhile! It's powerful! It's convicting, isn't it? YOU are responsible for your own knowledge; your own relationship with God; your own salvation. How much time do you spend reading and understanding the Bible? It is another of Satan's prime, subtle and successful deceptions that regular Bible study is not necessary! "If you don't use it...you lose it!"

The Bible has such a serious message for saints who might become so falsely secure, and it's found in that "mysterious" and prophetic book of Revelation:

*"I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth! You say 'I am rich and well off; I have all I need.' But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked and blind."
Revelation 3: 15 – 17 (GNB)*

This is a particular message given for the "Laodicean Church" (one of seven mentioned in the first part of the Book). It's translated here in English, but it was written in Greek. The word translated "spit" in verse sixteen is "*emeo*" in Greek. It's the word from which we get "emesis basin" and "emetic" in English and it means "vomit"! You see, this condition doesn't make our heavenly Father angry...it makes Him sick! There is another good lesson to take from this passage. The word translated "miserable" in verse seventeen is "*eleinos*" in Greek. It means "worn out from hard work". What hard work would that be? That of trying so hard to please the Lord..."working" so hard at it!

We are in such grave danger of underestimating Satan's ability to deceive and confuse with respect to proper knowledge and use of the Bible. We are so willing to permit our understanding to be formed and molded by others...those who are "expert"...priests, bishops, Mdivs and Doctors of Divinity! We handle our spiritual lives just like anything else in the world we live in. Yet, when we read scripture, we are constantly warned and instructed that the way to spirituality is exactly the opposite of that taken by the "world". That's because this

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world is still under the rule of the evil one. It's **so important** that we embrace such reading, study and relationship with God *ourselves!*

Many people think that they've memorized two or three things stored away from study from which they will elude deception. When Satan comes as an angel of light, as we're told he will in 2nd Corinthians 11:14, some think that they won't be taken in by it because he will roam the earth and appear in several places with this deception. These take comfort from the admonition Christ gave in Matthew 24:26 and onward as well as the clear description of Christ's second coming in 1st Thessalonians 4 where Paul makes it clear that Christ will not touch the "ground", but we all will be caught up in the air with Him. It would be wonderful if Satan's deceptions would be so clear-cut. Given what we already know about him, however, it is doubtful that he will treat us that gently!

History is replete with examples of intellectual over-confidence:

- *Already* in the first century, a group formed calling themselves the "dositists". The word means "seemed" and their premise was that "Jesus faked it"...the whole thing with Jesus and his 12 was a conspiracy.
- *Such* theories continued throughout the centuries. In the 1970s a book was published called "The Passover Plot" in which the premise regarding Christ was exactly the same as the "dositists". Jewish scholars uncovered "proof" that the whole thing was a magnificent conspiracy on the part of Jewish rebels. The book was made into a movie in the 1980s.
- *Jesuit* thought and intellectual debate today covers the concept that God doesn't even exist! Such thought is not limited to Jesuits either. The United Church of Christ and others teach it.
- *My* sister-in-law took a course at DePaul University in which she was taught that a valid diary existed of the writings of one who called himself "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth" in which he confessed that he was put up to the whole thing. He describes how he escaped off the cross. The diary was found at the site of Massada. Television "documentaries" have "revealed" this.

So, you see, the evil one will attempt to even do away with the evidence we have concerning the great controversy between him and

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Christ. Such attempts were already spreading in the Apostle John's later years...and he warned us against it:

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." 1st John 4:1,2 (NIV)

John took pains to write his gospel in a way that would show that the One who came was really

GOD

Satan has long known about the way in which God would appear as a man, to demonstrate that the race of men were really safe to save. That's why he hounded poor Jesus throughout His life...to tempt Him to cave in or slip up.

Long before Christ even got here, Satan was at work undermining the evidence...confusing it...counterfeiting the first coming of Christ. It's true and it's documented history. It is so much so, as a matter of fact, that scholars use it to argue that Christ's actual coming was fable and legend just like that of Tamuz and other pagan tales. Satan did this through the "mystery" religions. It's almost hard to believe if you've not been exposed to it. Long before Christ, for example, there was always a figure central to the salvation of the human race portrayed in the following manner:

- A dying, rising savior
- Supernaturally born
- Died a cruel, violent death
- Exalted up to the heavens...there to mediate and supernaturally help his followers
- Later to return, resurrect his followers and annihilate all the forces of evil

How about that!?! Doesn't that sound familiar? That's not all, either. In those "mystery" religions like Mithraism, etc. they had:

- Celebrations of last suppers (Lord suppers)

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- Baptism and washing in the blood
- A day to give honor to recognize a god as Creator and Lord
- The cross as a symbol of death/rebirth
- Sacrifice...”Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin” Hebrews 9:22
- Abstinence from eating pork
- And many others dealing with
 1. Hell
 2. Being Born Again
 3. Rapture
 4. Millenium
 5. More

If you’re curious and want to explore the paganism that exists in our Christianity and the Christian practices that exist in paganism, permit me to offer you a short Bibliography:

- **The Antichrist 666** – compiled by an organization called Repairers of the Breach. The last known address I have for this organization is P.O. Box 4267 in Brownsville, Texas, 78520. The reason I list it first is because it was compiled from 48 different works that are well referenced for further study.
- **The Two Babylons** – Alexander Hislop, Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, N.J. 1916, 1943, 1959.
- **Encyclopedia of World Mythology** – Rex Warner, reproduced by arrangement with Phoebus Publishing Company, BPC Publishing Limited, 1970, 1971, 1975.
- **The Origin of Christian Supernaturalism** – by Shirley Jackson Case. I believe that’s the correct spelling. It’s all I have currently, but you should be able to find it with the author as reference.

This last reference in particular shows the counterfeits of true faith that gentiles had which now run rampant through all of Christianity.

“Mystery” religions were full of “initiations into the mysteries”, designed to produce the desired emotional agitation as a substitute for personal relationship based upon reason. A good friend of mine who had the good fortune to retire young and donate his time to working with charitable organizations told me recently that he

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believes we ought to go back to these initiation rites for our young. He is a born again Christian and the church he goes to is promoting this concept once again.

I believe we will certainly see brilliant counterfeits of Christ's second coming. What with "New Age" thought and technology, this is already realistic thinking. You can already have "virtual" experiences in Las Vegas and a host of other Theme Parks in Florida and California. It won't surprise me when these technologies are seized upon to further the deceptive practices of the evil one.

Even the most important beliefs and teachings of Christianity are now being bent to support Satan's position against our God! Consider these and the special way they've been presented to show that God is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---|----------|
| - | Faith | - | Sin |
| - | Atonement | - | Cross |
| - | Law | - | Judgment |
| - | Christ' Intercession | | |
| - | The Destruction of the Wicked | | |

All of God's emergency measures are being skewed and twisted just enough to obscure the real truth about our God!

Are you ready for this? I said:

Are You Ready For This?

Have we over-simplified here? Are we in danger of being over-confident? Are we actually interpreting these truths so as to leave ourselves vulnerable? Are we leading the people we win to be vulnerable with us? What do you think? That's the real question...what do **YOU** think?

Chapter # 18:

What is God Waiting For?

The controversy in the heavens about Lucifer has been over for about 2,000 years now! When Jesus died on the cross, the character of Lucifer was exposed to the universe. Why the wait?! Why doesn't God come for us now and end all this suffering and confusion? We've seen that Lucifer doesn't fool anyone in heaven anymore. All of His lies have been met with evidence to the contrary. Jesus secured the freedom of the universe. The deal is done...let's go home! I'm ready for this all to end, aren't you? Or are you waiting for someone you know to wake up to what's really going on...a child; a spouse; a relative; some other loved one? What about yourself? Aren't you glad God waited at least long enough for you to "catch on"? Hmmm. What does that say about God and why He tolerates rebellion yet in this one "little spot" in the universe? Good question! We'll come back to that at the end of this chapter and the next one.

We know, from our brief looks into the Book of Revelation, that Jesus will return for those who have experienced Satan's last and best shot at deception and destruction. Here's a heavy thought: Those that Jesus returns for who are alive to meet Him in the air will have accomplished what fully one-third (1/3) of the heavenly host had not: They will have refused to be turned against God by Satan's lies. Think about that one for a minute. Heavenly beings that dwelt in the very presence of God for...what...eons?...were persuaded by Lucifer that God was arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe (A.V.E.U.S). One-third of God's family, who knew through personal experience what He was like, were taken in by the persuasive power of the evil one. Hopefully this puts in perspective what we're about to go through. **Please** don't underestimate its magnitude!

