

**ESSAYS ON REALITY, GOD, AND  
THE MEANING OF LIFE**

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## ***IN THE BEGINNING***

“What is truth?” said Pilate to Jesus. Someone asked me a similar question one day. I had just finished reading a couple of books by Carl Sagan. Sagan had a gift for describing the cosmos in beautiful and magnificent ways. But, he always made a point to try to convince the reader that we didn’t need this silly idea of god. He claimed that science would eventually answer all our questions; therefore, we didn’t need to put “The God Stamp” on everything we didn’t understand. Now, I enjoy science and I enjoy Sagan’s work, but his approach to God was unscientific and that bothered me. So, I was complaining of this to a guy I was flying with and his response was: “How do you know his is wrong? You were born to a Christian mom in the United States of America. You just believe in the Christian god because you were born here. What if you had been born in China or India? What if Sagan is right?”

That question rolled around in my head like a BB in a tin can, making so much noise, that I had to answer it. So I went on a quest -- Clean-sheet approach; No pre-conceived notions. I wanted to know: "Is there a god? If so, who's god?" It took me a while. I talked to people. I read some good books by others who had already gone down this road. C.S. Lewis' "Mere Christianity" was a powerful work. Lewis had rejected the idea of god in his youth. As a young man, he set out to disprove God's existence using pure logic. In the process, he proved to himself that God was real! The first half of "Mere Christianity" walks the reader through that logic, and locked-in the idea of a real god for me. But now the question was "Who's god?"

A couple of things happened about the same time. I was commuting to work (2 flights totaling 6.5 hours) and did a lot of reading. I was at Barnes and Nobel looking for something to read on my next trip and came face to face with 6 Promise Keepers Men's Study Bibles. My Bible had been lost for years, so I looked up and said "Ok, God, I can take a hint." I bought one and started randomly reading it. About the same time, I was discussing my search for truth with another pilot, who asked me if I'd ever heard of Lee Strobel. I had not.

Strobel was the legal editor for The Chicago Tribune newspaper in the 1970's and a devout agnostic. His wife had accepted Christ at some point and Lee was impressed by the positive changes in her life. He decided to use his investigative skills to check out the claims of the Bible. Armed with his toughest questions, Lee interviewed scholars and university professors. He asked archaeologists and ancient literature professors about the accuracy of Biblical claims. He challenged a medical examiner with the belief that Jesus survived the cross. On and on he went, each time getting powerful, simple, and compelling answers to his questions. The result was a stack of evidence affirming the truth and accuracy of the Bible and the truth of Jesus' existence and his claims to be God in the flesh. Strobel wound up on his knees, overwhelmed by the evidence, giving his heart and life over to Christ.

His book, "A Case for Christ," along with actually reading the Bible for myself, locked-in Jesus and the Christian god, as the true version of reality for me. My final step came as I was reading the story of King Saul. Saul had been half-living for God and half doing things his own way. God grabbed hold of me and I knew He was saying "Bruce, you're doing the same thing. I want you back, 100%." I broke. On my knees, I bawled my eyes out for wasting 20-plus years of my life and surrendered my heart and soul and strength to the Lord God of Israel.

I had known for some time, that God was real and the Bible true. My final hurdle was that I was afraid to let go of the reins of my life and let someone else have them. I've never been afraid of anything in my life, but I was afraid of this. After surrendering though, oh what freedom! What joy! How foolish I'd been for fearing to trust God, the creator and lover of my soul with my life! What a blast it's been ever since! Ahhhh ... eternal life! How amazing to learn (by actually reading the whole Bible) the true nature of God. I sat back from my morning reading one day and realized that the Bible, from cover to cover, is one big love story! God created us to share His love with and we ran from Him. We've been running ever since, and the Bible is a recording of the extent He has gone to (including sending the Son to die on a cross for us) to get us back. I get excited just saying that!

Hungering for more, I dove into God, Christ, and the Bible. As I did, questions came up. After searching out answers, I would write my findings in an essay. One day, someone challenged me with a couple of websites dedicated to exposing the supposed errors and contradictions of the Bible. Some of their issues seemed valid. So, off I went again, looking for answers. Each of those investigations turned into essays as well. They are compiled here. I hope they will strengthen your faith, or give you reason to have some. If you are reading this, you are seeking Truth. I praise you for your desire and for making the effort. You will never regret it.