There are very vivid and accurate descriptions of this experience to come in both the Old Testament and the New Testament:

"There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered...Those who are wise will shine like the

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brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”
Daniel 12: 1,3 (NIV)

Notice the reference to “the book” in this passage. It is used elsewhere in Daniel as well:

“There were many thousands of people there to serve him, and millions of people stood before him. The court began its session and the books were opened.” Daniel 7:10 (GNB)

Daniel, here, was using language he could understand when he wrote his book. John the Revelator did the same thing:

“And I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and then another book was opened, the book of the living. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.”
Revelation 20:12 (GNB)

We have to use a little realism here, and give God His due. Do you really suppose there are “books” in heaven? If we have computers to record and store data on, don’t you think they have at least such technology in heaven? Daniel and John couldn’t have put that into the language of their time. The point is, however, that the Bible is thought-inspired and that there is some means of record-keeping there. Please notice one other thing from the passage in Daniel 12: 1,3. See what the wise are doing? They’re not running around trying to survive persecution or the havoc to be experienced in the last days. They aren’t fleeing from it or phased by it in the sense that those who worry about “end times” and the “tribulation” are. Daniel says that they are “leading many to righteousness”. That’s right! They’re giving Bible studies and reaching all they can before that frightful end of probation for all mankind. When the great pronouncement of Revelation 22:11 is made...all will have made their decision as to whom they will serve. That’s the end of it all and Christ will come. But right up until that time, the “wise” will be trying to persuade people to make the right choice! Analyze that one for its implications...for the kind of people we are to be at the end! Will we just be involved in a battle for

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survival? Is that what it's all going to be about? Many teach this and do so erroneously. Those that go through this will trust God just like Jesus trusted His Father to get Him through everything. People will be attracted to them because they will bear such an encouraging witness to the truth about our God! They won't be concerned in the least about themselves...about being raptured or about building shelters in the country. They will only be concerned about others...those that don't know what's coming.

OK, ok...let's look at a New Testament description of this experience now:

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.”

1st Tim. 4: 1-3 (GNB)

There's a lot to consider in this little passage. Let's analyze it a bit more: Will those who “abandon the faith” leave the church then and become atheists? Nope. That's not what St.Paul's first letter to Timothy tells us. He says they'll follow other deceptions, succumb to false teachings about God and then force others to follow traditions that God has nothing to do with. Timothy indicates here the kind of things that will be done in the last days to misrepresent our God. Recall the accusations of Lucifer concerning God's character as A.V.E.U.S. (see above). Note these arbitrary things:

- Forbidding to marry
- Abstain from food for ceremonial reasons

Wouldn't Satan love for us to forget how and why we were given the sacrament of marriage in the Garden of Eden? Or that great lie of his in the same Garden that was later answered by Jesus' death? Wouldn't he love for us to forget the practical health reasons for abstaining from certain foods?

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Look at Paul's description of Satan's purposes and methods in 2nd Thessalonians 2: 1,3,4,6,7,9,10:

“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed... He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God...And now you know what is holding him back...For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way...The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” (NIV)

Notice the continual warnings against deception here. This was written in the 50s AD!! What insight to the future...what a key to one of the reasons that God waits! He wants everyone to have the chance to make an intelligent choice about who is right in the great controversy: God or Lucifer. Satan uses lies and deceit; God uses evidence and demonstration. It's not really that hard to see the contrast between truth and deception...God's ways and Satan's ways. “Counterfeit miracles...signs and wonders” Paul says. Are you impressed with how much of this is actually going on at the present time? Have you seen a “Psychic Channel” lately?

Could people who survive these deceptions possibly be babes in the truth? “Babes in the truth” is a term commonly used to describe new believers...those first acquainted with Christianity as a way of living. Perhaps it would be better if we had one more look at what we mean by the “truth” again...what we mean in this book by that expression. The “truth”...the truth referred to in this book concerns God the Father and the fact that He is not the hard-nosed, cold-hearted deity His enemies have made Him out to be. The survivors of the end-time deceptions meet the Biblical description of Christian maturity and perfection: *They have their faculties trained by **practice** to distinguish*

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between good and evil. Though their faith be severely tried...they will never let God down! These, like Job, can stand firm and alone!

God is waiting for such firm believers! Are you one? Don't you want to be one? Will God be able to take people of any other persuasion into His kingdom? Would that make sense? Would it even be fair to those who want nothing to do with God? Those who think that other “things” will save them; those that think that other “things” are more worthwhile; those who think they are gods unto themselves? Those whom God will reap from the earth will take the place of the family that left Him so very long ago...long before this globe was made! Is it any wonder that Satan has such hatred for them? That they will be so harassed at the end? These will demonstrate to the universe that they choose and believe in the God that the rest of the universe does. They will provide evidence of it just like their God provides evidence of what is truth. They want the Father to be their God and they want to be His people...in the truest sense that those terms were ever intended.

There is another reason that God waits. It's merciful, and He is a merciful God. He doesn't want to lose anyone!

“The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.” 2nd Peter 3:9 (GNB)

In order to make it past Satan's last gauntlet, people will have to be prepared...ready...really ready! Those not so prepared will be confused and deceived. Remember God's promise in 1st Corinthians 10:13 which is there for your choosing also:

“Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.” (GNB)

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The Bible's last book pictures angels holding back the winds of strife until God's children have been unshakably sealed and settled into the truth:

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels.... 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.'"
Rev. 7:1-3 (RSV)

Isn't this just like our God to do this? Notice the "holding back" language used here and compare it to the same language used in 2nd Thessalonians 2 above. It's clear here that the closing events of Earth's history are being held back because we have not yet become "sealed".

What does that mean?

You have to ask what "sealing" meant to the early Christians when they heard this read aloud to them. Had they received any help in understanding the meaning of the term "sealing"? As likely as not, many of those who heard from the scroll of the book of Revelation written on Patmos were in Ephesus (Ephesians). Paul wrote them letters, warning of false teachers & urging them to hold fast to the truth. He had a lot to say about the concept of being sealed:

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30 (NIV)

Now this raises the question: How is the Holy Spirit involved in our being sealed? Paul goes on to tell us:

"In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." Ephesians 1:13 (RSV)

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Note the emphasis on “truth”...the gospel”...the “Good News”. What is that again? Paul clarifies that the gospel is the good news about GOD just a few verses further in that letter:

*“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.”
Eph. 1:17 (GNB)*

Now what truth does Jesus want us to know? Jesus clarified it in the book of John:

*“ When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth....”
John 16:13 (GNB)*

This passage is from the experience in the upper room...Jesus’ last desperate effort to strengthen His children before they underwent incredible deception and trial. John the Beloved devotes five solid chapters to this experience in 13 through 17. He had a lot to say about the Spirit and the truth about His Father. Take some time to look up the following:

- John 14: 16, 17, 23, 26
- John 15: 23 – 26
- John 16: 12-13, 25-28

I’ll quote a little from the above so that you get the flavor here:

“The Holy Spirit...will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you...When the helper comes, that is, the Spirit of Truth...he will speak plainly about me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about me...he will guide you into everything that is true.” (Phillips)

Note that John...the same John who wrote about sealing in Revelation 7, also wrote the above verses from Christ about the work and role of the Holy Spirit. John knew about Paul’s work with the Ephesians. He was not banished until much later. He knew Paul prepared his charges and they would have some background into what it means to be sealed:

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“To be so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved from it.”

Given the importance of being sealed, shouldn't we focus more on this **TRUTH** into which we must become so settled? So sealed that, despite Satan's intense efforts to the contrary...we cannot be moved? Forgive me for pounding on this...but I want so to make a critical point:

- Is it the truth that God exists and is all powerful? *Well...yes. Certainly!*
- Is it the truth that the end is coming soon? *C'mon already, Satan and his followers are settled into these truths!*
- Is it the truth that the 7th Day is the Sabbath? *Yes, ok.*
- Is it the truth that we should obey all 10 commandments? *Of course, who would dispute that?*
- Is it the truth that we should read our Bibles faithfully? *Uh-huh.*
- Is it the truth that we should pay a careful tithe? *Yes.*
- Is it the truth that we should be very careful about what we eat? *Sure, but aren't you starting to get picky here?*
- Is it the truth that we should be very careful about how we associate with “sinners” who might lead us astray? *All right...that did it! Where are you going with this?*

I'll tell you where. A great many Christians would answer very affirmatively to every one of those “truths” above; some more vehemently than others. I don't mean to minimize those “truths”, but are they enough? If following the above truths “to the letter” got you your “ticket into heaven”, would you be happy living with a God that could go ballistic on you at any moment? A God that is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe? Would you expect to live happily ever after with a God like that?

Throughout the Bible...the all-important **truth**, the saving **truth** is, above all else, the **truth** about our God! Jesus came to this earth to bring us this truth about His Father so that we might be “won back” to Him, in love and trust! God can only save and heal those who love and trust Him!

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Remember all that Jesus said concerning His Father in the upper room...and what He said about the Spirit bringing to remembrance those things He said about the Father. Also in Ephesians 1:17 above, Paul points out that the Holy Spirit comes so that we may know God better. It seems to me that an obvious deception of Satan's would be to pervert and counterfeit what it means to experience the Holy Spirit! There are those that believe that unless you speak in tongues, you do not have the Holy Spirit. Is this consistent with the picture of God given in the Bible? Is it consistent with what Jesus said the purpose of the Spirit is when He instructed His disciples in the upper room? The Spirit unlocks the truth contained in scripture. Pray to God and ask for the Spirit to accompany you every time you open the pages of His Book. It's the only safe course. Only the Spirit can lead you to the consistent picture of the truth about God; the fact that God Himself is the object of that truth; and the essence of the truth that runs throughout all of scripture in all its stories!

Now...I want to ask you seriously – Do WE (you, me, our fellows in Christianity) really accept Jesus' picture of His Father? Do we truly accept Jesus' testimony about His Father? Think about that a moment in the context of all you've been taught and all you've experienced in Christianity. I want to get very specific concerning something Jesus said about His Father. He was talking to His disciples in the upper room. It was a final briefing for them. There were no parables, no figures of speech. The time had come for Jesus to be plain and clear with His lieutenants. Here's what He said to them:

“When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, for the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you love me and have believed that I came from God.”

John 16:26 & 27 (GNB)

That was Jesus testimony about His Father...that was what Jesus came to reveal to us all: **That the Father Himself loves us...just like Jesus does!** Do you accept that? Is it an integral part of your whole way of looking at religion and the way you practice it? Is it basic to your understanding of the plan of salvation? Or are you still unable to accept what Jesus described as a plain, clear statement of the **truth**

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about His Father? There is no need for the Son to plead with the Father on our behalf...because the Father loves us just as much as the Son does. Jesus said this many times: “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father”. Whoever you are, reading this...please make this a part of your Christian theology. It needs to be...it must be...because

IT’S THE TRUTH!

We must become so settled in this truth that we cannot be moved from it. I don’t mean that we must become pig-headed; stubborn; closed to ideas or anything of the sort. Being grounded in truth means not to be afraid to test it, time and again. It also means, that when other ideas don’t stack up, they shouldn’t be accepted! That’s what “not being moved” means. Otherwise we become easily swayed “to and fro” by every wind of doctrine:

*“We are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes. No, let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ.”
Ephesians 4: 14, 15 (NEB)*

The time has come for us to ask ourselves: are we such “babes” in this truth that we need *emergency measures* to be reverent toward our God...to do what is right? If we still *need* those measures...then we’re still “babes” or “babies”! The Apostle Paul had some pretty “direct” things to say on this subject, especially to those who had strong church backgrounds:

“There is much we have to say about this matter, but it is hard to explain to you, because you are so slow to understand. There has been enough time for you to be teachers – yet you still need someone to teach you the first lessons of God’s message. Instead of eating solid food, you still have to drink milk. Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right and wrong. Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil. Let us go forward, then, to mature teaching and leave behind us

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the first lessons of the Christian message. We should not lay again the foundation of turning away from useless works and believing in God; of the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment. Let us go forward!”
Hebrews 5:11-14 and 6:1-3(GNB)

What are the elementary teachings? What are the rudiments of our beliefs? Typically they are the doctrines that comprise the hundred-odd different flavors of Christianity that people sample until they find one in which they are comfortable. More often than not the choice is made on the basis of what we’re “raised” in...what our mothers and fathers believed and lived. Is it enough to accept what our mothers and fathers believed? Can we be saved by accepting that? Or is there more to the Christian experience? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if it was something that challenged our intellect and being throughout our lives instead of just some “body of beliefs”...a mantra of doctrine that gets recited over and over and memorized so that we’re sure what it means to be a solid member of the “true” Catholic faith...or the “true” Lutheran faith...or the “true” Methodist faith...or the “true” Baptist faith. Uh-oh...I’m starting to step on some toes, aren’t I? Fact is, though, that true Christianity requires those who would follow it to examine how it was revealed through Christ! He showed that doctrine was just the foundation to a way of life! A way of life, by the way, led by all the citizens of heaven! Let me illustrate the point here. Let’s challenge ourselves a minute concerning the rudiments of our beliefs. Let’s pick some...no. Let’s pick just one that’s common to all Christianity and ask:

Do we still need THE LAW in order to love God and love each other...and not hate and desire to murder our enemies? Would we murder them if there were no law that says we must not do it?

If we’re still at this point, we’re still “Babes” and we’re not ready for Satan’s last attack...his final great deception! Do you prefer the thunders of Sinai? Or would you rather hear the “still small voice” of truth...which Satan cannot duplicate because the truth is not with him?

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Ask yourself this: Why DO you obey? Is it because God has the power to reward and the power to destroy? Is that good enough? Or is it because you want to please God? That seems like a good and proper thing to do, but does it satisfy you? Will it last you throughout eternity if you're not in harmony with God? Or do you obey God because you've seen the results of the choices made against Him...because you have enough experience behind you now to see that all God has asked of us is for the good of the universe...because you see that He is right and agree with His judgments and admire His wisdom and His love for His creatures?

God is waiting for us to get this right! At least...He's waiting for those that will be able to stand alone at the end of days to get it right! Why is it that this is so hard to see? What makes us complicate it so? Are we still so pre-occupied with what God has done for us...with our own salvation...that we think the whole thing is about us? Are we missing the understanding of the plan of salvation in its cosmic proportion...in the context of the great controversy between God and Lucifer, involving the entire universe...and the only way to safety? I think so.

If you wonder whether you've grown in Christianity or not, ask yourself this: Do you still demand vengeance on your enemies? In order for justice to be served to your satisfaction...do you require "tit for tat" so to speak? An "eye for an eye" and a "tooth for a tooth"? Is that your idea of justice? Do you suppose it's God's idea too? Do you demand that your enemies suffer all that they deserve in the "final fires at the end of time" or you (or God for that matter) will not be satisfied? Is that what you think justice "demands"? **OR** are you ready to join the Father as He CRIES when all this happens: as He watches His children reap the consequences of their own rebellious choice? God does NOT turn His back on these rebels. He watches...in anguish...as they die...as their light goes out! Yes, He cries over the loss of Lucifer and the rest of the family. Does this astound you? Should it? Doesn't that little admonition from Jesus just "ring" in your ears right now: "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the sons of your Father in heaven." That quote comes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:44 and 45.

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If you still desire vengeance, though you call it justice, you're acting like a little child in this faith! Hard to take, isn't it...but accurate? What do you think? What makes sense to you now after all we've examined? The Apostle Paul was like this in his adulthood. Remember? When he was called Saul and he ran around persecuting Christians, putting them in jail or to death because they didn't believe as he did and he regarded them as enemies? But he grew up! And he put away childish things:

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” 1st Corinthians 13:11 (RSV)

There's a time in life when it's appropriate to be a child: to believe what we're told and to do what we're told. But...while the enemy is still abroad...while we're still children, we need protection! We need the emergency measures to help us believe and do what is right! God's been willing to give them to us and we should thank Him for it. HOWEVER...in the last days, there will be no protection! Satan will twist (has already) the emergency measures to support his own position...to put God in a very bad light. He will cause the scriptures to be sifted, rifled and abused such that meaningful passages and stories will be passed off as preposterous legend. He will even be able to convince a great majority that he doesn't even exist! Ask around...who believes in Satan anymore? Can't you just hear Dana Carvey as the “Church Lady” on Saturday Night live? SATAN?

We need to “grow up” to handle this. Job was grown up! Consider the ways the adversary tried to break him down and undermine his trust in God! First his assets were taken away; then his family; next his reputation and finally his health. Consider this! All of it was with a view toward affecting his theology...his picture of God! For many of us, any one of these attacks would've done it! We'd have been whining: “Why, God? WHY ME? What did I do to you?” Our faith would've been severely tried. But Job lost it all. You know what his greatest trial was in it all? It was the great stress he went through when his friends came to comfort him with “their theology”! Suppose it could get to be this way in the last days to come? You can bet it

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will...and we'll be defenseless unless we truly know God the way Job did: as a true Friend and Father, as well as a Sovereign.

It seems to me that a great deal of Christian theology today is pre-occupied with our "legal" standing before God. God's relationship with us is anything but "legal"! Could it be **that** is the reason why God waits? Is He waiting for us to grow up into a much larger understanding of the **truth**? Without that understanding, we'll never survive the time of trouble we're told is coming in the book of Revelation. So, the Apostle Paul gives us this rock-solid counsel:

"Put on all the armour which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. Stand firm, I say, Fasten on the belt of truth..." Ephesians 6:11-14 (NEB)

Come on, now. We know what the truth is! It's the GOOD NEWS ABOUT OUR GOD! Let's share that with everybody we contact that has an interest! God is waiting for us to do this, and He can't wait much longer!

Chapter # 19:

How Soon Will This All Be Over?

Pay attention to this question now: I'm not asking "when" will this all be over, but "how soon?" There's quite a difference if you think about it. Our last three chapters have talked about "when":

Chapter 16 – We studied about the messages of the three angels: God will come when His children on this planet have fully responded to His last pleading;

Chapter 17 - We studied that God will come when His children are so settled in the truth that they can resist Satan's final effort to deceive; and

Chapter 18 - We studied that God will come when His children are such grown-up believers that they can not only survive the time of trouble (or tribulation), but, like Job, speak well and truly of our heavenly Father.

OK...all right then. That's when He will come. So...how soon is that going to happen? Do you think, maybe... in your lifetime? Why would you think that? Why wouldn't you think that? Go ahead; take the quiz! These are not new questions! More than 1900 years ago, the disciples put this question to Jesus:

"Tell us, when will this be and how can we tell when You're coming back and the world will come to an end"?
Matt.24:3 (Beck)

Jesus responded by sharing a lot with His disciples. You can read about it further in Matthew chapter 24. But Jesus admitted that, in His humble human form, even He didn't know "when" His Father was coming...the day and the hour. Here are His own words:

"But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father."
Matt. 24:36 (NEB)

Now these very words raise an interesting debate. Was Jesus saying that, at the time He was speaking, no one knew the day or the hour? Or was Jesus saying that, forever and ever until He got the secret word

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from the Father to return, no one would ever know the day or the hour? Fundamental churches teach the latter concept, and I was taught that from my youth. I'm not so sure I believe it today, because I came across passages in the Bible that seem to indicate otherwise. Look at this one, for example:

"...If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Revelation 3:3 (KJV)

John the beloved wrote the book of Revelation when he was exiled on the Island of Patmos. He, himself, heard Jesus say years before that no one knew the day or the hour of Jesus' coming. But in his vision on Patmos, He heard Jesus tell him that "if he didn't watch", the coming would be upon him like a thief. The implication for him and for us is that if we do keep watch, we will know the day or the hour. That's heady stuff isn't it? There's no "magic" referred to there...no requirement of being a minister or priest or saint or anything other than a plain believer, eager, working for the coming of the Lord, watching and hoping for it!