## ***Chapter 1: The Search for Truth***

The search for truth, the search for meaning, will always turn into a search for God. Without God, there is no Meaning. And Truth? Most of it becomes meaningless as well. What remains is some harsh realities like “dog-eat-dog,” “survival of the fittest,” and “might makes right.”

This common thread runs through the following essays.



## Can We Know God Exists?

Is God real? What is reality? Is our universe just a molecule in a blade of grass in a far greater, much bigger universe? Are we but a dream in the mind of a patient on a hospital bed, where his world is real and we are his imagination? Philosophers and scientists have so dissected reality over the centuries, that some people actually no longer believe in it. I know of an airline pilot arrested for voyeuristically peeping into hotel rooms. His explanation was that he no longer believed in reality and was living life to the max – full hedonism. He is the perfect example of what would become of humanity if there were no God. (Actually, this was demonstrated on a grand scale between the time of Adam and Noah when the hearts of men turned to “only evil all the time.” Gen 6:5) It is only the existence and awareness of God that keeps our evil in check. Like Voltaire said, “If God didn’t exist; he would need to be invented.”

But, how can we know? Some folks are content taking it for granted, but others, like me, really need to know. Ideas have consequences (remember the airline pilot!). What we believe matters. We make critical life choices based upon our world-view.

I was in my mid-30’s and facing one more of a series of big choices in my life. I had just given up my active military career for one in the airlines. During the same time, marriage problems and counseling were challenging me to defend my desire to remain married (I did!). Then I was pushed by someone at work to examine my reasons for believing in God. This all sort of worked together to generate an early mid-life crisis for me. I needed to know what mattered. I wanted to matter. But did I? If God is not real, everything changes. If God is real, but it’s the god of Islam, or Hinduism, serious choices needed to be made about my life.

I realized I had been living on autopilot – believing in the Christian God because my mom did; chasing the American Dream because everyone else was. The pain of my troubled marriage led me to examine things about myself I had never questioned. I believed that people should stay married, but councilors were asking me “why?” I believed that there was an authority greater than me, greater than Man, but a co-worker was asking “is there?” I needed to find out.

So, I started digging. It took me a few years (I am a slow learner!), but I discovered a ton of evidence supporting the existence of God, the veracity of the Bible, and the truth to Jesus’ claims to be the Son of God, our savior, and living today as the bodily expression of God himself. Volumes of books have been written on these subjects, so I will try to be brief and summarize what I found. For those of you whose eyes roll up and fall deeply unconscious during science and logic discussions, just skip to the end and read what I found out about Jesus. Seriously, everyone could save themselves a lot of time and effort if they would simply do that. But not everyone is the same, so I present my findings and hopefully you’ll find something you relate to.

### Humanity

I think it’s interesting that all the cultures of the world worship. In fact, when you look back in time, as far as we have any record, mankind has always worshipped. The charge that Man invented God is just an opinion unsupported by fact. To find a time in history when mankind didn’t worship, in other words, the time we invented God, one must go to a spot on the time-line of existence before the written word, a time before oral history, a time before gods were painted on walls or sculpted from stone. One must go back to the time of the supposed “cave man.” But even there, recently, we find evidence of worship. Anthropologists studying the burial sites of the Neandertal people believe the type of burials indicate a belief in an afterlife and imply worship of a god. Along those same lines, I recently read an article by an anthropologist studying hunter-gather tribes. He believed that it was the desire to worship communally that led to the first big cities, which led to the need for trades and craftsmen, which led to the need for currency. So, as far back as any evidence of humanity can be found, the evidence of worship is always present.



Another observation is that there is broad agreement, globally, on numerous points about good and evil. This fits well with the fact that mankind has always been led by religious beliefs. That all religions agree on certain core morals, points to the likelihood that they all spun off from an Original Belief or came from the same source. Godless evolutionists would counter that these “truths” are just instinctively inbred behaviors that promote survival. Their claims make for a lively debate, but it is a debate over opinions and theory. In this discussion, I’m trying to keep the focus on facts alone.