Jesus indicated that there was something much more important than knowing the exact time of His coming again. He indicated that it was *more important* to trust Him and *be willing to wait!* Remember Chapter 3 – "All God Asks Of Us Is Trust!"? If only we would trust Him enough to be willing to wait...to be ready for His coming no matter when that might be! We really don't need to know the exact time...all will be well with the God we have come to know and trust!

"Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me...I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also." John 14: 1, 3 (NEB)

THIS is truly the perspective to have! Don't you agree?

So, let's admit the truth about ourselves now, anyway. We're intrigued about the "time" thing, aren't we? It shouldn't make us anxious or fearful...but it sure is interesting! Well, Jesus did give us

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some details about it. You could certainly “ballpark” the time of His coming:

“Then, if anyone says to you: ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ – do not believe him. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear. They will perform great miracles and wonders in order to deceive even God’s chosen people, if possible....Or if people should tell you, ‘Look, he is out in the desert!’ – don’t go there; or if they say: ‘Look! He is hiding here!’ - Don’t believe it. For the Son of Man will come like lightning which flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west...And all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other.” Matt 24: 23,24,26, 27,30,31 (GNB)

Wow! He gave some more signs in Matthew 24 too:

- Disturbances in earth and sky
- Growing distrust between nations
- The rise of false religious leaders
- False prophets and imitators will perform miracles
- The false teaching that His coming would be in “secret”, that He would hide out.

Does anyone today believe that Jesus came back already in secret? This may surprise you, but it is one of the teachings of our Jehovah Witness friends. As you can see from Matthew 24 above, it is not exactly Biblical. There is no place in the Bible that you can find this teaching. On the contrary, John’s vision in the book of Revelation clearly says otherwise:

“Look! He is coming in the clouds! Everyone will see Him, including those who pierced Him. All peoples on earth will mourn over Him. So shall it be.” Revelation 1:7 (GNB)

How is that going to happen? Some think that, through the technology of television, every eye shall see Him. Others believe the earth will be

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“peeled” like the skin of an onion so that all can see the east from where He comes. No matter the means, it will be quite an event.

Let’s look back to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 some more. In verse 30 He says: “all people of earth will weep at His coming.” Why would that be? Long before Jesus walked the earth, Isaiah talked about his vision of the end. Isaiah seems to contradict Jesus in chapter 25, verse 9:

“In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’” (NIV)

So...what’s that all about? Was Jesus wrong? We know He read Isaiah, because Luke records a special and tense scene in the synagogue one day when Jesus read from Isaiah (Luke 4: 16 – 20). By now we ought to feel pretty confident that Jesus surely wasn’t wrong! There does appear to be a conflict that’s confusing here though...and we should be able to resolve it because God is not the author of confusion (1st Corinthians 14:33). Let’s draw on what we’ve studied.

We learned that almost everyone on earth will follow the “beast power” talked about in Revelation 13...the chapter that discusses Satan’s final effort to deceive the earth. In verse 8, John says:

“And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (KJV)

Not all will succumb to the power and demands of the beast then. Those who choose to remain loyal to God and are not deceived by the beast power will stand at the end. When Jesus comes however, even though He’s still in human form, how is the world going to react? John says in Revelation 6:16:

“They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’” (GNB)

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Why are the people of earth going to feel this way toward their God? It's implied in Isaiah 25:9 above. Those that chose the side of God and came to know God through study and experience with Him have come to trust Him, and trust Him completely. They believe Him and His promise to save them! Their tears are tears of joy! The rest of the people on earth have not learned this! And why haven't they? Because they entrusted their religion to the “wisdom of men”. They didn't study and experience for themselves. They let “things” (money, the job, objects, power and influence of various sorts) be their gods instead of the One True God. They, therefore, were led to accept the lies about the One True God as the truth! They never came to know the Gospel...which is the real TRUTH about God! So, indeed, everyone will weep at the second coming of Jesus! Sadly, for most, the tears shed will be for terror and regret. For a small loyal group, however, the tears shed will be for joy!

As I wrote this, we were in yet another election year. George W. Bush and Al Gore seemed to be in a dead heat to win the nominations of their respective parties (as it turned out, it was quite a “heat”!). Each tip-toed around the “Christian right” as that term has been applied to vocal opposition to abortion and other conservative viewpoints. Each needed the support of that group to win the presidency. An independent group, led by Pat Buchanan, seemed to be poised to throw a “wrench” into the political process by splitting the vote of the American people three ways over issues of conservatism and values...values that affected many liberals as well. The prognosis for November was unclear.

Pat Buchanan appealed to “the religious right” with the promise that if he was elected, he would run this country according to the dictates of the Bible. Did that win you over? Were you comfortable with that? Would you be pleased to have laws passed and enforced such that everyone would have to obey and conform to a dictated society? Would you be pleased having Pat or George or Al or anyone else tell you how to believe? What to do? Has legislation ever been successful in changing the hearts of people? Did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 change the hearts of whites toward people of color...particularly toward African American people? Has racism gone away since 1964? I don't want to go too far down this path, for

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the sake of staying on the course of this chapter. But it's important for us to remember the tenor of this entire book, what it says about our God and the way He runs His government. We've learned that God doesn't use force; that it is not a successful course to follow with intelligent creatures. Intelligent creatures like us must be convinced through a demonstration of the evidence. The real trouble with us is that the majority of us are not willing and committed to use the intelligence we have been given.

The face of Jesus, when He comes, will cause two reactions. We've seen them demonstrated in the Bible very poignantly: the reaction of Judas and the reaction of Peter. So, what do I mean by this...is Jesus two-faced? No, no. But there are two distinct reactions with one thing in common: each will feel unworthy of welcoming Jesus. One will feel afraid and call upon the rocks to fall on him and hide him from the God he feels will be pretty angry with him...ready to torture and kill him. This "Judas-type" represents those who didn't take the time to get to know their God. In this group will be a large majority who even reject Him, who didn't believe He was real. The other, the "Peter-type" will also feel unworthy of themselves. They, however will have come to know a God who loves them in a way they can barely understand. They will have confidence in this love, in God's promises to them and in God Himself. They trust Him to save them in spite of themselves.

Now let me ask you this very serious question: When Jesus comes, are you gonna be afraid? If your answer is affirmative, you need to take more time with Him. Go back to Chapter One and run through this book a couple of times. Don't give up on God, and He won't give up on you! Give up on Him, and you eventually leave Him no choice. He won't force you.

Some of us can't wait for this world to come to an end! The "old saints" in the church, as well as people who have had a pretty rough time, are more than willing for it all to end. But God waits! I have to tell you...I'm glad He waited for me! I know there are others in the boat I was in! The great God of love waits until they've had the chance to hear the "Truth" and make an intelligent choice. Often Satan, in the great war that exists here yet, interferes with God's

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patience. He kills people through his influence, wars, maladies, famines, “accidents”, “acts” of nature, etc., etc. The victims of this interference ultimately fall into the hands of the loving God we’ve come to know in these chapters. Do you trust Him to make the right judgement about these poor victims? Or do you blame Him for what’s happened to them? If we really want this to be over, we must be prepared and willing to share that “Truth” about God with others who desperately need to know it. There are many looking for this truth, you don’t have to “force” yourself upon them. You may need to lovingly ask...to put aside your pride or your fear of rejection.

Let’s look at a couple examples of God’s patience with people. No where is it more keenly demonstrated than in the Old Testament of the Bible. Consider this passage:

“The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them his messengers, because he had compassion on his people; ...but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against the people, till there was no remedy.”
2nd Chronicles 36: 15, 16 (RSV)

There it is, one of those statements where the Bible seems to say: “God put up with them until they finally teed Him off so bad that He lost His temper. Well that is one way of looking at it, I suppose. But there is another way, more consistent with the patient God of love we all want to believe exists. The Bible clearly tells us, time and again, that our God is a God of love. We need to know that the Bible doesn’t lie, so we need to understand statements like the one in 2nd Chronicles above. The Chronicles are interesting books. They contain what their title suggests: a Chronicle of the happenings to the chosen people of God over millenniums of their history. There are 29 chapters to the first book and 36 chapters to the second book. This quote is more than half-way through the last chapter of the second book!

- Lots of water had gone under the bridge in God’s experience with His chosen by this time!
- We’ll refer to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible this time to get a consistent picture of God.

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- Ask yourself here: what was God to do? What was His wrath?

If you start at the beginning of 2nd Chronicles Chapter 36, you get more of a feel for what was happening here. The turnover of kings of Israel became worse and worse in their behavior and rejection of God. So finally in verse 17 we find:

“Therefore he(God) brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged; he gave them all into his hand.” (RSV)

As we read before (See Pg. 104 of Ch. 8 and Pg. 129 of Ch. 9), God’s wrath was to finally let them reap the results of their choice. They didn’t want Him or His protection, so He let them experience what they thought they wanted. It was clear that they didn’t want Him! Was God anxious to give them up in this way? Did they finally “get His goat” and light off His temper? We should know better by now. Look at verse 21:

“to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

You see, in the ordinances that God gave His people to guide their thinking and their life-style, He said that every 7 years the land was supposed to enjoy a “Sabbath” also. Nothing was to be planted in it. You can find the ordinance in Leviticus 25:4. My point is this: the word of the Lord through Jeremiah was that if God’s children didn’t heed His counsel, they were going to spend 70 years in Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 25:11). They were to spend one year for each “Sabbath” that the land didn’t get. Since the land was supposed to “get a Sabbath” every 7th year, and it had 70 of them coming...God’s children had been ignoring Him on this and other issues for 7x70 years or 490 years!! That’s how long God had been sending messengers and prophets with words of reform and an appeal to loyalty! So this action on God’s part can hardly seem arbitrary, can it? Nor can it seem a fit of temper or rage. It’s clear that Israel simply wasn’t going to listen to God anymore. 490 years is pretty solid evidence of that fact. They

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rejected God! They kicked Him out! He let them experience it. Fortunately for them, this was still “discipline”! God only “seemed” to abandon them. Lots of saints grew up in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends; Ezra; and Jeremiah among them!

Sometimes this patience of God has been misunderstood to mean “*we can go on sinning with impunity*” (without consequences). NOTHING could be further from the truth! Nothing could make less sense. Is God too good or too kind to turn us over eventually to reap the consequence of our choices? There are some “feel good” churches that preach this sort of thing, but the Apostle Paul was pretty straightforward about it:

“Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God’s generosity and patient mercy toward you as weakness on His part? Don’t you realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” Romans 2:4 (Phillips)

God’s patience has sometimes puzzled His trusting children...as in the days of Habakkuk. His words came from near the end of the seventh century, B.C., at a time when the Babylonians were in power. He was deeply disturbed by the violence of these cruel people and asked the Lord, “so why are You silent while they destroy people who are more righteous than they are?” The Lord’s answer was that He would take action in His own good time, and meanwhile, “Those who are righteous will live because they are faithful to God”. Those who consider themselves God’s friends will have faith that He will act and do it timely. They must have patience, however, because God is not like man. His love and mercy endureth forever! So Habakkuk complained a few times to God in his little book. His appeal from Chapter 1, verse 12 through God’s answer in Chapter 2, verse 4 is precious, insightful and worthy of commitment to memory. Read it and come back. Isn’t it wonderful how, if you are a friend of God, you can say just exactly what’s on your mind? Habakkuk sure didn’t have any problems with that! God’s response to Him was “Trust Me...give Me time to work things out. I will, you know, I promise!” That famous response in Habakkuk 2:4, the second part, is often quoted:

“The just shall live by faith!” (KJV)

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You must have heard it many times, for it was a motto of Martin Luther's. It is often misquoted and misunderstood as relating to forgiveness. Paul quoted it in Romans (where Martin Luther read it!) and Galatians:

"The just shall live by faith." Rom. 1:17 and Gal 3:11 (KJV)

Yup. The same words in all three places. Paul was not talking about forgiveness here, however, he was talking about trusting God and in Him enough to be willing to wait for Him to accomplish whatever in His own good time!

In these last days, God's patience gives His enemies the opportunity to misinterpret His graciousness as *weakness*...to scoff at His apparent inability to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion...to bring many to doubt whether He even exists at all! They certainly have been deceived enough at this point to doubt that Satan exists at all either! I had a serious luncheon with a colleague not two weeks ago in which she asked me about my spiritual life and beliefs. She knew I was committed to it and she wanted to know how I was able to "fit in" at work, being a Christian. She admitted to being a "nominal" Christian herself, but she rejected the picture of God that she got from her church. She proceeded at length to tell me the details of her last confession (about 10 years earlier). She was absolutely taken aback that I could believe that Satan exists.

This would be a good time for you to read all of 2nd Peter Chapter 3, especially verses 3 & 4 which I'll quote here:

"First of all you must understand that in the last days some people will appear whose lives are controlled by their own lusts. They will make fun of you and will ask, 'He promised to come didn't He? Where is He? Our fathers have already died, but everything is still the same as it was since the creation of the world!'" 2nd Peter 3:3,4 (GNB)

No, nothing has changed...and nothing ever will!! But Peter goes on to explain the real reason for the delay in verse 9:

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“The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.” (GNB)

Do you remember what “sins” are? How we defined them in our introduction? If not, please go back and refresh your memory. This is the kind of definition you’ll want to give to your children. You should remember it yourself too...don’t let it get any more complicated than that!

St. Peter goes on in this Chapter to give the same advice that St. Paul did in Romans 2:4 above. I’ll summarize the thought in my own words. See if you agree starting at verse 15:

“Look on God’s patience with you as your opportunity to be saved! Get to know Him for who He is...be won over as a friend so you can become an admirer and an emulator!”

Sometimes God’s incredible patience and graciousness has even been an embarrassment to some of His people. One of the most interesting illustrations of this is the story of Jonah. It’s just a little book, only four itty- bitty chapters! That’s right, I want you to read the whole thing. You think you know the story...but you only think you know it! That’s because you’ve heard it told so many times. It’s often referred to as one of those “legends” in the Bible. Yeah, the guy was swallowed by a whale because God was teed-off at him. He actually lived in its belly for three whole days! You know the story, right? Wrong. Go read it now, and come back.

Surprised? There was a lot more to it than you remembered wasn’t there? OK, let’s recap. The first chapter tells what we most remember. God tells Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh that their city will be destroyed if they don’t change their ways. Jonah absolutely hates the Ninevites, however, so he bolts for the harbor. He thinks he’s going to hide out in Spain (Duh! Earth to Jonah...anybody home?). While on ship, a storm comes up. The sailors find out that Jonah is to blame and they throw him overboard whereupon Jonah is swallowed by “a large fish”. He stays in there for three days and

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nights to think the whole thing over. The fish vomits him up on a beach, and again God asks him to go warn Nineveh. Under considerable pressure here, Jonah acquiesces (oh all right. He gives in). He was hardly a volunteer...certainly not your typical missionary. Yet he held the honor of being one of God's prophets! He was asked to deliver a dangerous message to a dangerous people...and he finally did it. Jonah stalked the streets of Nineveh shouting "repent in 40 days or else". Then he went up to a hillside to enjoy the destruction, because he really hated those guys! BUT...it didn't happen!! The people of Nineveh listened to God. They were not destroyed therefore! Many people think it was because God changed his mind about those people. The fact is...those people changed their mind about God! In any event, Jonah was pretty miffed. He says something astounding in the very last chapter, chapter 4 verses 1-3:

"Jonah was very unhappy about this and became angry. So he prayed, 'Lord, didn't I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That's why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always ready to change your mind and not punish. Now then, Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive.'"

How about that guy? Think of this man knowing God that well in Old Testament times. Those are words used by Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah...the greats! They knew God!

How often...today...do you hear such words uttered about our God? Hmmm? Is the story of Jonah known for this? Is that the first thing that came to your mind when I said we'd look at this story? Is it one of the first stories that comes to your mind when you think of an illustration of God's love for people? When's the last time you heard that preached?

Back to the story: Jonah was embarrassed! He told the Ninevites that they were gonna get it. Now he looked like a fool! Besides, he wanted to see them "get it"! He hated those "unrighteous" heathens. Look at how God tried to reason with Jonah over this whole thing. The remainder of Chapter 4 tells the story of God's illustration of the truth to Jonah through the creation and death of a little plant.

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Jonah got pretty upset with God all over again because of the death of that little plant that gave him some shade. But look at God’s lesson:

“This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next: you didn’t do anything for it and you didn’t make it grow – yet you feel sorry for it. How much more, then, should I have pity on Nineveh, that great city. After all, it has more than 120,000 innocent children in it, as well as many animals.”
Jonah 4:10, 11 (GNB)

Yes...God even had a concern for the animals! You see, he never wanted that sacrificial system we studied about in Chapter Eleven! His eye is on the sparrow!

Let’s go back now to what some of us would call “contemporary” history! For many, all of American history is contemporary because of the short time the United States of America has existed. Between 150 and 200 years ago, however, there was an interesting phenomenon of spiritual and religious revival in the Northeast as well as in England and large parts of Europe. There was actually a world conviction that the 2nd coming of Christ was very near. Yes! That’s true and documentable! Students of prophecy in a variety of churches (Methodist; Baptist; Lutheran and Anabaptists in particular) became concerned that they might be living very near the end of time as we know it. They were studying Daniel and noticing its similarity to the book of Revelation. In particular, they were pinpointing what they considered to be the end of a prophecy of 2300 days. They were noticing signs that Christ pointed to in Matthew 24...especially verse 29:

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky.” Matt. 24:29 (NIV)

In May...specifically May 19, 1780, they saw the sun darkened so that you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face! The moon would not give its light either. On November 13, 1833 there was a meteor shower the likes of which have never been seen before or since. People in Mexico and other South American countries were committing suicide in large numbers for fear of what was coming on the world! Students

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and scholars alike were noticing lines in the prophecies of Daniel that seemed to point to events to happen in 1798 and 1844. Such an accumulation of signs and evidence led a great many people to believe that the 2nd advent of Christ was eminent. On a chilly night in October of 1844, thousands awaited on hillsides, having sold their farms and belongings, only to be greatly disappointed that Jesus did not come! Around that period of time a number of contemporary American religions were born: Christian Science; Mormons; Jehovah Witnesses; Spiritists; and Seventh-day Adventists. It wasn't one date...or one event...but an accumulation of events, a combination of a lot of evidence that brought about serious Bible study and re-examination. God has always worked this way with people: not just a little here and a little there...but LOTS of evidence.

A small group of people that came out of this experience decided that it was time to give and spread the last three angels' warnings in Revelation chapter 14. This is all part of religious history! Today, yet, there are literally millions the world over that agree with those insights of well over 150 years ago!

Now the "early ones" didn't read the signs entirely correctly, that's obvious. The signs weren't a signal to "pack up for the trip to heaven". They were, rather, a call from God to prepare the whole world for His coming! That's why we're still here...because we haven't done it yet! Who is the "we" I'm referring to here anyway? It's all those of us who recognize the truth about God and the very great privilege He has given us to participate in spreading the loving message that draws men back to Him in trust. Is that anybody in any particular religion? Well there are certainly those in various religions that seem to think it's their sole job and responsibility! But God's people are in all religions. According to the Bible, they are few. That's sad, isn't it? But also, according to the Bible, the opportunity and hope for many is real! The responsibility for awakening is on the shoulders of those who see and choose. They should be made alive by the challenge before them.

It's true that things haven't happened as quickly as early aspirants to Christ's coming thought they would. Those signs in the sun, moon and stars are now well over 200 year old. Should we be

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surprised...or even ashamed that our God would be willing to wait this long? Preaching about the “end of time” has been going on for centuries now. Is it embarrassing to continue? Whose reputation are we concerned about anyhow? Are we concerned about *ours* or God’s? Even Hollywood has been moved that times are a bit more decadent and more worthy of judgment. Hence movies like “The 7th Seal” or, more recently “The End of Days”. But the message of these movies is that somehow, mankind can delay the wrath of God and the destruction of the world. It is a view totally unacquainted with the Good News. That may be due to the fact that a great many “believers” think that the Good News is all about them and what’s been done for them. I just can’t seem to emphasize this enough:

The GOOD NEWS...the GOSPEL...is not about US! We too often make that mistake. The Good News is about Our God! And it’s not about what He has done for us...it’s about who He is! It’s about what He is like...that would cause Him to do for us what’s been done!

GET THIS PLEASE: If, by our failure to complete our task we have contributed to the delay in Christ’s coming, then we deserve to be ashamed. **BUT:**

The longer God waits, the more gracious He looks! His delay only confirms the Good News. We should look upon it with pride and gratitude! We should not make the same mistake that Jonah made!

God needs better spokesmen than Jonah proved to be! Reluctant teachers of the truth...themselves moved by guilt, fear or obligation...are a very sad denial of the Good News! God is waiting for people who look eagerly for His coming and work to hasten it on:

“Look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on.” 2nd Peter 3:12 (NEB)

So...now again to the question that began this chapter: “How much longer?” Well, you can bet the farm on this:

- God will wait as long as there is hope for anyone!

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- He will not wait forever...He is a God of time and order as well as a God of love and mercy.
- He will wait as long as it makes sense to wait...and not a moment longer.

No one wants more to bring an end to distrust, recreate the earth and give it back to its “rightful” occupiers than God does!

So, again, when will it end? Only God, who knows all our thoughts, will know when all final decisions have been made. That’s why Jesus gave the advice He did in Matthew 24:44:

“So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting Him.” (GNB)

BUT: in case we think we’ll always remain in the dark about this, remember Paul’s counsel in 1st Thessalonians 5:4:

“But you, brothers are not living in darkness, and so the day will not like a thief take you by surprise.” (Kliest and Lilly)

We know what is to come...what must take place. How soon do you think the conflict will be over? Will you work to help make it happen?

Chapter # 20:

Peace at Last!

Well...here we are at the end of our journey to learn the truth about our heavenly Father. Just 19 chapters ago we began this journey by remembering that there once was peace throughout the universe. Yes, yes...but peace with whom? Peace with every existent being everywhere! There was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other, all of them trusted their Heavenly Father, and He in turn could safely trust in them. Is that the definition of peace? It appeals to me, I'll say that for it! But Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says:

Peace – *Pees*, from old French (*Pais*) and that from the Latin “*Pax*”, meaning to agree. *It's a state of tranquility; freedom from civil disturbance; a state of security and order...harmony in personal relations; an end to hostilities!*

Shalom (in the Hebrew) – *Safe...(Well, Happy, Friendly, Health and Welfare)...prosperity, rest, whole.*

Eirene (in the Greek) – meant to join...to set at one again!

Remember the beginning? There once was peace...trust. Then came WAR! With it came:

- Distrust over false charges
- God's long, patient demonstration of the *TRUTH!*
- Confusion over the nature of the conflict:
 1. Mere obedience to the rules?
 2. The character and government of God Himself!

Victory for God in this war is not the destruction of His enemies! Many believe that's how the whole thing ends! God gets good and angry...He absolutely loses His cool and does the unthinkable: He wades into sinners with blind fury, annihilating them left and right. Given all we've studied, does that make sense? Do you think God would do that? Here are a couple of hints:

- Who are His enemies? Those of His own family that no longer trust Him or in Him

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- Who is and has always been most powerful? Well, God always has been. He could've wiped out those who disagree with Him long before. Why now all of a sudden? And why in such a fit of rage?

This is not about Brute Power...it's about TRUTH (real power!). There is no victory for God in this war unless what went wrong is set right again. Think about this a minute: Could there ever be peace again if God really were the kind of being and personality that Satan has made Him out to be:

Arbitrary;Exacting;Vengeful;Unforgiving;Severe?

This reminds me of the old (really old) joke: What do you feed an 800 pound Gorilla? Answer: Anything it wants! Many people, even theologians, see God this way. "God is, at times, arbitrary," they'll say. "but...as the Sovereign of the Universe...He has every right to be!" These same people see God as "getting even" with the bad guys at last. God gets His vengeance, all right, but they refer to it as "justice". They think it's unfair unless God "evens" everything out. They will go to the grave holding God accountable for this. Most people are a little hesitant to call God unforgiving and severe...it usually doesn't quite come out that way. Instead they "couch" the accusation abstractly saying "gentle Jesus is our Intercessor...our friend in heaven...pleading with the Father to forgive us."

Does peace with God constitute a "cease fire"? Have God and His creatures been firing on one another? Has it been that kind of war? Grenades; bullets; rockets; nukes? I think we know better than that. The war has been, and still is, a battle for the mind. A contest over trust...a weighing of the facts and a decision over what truth is.

The Apostle Paul was delighted to bring the message of peace with God to the Gentiles. In Romans 5:1 he said that sinners can indeed be restored to peace with God! The KJV and the RSV use the term "justified" as though the bringing of peace were a legal transaction: Pardon. The real transaction, however, is one of awareness! It's an enlightenment about God! The GNB states it a little more along these lines:

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*“Now that we have been put right with God through faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Now that we are aware of the complete, loving nature of our Father...now that we understand it to be no different than that demonstrated by His Son, we can *trust* Him and *trust in* Him! This brings peace!! God forgives and forgets! Remember chapter thirteen? God treats us as though we never sinned...as though we never wandered or ran away from Him! We won't feel uncomfortable around God. We need never worry that He will bring up our past because He won't. He doesn't treat us that way now and He surely won't when this is all over! He treats us just as though we never wronged Him...it's truly amazing. Without going back to chapter thirteen, how do we know this to be true? Was it a promise God made in the Bible, or a claim? Or was it, maybe, a demonstration of the evidence somewhere in the Bible? Of course! A beautiful demonstration story concerns God talking to Solomon about his father. This happened after David was dead, and Solomon was dedicating the temple he had built for God. God is quoted:

*“The Lord said to him (Solomon)... ‘If you walk before me
in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your Father
did... ’” 1st Kings 9:3,4 (NIV)*

There's God saying that David had integrity of heart, an upright guy! Isn't David the one that saw a gorgeous woman taking a bath...and plotted to “have” her? Uh-huh. It was a family thing for Solomon to understand too, for the gorgeous woman was his mother, Bathsheba! But she was married to someone else at the time David did this, remember? Her husband was a loyal officer in David's army. So David, the “upright” guy, had his generals place the officer at the front of the heaviest battle so that he was killed. It's what you might call a form of “murder” if you read the story through. How can this be? It's not the only instance where the Lord refers to David this way either. There's another major one long after David is gone. As a matter of fact, so many of David's household proved unworthy and disloyal to God that God took the Israeli monarchy away from David's family. The house of Jereboam was in rule. A few chapters down, God is

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speaking to His prophet Ahijah concerning a message He wanted the prophet to give Jereboam:

“...But you have not been like my servant David, who was completely loyal to me, obeyed my commands and did only what I approve of.” 1st Kings 14:8 (GNB)

What? How could God say that of David? David was a headstrong, bloody king who did a lot of whatever he felt like doing! He was teachable and repentant though, so much so that God paid him quite a compliment. He said, by way of St. Paul, the following:

*“I have found that David, the son of Jesse, is the kind of man I like, a man who will do all I want him to do.”
Acts 13:22 (GNB)*

This sounds even more dramatic in the King James Version:

“I have found David the son of Jesse a man after my own heart, which shall fulfill all my will.”

Yikes! There must be some explanation for this! And of course there is. These anecdotes back up the promises given in Hebrews:

“I will forgive their sins and will no longer remember their wrongs....And then He says ‘I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer.’” Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17

God did this for David...He’ll will do the same for us!! The peace we will have with God will indeed be an intimate friendship!

When Jesus walked among mankind, He came to bring peace with God the Father. He spent a lot of effort trying to get this across to the disciples at the last supper in the upper room. They, as well as most of Israel, wanted a peace enforced by the Messiah as ruler of the world. Jesus specifically denied that as His mission. On the contrary, He said:

*“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
Mat. 10:34 (GNB)*

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Jesus foresaw that belief in Him as the Messiah for the real purpose that He came would cause strife in that nation, even among family members. They were not interested in the Truth, it wasn't what most of them wanted to hear! It wasn't "peace" according to their terms.

*“Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does.”
John 14:27 (GNB)*

Jesus promised peace of mind, peace with the Father...not peace in the form of victory over the Romans. Paul knew this as well. In one of my favorite passages by him he encourages friendship with God through Christ:

“When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into His friends and gave us the task of making others His friends also. Our message is that God was making all mankind His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how he makes them His friends. Here we are then, speaking for Christ, as though God Himself were making His appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into His friends! 2nd Corinthians 5:17 – 20 (GNB)

See the beauty of this? Jesus wants you to be friends with God. He will help you achieve this, but He will not do it by paying some legal penalty so that God will not have to kill you after all! Jesus brought and brings us peace with God by showing the truth about God...that there is no need to be afraid of Him. Indeed, God and Jesus are the same! Jesus said, “...if you have seen me, you have seen the Father!”

Not everyone wants to be friends with God, however. I know that sounds strange, but it's true. The time will come when God will indeed give up those who refuse to trust Him and turn down the truth...those unwilling to listen...to let Him save and heal them. What a tragedy. They are misled into believing that they can survive on their

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own...that they are gods unto themselves. This is Satan's delusion, and they believe it. They will die! Not as a penalty...but as a consequence! God gave us all some of His very power, as the source of our lives! If we choose to separate ourselves from Him (remember, that's the definition of "sin"), we choose to separate ourselves from the source of life. We will cease to run, operate, function. That's all there is to it! God absolutely will not torture to death His dying children. Guess where that idea came from? Who could make up such a lie about God?

Yes, peace with God comes as a matter of choice. Jesus came to reveal the truth about His Father so that the choice could be intelligently made! Jesus worked hard against the prevailing religious teaching of His church! There are times when I think He would still be in that struggle if He were walking with us today! Some churches have found, through Bible Study, that the concept of an eternally burning hellfire that God commits "His enemies" to is just plain false. Yet some of their doctrines still intimate that there is a functional difference between God the Father and Jesus the Son. They teach that we may be assured of our salvation because we have a "friend in court". Jesus is not only our Defense Attorney, He is our Judge! The Father handed the Judgeship over to the Son so that, if anyone believes in Him, the Father won't condemn Him. In this way, before the court of the universe, we are able to "flim-flam" a not guilty! God the Father...the God of Justice...is unable to render such a verdict. He cannot and still be just! But His Son can! Isn't THAT good news? How do we get such reasoning? Jesus showed us that there is no need for Him to plead with the Father...that the Father Himself loves us!

THIS IS THE GREAT TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE!

This is the truth that brings EVERLASTING PEACE!

LIKE IT? WANT IT?

WOULD YOU GIVE UP ANYTHING TO HAVE IT?

The Easter season went by as I was writing this. Mardi Gras came and passed...then Ash Wednesday. Every time this season comes around I long for someone to mention the purpose of Christ's mission. This particular Easter was special to many in the world as their eyes were turned to watch Pope John Paul II worship in the Holy Lands. There was a lot of talk about peace...about us making nice

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with each other because that's what Jesus would want. But no one talked about the way in which peace occurs and the terrible price that Jesus paid to achieve it! The Apostle Paul mentions it in his letter to the Colossians:

“Through Him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to Himself, making peace through the shedding of His blood upon the cross.” Col. 1:20 (NEB)

That's a very direct statement about the cosmic nature of Jesus' experience, including the whole universe!

So then...how successful has God been at restoring peace?

- How about in heaven? Does “peace” prevail there?

Well, Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation would seem to indicate so. Chapter 12 in particular seems to indicate that there is finally peace in heaven, especially in verses 10 through 12. The inhabitants of heaven and the rest of the universe get it now. They've thrown Lucifer out!

- How about in the hereafter? Well, sure. Isaiah and Revelation chapters 20 through 22 state that we are in for peace for sure!

OK..ok. But what about “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men”? What kind of progress has God made at restoring that peace? That hits home! That's where I live! I must say...things don't look that good here. What's up with that? Remember, this world is the one place that Satan has had success. He has abused, and caused us to abuse, the blessing of free choice. Under his influence, many have chosen to twist the truth, causing argument, strife and even persecution over it. I cannot resist an over-powering example of this. Before I bring it to your attention, you all need to know that I am a white, reasonably affluent member of suburban America. Here is my example:

At the very base of the construct of the truth about our God is the fact that all men are created equal. This is a simple truth, one our

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forefathers had the wisdom and foresight to incorporate into our country's governance, even though they were not necessarily true to it. That truth, as well as our country's dedication to freedom of choice...those elements of who we are and what we stand for have enabled God to richly bless this country beyond many others that ignore such necessary values. But saying it and meaning it are two different things. Throughout the history of the United States, ethnic groups have had their battles: Slaves; Irish; Chinese; Italians; ad nauseum. In 1964, the plight of "negroes" in this country was so unjust that their cause reached the lawmakers of the land. The Civil Rights Act was enacted. Here we are, almost 40 years later. Is racism gone? Well...at least...aren't things better? After all, for the first time in our history, polls had shown that the American people would elect an African American into the highest office in the land (Colin Powell). So, have we been able to legislate a change of heart? You would have to be terribly dishonest with yourself to answer that in the affirmative. Anna Quindlen provided a heart-rending article in the March 13, 2000 edition of Newsweek Magazine entitled: "LAST WORD...The Problem of the Color Line". In the article she addresses a riddle: "Why is our most important issue the one no one really wants to talk about?" Racism not only exists, it prevails even in churches! And it's not just in these United States of America that this problem exists and rends the peace. It's in Rwanda between the Hutus and the Tutsis. It's in India and Pakistan. It's between cousins in the Middle East. It's in Kosovo and in hundreds of other places the world over. It's in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and similar Muslim countries toward the United States. Satan revels in it. How can Christians tolerate this or even foster it...and still bear the name of Christ? Shame! Blasphemy! How could anyone believe God approves of this? Such misrepresentation breaks His heart!

Well, Jesus knew the kind of world He came into. He also knew the adversary He was up against as a humble member of the human race. He foresaw what His demonstration of the Truth about God would cause and He warned about it:

"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; a man's

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*worst enemies will be the members of his own family.”
Matthew 10:34-36 (GNB)*

Indeed, the Jews of the time did not want to hear any talk of equality among men! They were the chosen! God favored them! They lost sight of their mission to the world given long before to one they revered: Moses –

*“I have taught you all the laws, as the Lord my God told me to do. Obey them in the land that you are about to invade and occupy. Obey them faithfully, and this will show the people of other nations how wise you are. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, ‘What wisdom and understanding this great nation has!’ No other nation, no matter how great, has a God who is so near when they need Him as the Lord our God is to us. He answers us whenever we call for help. No other nation, no matter how great, has laws so just as those that I have taught you today....The Lord your God is supreme over all gods and over all powers. He is great and mighty and He is to be obeyed. He does not show partiality, and he does not accept bribes. He makes sure that orphans and widows are treated fairly; he loves the foreigners who live with our people, and gives them food and clothes. So then, show love for those foreigners, because you were once foreigners in Egypt.”
Deuteronomy 4:6 – 8 and 10:17 – 19. (GNB)*

The Israelites were to be a light, an example for the rest of the world to follow. All nations were to join with them if they so chose. Fat chance for that in the time of Christ’s sojourn here!

Look at what the members of Christ’s own family did to him:

“He came to his home, and his own family did not welcome him.” John 1:11 (Goodspeed)

In fact, they told Him He had a devil...killed Him to silence Him! Remember this: The ones who rejected Christ and preferred Satan’s picture of God were the most pious group of 7th-day Sabbath-Keeping;

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Tithe-Paying; Vegetable-Eating; Health-Reforming; Bible-Studying worshippers the world has ever known!

St. Peter warned that those who accept the true picture of God may suffer as Christ did:

“Do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering.... Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ’s sufferings... Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ’s followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is resting on you.” 1st Peter 4: 12 – 14 (GNB)

It seems somewhat incongruous or hard to believe that those who hold such an enduring and loving picture of God will be persecuted doesn’t it? Where will such trouble come from? Oboy...you don’t think the Sabbath-Keeping; Tithe-Paying; Vegetable-Eating; Health-Reforming; Bible-Studying guys could be a part of it again...do you? (Hint, Hint: What does history do over and over?) Could you even entertain that thought just because it happened once before? (Take a look at the world around you...I mean the Christian world...the world of Islam...the world of Buddha and Vishna...these “peace-keepers”)

How about an encouraging word here? I know **I** could use one! St. Paul says that, if the Holy Spirit is with these people, He will bring peace!

“The Spirit, on the other hand, brings a harvest of love, joy, peace...” Galatians 5:22 (Weymouth)

How does the Holy Spirit bring peace? Is it a Divine “Tranq” for our feelings? Does it remind us of the truth? (WWJD?) This is another of those important areas that Jesus got into with gusto at the last supper:

“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14: 25,26 (NIV)

He said a lot there in that upper room! Look at the theme of it:

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“I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave; I have conquered the world...Father...eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God...I have glorified you on earth and finished the work you gave me to do.”

John 16:33; 17:1,3,4 (Jerusalem)

Is it possible to be convinced and accept this truth and be willing to give up anything to have this peace and yet still experience some unpeaceful strugglings within ourselves? This whole idea troubles many people. It troubled St. Paul! He wrote a lot about it with great personal experience:

“I see a different law at work in my body – a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of...It makes me a prisoner...What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me?”
Romans 7: 23, 24 (GNB)

But then he goes on with all of chapter 8 in the letter to the Romans. He describes the rescue:

- Right at the start: God does not condemn His struggling children!
- These habits of a lifetime do not change overnight!
- Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all on our side, pleading alongside Each Other for us to a witnessing universe. (vs. 27, 31, 34 of Chapter 8)

Read chapter 8. It's one of the more encouraging passages in all the Bible. It concludes like this:

“If God is for us, who can be against us?...I am certain that...neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers...will ever be able to separate us from the love of God.” *Romans 8:31,38 and 39 (GNB)*

Now if we do need discipline to overcome the bad habits, God will give it to us. But when it comes, we'll understand that God isn't angry with us. He's disciplining us because He loves us!

“Remember that the Lord your God corrects and punishes you

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just as a father disciplines his children.” Deut. 8:5 (GNB)

“Because the Lord corrects everyone he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a son...those who have been disciplined by such punishment reap the peaceful reward of a righteous life.” Hebrews 12:6 and 11 (GNB)

We won't allow the discipline to disturb our peace with God. We'll recognize it for what it is! Have you been “disciplined” lately? Are you happy about it? Well...are you at least at peace about it? Above all you should be grateful for it! I usually am...once it's over...long over! Fact is, though, I'm always chagrined at ever having placed myself in the need for discipline. It's a growing experience...like the rest of life.

So, here we are...eager to have peace restored in the universe again. If we've been set right with our God; and we've been won back to love and trust,...God can even turn our trials and troubles to our advantage! We started this chapter out with Romans 5, and we've come full circle again:

“We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character...”
Rom. 5:3,4 (Phillips)

To some of us (most I truly hope), these chapters about God have indeed been **Good News**...but they are hardly new concepts! They are centuries old, going back to the time before the 66 books of the Bible were even written! But surely the concept of true peace with God was clearly understood in Old Testament times, as is evidenced by the following:

“You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you.” Isaiah 26: 3,4 (GNB)

Look at how old that is...and so many of the other prophets agreed with him! We have it preserved in Britain somewhere in the Dead Sea

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Scrolls! St. Paul confirms that people in the Old Testament times had this Good News:

“For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith.”
Hebrews 4:2 (GNB)

It's important to get this point: **the Good News can be turned down!** Fact is, many will turn it down. Very many! They will treat God like an enemy and break His heart. I fully expect to see the tears stream down the face of God as He loses Lucifer and that great part of His family at the very end. If we're like God...as we're supposed to grow to be...tears will stream down our faces as well.

So...what will it be for us? Will you be won by the evidence? Will you share the *real* Good News...all of it...with others and so put them at peace with God?

“When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old spiritual, “Free at last, free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last.”

Martin Luther King
August 28, 1963

Conclusion:

The last chapter sort of sounded like a conclusion, didn't it? I'm not sure what this very brief piece should be called...or even exactly why I'm still writing. This book seemed to end pretty well at chapter 20! Yet I have a feeling of unrest...that this work is somehow not yet complete. Maybe it's because it took me so long to write it and edit it and get people's opinions and work some bugs out. Maybe it's because so much has happened since I first undertook to put this all in the form of a book. Writers probably aren't supposed to reveal these kinds of things, otherwise they'd go crazy trying to keep their work up to date! Well, I don't consider myself a writer. That may be apparent! I do think this topic is timely though as well as timeless. I think I know what's bothering me and I feel the need to share it with you.

This book was really pretty well finished about six months ago. Six months ago was September of 2001. You know what happened then. The numbers 9/11 will be forever engraved upon the minds of everyone in the world. As I put these last few paragraphs together, Israel has invaded the Palestinians in the name of the "War on Terror". We refer to the happenings in the Middle East as "unrest". My, my...how we choose our words. "Unrest" indeed! I don't think we've ever witnessed so many people, men and women, willing to blow themselves up in the hopes of taking more of the "enemy" with them. This whole thing is over religion. Has been for milleniums. What kind of picture do the people in the Middle East have of God? How I wish I could share the concepts in this book with all of them. Suppose they'd listen? Or do you suppose they'd "crucify" anyone who brought these ideas to them? The undertaking seems an impossible task doesn't it?

Lest you think I'm prejudiced toward Arabs and Jews, the same observations could be made in Northern Ireland. The situation in the Middle East seems to have taken the focus off the strife in the North Sea, but it rages on. Pick a place in the world and I'll show you religious strife of one sort or another there. Will it ever change? If you read and study the Bible, you'll know that the world will go on deteriorating this way until Christ comes again the second time. It's in the prophecies.

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So, what of it? "Insh Allah" as the Muslims say? It is the will of God and we can do nothing about it? To even suggest that is to refute almost every line of type on the previous pages. Our quest must be to make sure that we as individuals become right with God again. If we do (and we certainly can), we've made our contribution to the future of universal peace. To influence change for the better, we must start with ourselves. We must clearly see and admire the God who made us so as to become changed into His friends. It doesn't happen overnight...but if we want it to happen it will. We will relate to God differently and, as a consequence, we will relate to each other differently...the way God originally intended. Don't you want that? Don't you want it for everybody?

I feel the need to confess some failures in this book too. It starts with a claim on the very first page that it's a work that your fifth-grader can understand. That surely was my hope...but I've reread this thing a number of times now. I've failed miserably in that area. Despite that, it is my hope that you've benefited...that the ideas were somehow expressed with more clarity and simplicity. There's power in simplicity you know.

My sister and a few others told me that chapter 5 was, perhaps a bit insensitive toward Mormon and Muslim believers. "It's just not politically correct, if you know what I mean". She said. It bothered me and still does. I feel the need to apologize to any Mormon or Muslim believers for unintended offense. I probably lost any Mormon or Muslim readers by that chapter. They're possibly not here to receive the apology. Others, however, said the examples were informative and useful in making the point that we need to read and discover things on our own rather than take others' word for it when it comes to beliefs this important. It's a dilemma for me. I would appreciate feedback from anyone on how to more tactfully handle this subject matter.

It is my hope that you've caught a "glimpse" of the cosmic/universal nature of what we're all involved in...that these chapters have provided you with some of the answers about God you've been looking for all your life. I don't want much do I? Sincerely though, I want so much for you to realize the privilege you have in participating in this great demonstration. You can play a part

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in vindicating the God that loves you so! You can understand the purpose that God has for you...why you are here...what you're supposed to do...what He expects of you, and where you go from here! Don't tell me those questions haven't crossed your mind.

You might be asking yourself why on earth I should care about what crosses your mind; why I should care at all about what happens to you. I don't even know you. Well, it ought to be apparent that I'm not doing this for the money! It may be the first time I've undertaken anything requiring this much effort without being concerned about money! In the preface I think I told you that I'm a CPA. I know a pretty fair amount about money, how to make it...how to keep as much of it as possible...how to make it grow. But this has nothing to do with money. If you've paid for this book, it hasn't cost you much. You know that too. As I write this, I'm not even sure how this will be priced, except that I want it to be very affordable...even cheap! I'm going to publish it myself because it probably wouldn't happen any other way! It's not copyrighted. You can copy the heck out of it all you want! I said that in the preface too. OK, what point am I trying to make? It comes down to this:

If you've read this book...you've been led to do so!

Please don't misunderstand this. It's not a pompous statement on my part. I'm really not trying to take any credit for anything here. It's such a fluke or so unusual that someone like me would write a book like this. It's probably also pretty unusual that you've taken the time to read it...or that you came across it at all! There is no special overt marketing, it's not being promoted anywhere...I'm not going on Jay Leno or Dave Letterman or even National Public Radio to discuss it. It isn't being reviewed and likely will never be. It's likely you didn't find it at your local Christian Bookstore either! If you have it and you've read it...you've been led to it. The very thought of that thrills me beyond my ability to describe it.

In any event, it is my prayer and desire that you've been blessed by what's been set out in this book. I'd love to hear from you regarding your reaction to it whether negative or positive. You can reach me at pcinquemani@new.rr.com or you can snail-mail me at:

“Oh My God!”

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Ok, this is finally the end. It's no fairy tale, but we can sure say at the end of this one "and they lived happily forever after"!