Fact: Mankind has always worshipped

Fact: There are globally recognized truths about good and evil

## **Science**

All of reality that we can measure is made of matter and energy. All matter and energy obey certain principles we call The Laws of Physics. Two of those laws apply directly to our question. One says that all effects have causes. The other is that order moves to disorder, energy decays. We call it heat death.

Before Einstein, the growing scientific community held that the universe was infinite in size and had always been. Scientists would scoff at religious claims that a god made the universe because they could see no evidence of a beginning at all! That all changed in the 1950’s with Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity. Mathematical investigation of his theories led to a powerfully convincing model of the universe we call The Big Bang. Today, the majority of scientists agrees that Einstein’s work demonstrates that our universe is limited in size and had a beginning! Continuing improvements in telescope technology allow observations never experience before, and these observations support the Big Bang model. Each new development actually draws us closer and closer to a created universe. Atheists are struggling to come up with theories explaining the Big Bang, but they all have the same two problems. The law of Cause and Effect says that all effects have originating causes. If the matter of the universe once was condensed in a tiny ball that exploded (the Big Bang), then what caused that explosion? What caused that first ball of matter to form? All atheistic answers to those questions fall victim to the law of heat death. They all require infinitely large universes existing for infinite amounts of time, which is impossible because the Laws of Thermodynamics say that all the energy involved would have decayed long ago. Stars burn out. Contracting and expanding universe cycles expel heat. Heat death would have brought all universal activity to a standstill long ago. Regardless of the model, there must still be an Original Cause. An infinity of causes is an impossibility because of heat death, so a First Cause is required. That First Cause was announced when God said “I AM.”

There is actually a third problem with all atheistic universe origin theories. It is simply that there is no evidence to support them. All evidence point to:

Fact: The existence of our universe demands a First Cause

## **History**

Most historical accounts of God’s existence come from oral histories that were later written down. Some modern versions come from a single man’s claim to have received the true story (like Swedenborg, Mohammed, and Joseph Smith). It would have been cool if we woke up every day to the voice of God announcing “Good morning! This is God. I’ve got a great day designed for you! Up and at ‘em!”; but we don’t. Instead, each religion claims to have the true story passed down through the ages. There are some similarities in most of them (like a creation story and a global flood), but there are significant differences -- differences that have serious implications about the afterlife. Choosing the wrong path to God could lead to an eternity in hell! How is one to choose? Is there evidence pointing to or supporting the claims of any religion?

Fact: There is no historical evidence supporting the religious claims of ancient Greek, Roman, Norse, Asian, Native South, Central, or North American tribes. There is no evidence to support the unique claims of Islam or Mormonism.

Fact: Historical and archaeological evidence has always supported and continues to support and verify the claims of the Judeo-Christian God. There are claims that the geological record conflicts with Biblical claims (6 creation days vs. billions of years; evolution vs. divine creation), but new developments in creation science are beginning to counter those claims as well.

The historical argument that puts to rest all other arguments, though, is the record of the life and times of Jesus.

## **Jesus**

Who was Jesus? Did he really exist? Did he really rise from the dead? For an in-depth study, I highly recommend Lee Strobel's "A Case for Christ" and C. S. Lewis' "Mere Christianity." There are many other good books offering compelling evidence, but these two are a solid presentation of the core issues. I will try to summarize what I've learned.

Was Jesus real? Christian, Jewish, and Roman historians confirm the existence of a real person named Jesus. You will always find someone trying to deny the existence of Jesus, but all credible historians acknowledge he really lived and died as recorded.

How do we know about him? The majority of our knowledge comes from the eyewitness accounts of Matthew and John; the documentation of eyewitness accounts by the disciples Mark and Luke; and from the experiences of Paul. The accuracy of these accounts has been and continues to be verified by historians, ancient literature professors, archaeologists, and non-Christian histories.

What do we know about him? His birth, life, and death fulfilled centuries-old prophecies (statisticians say the odds that Jesus complied with just 8 of them by coincidence are astronomically high – comparable to finding a single, marked silver dollar in an inch thick layer of dollars covering the entire state of Texas in one try!). His miracles were confirmed by hostile testimony (recorded by Jewish historians in the Talmud). His empty tomb is acknowledged by all credible historians (atheistic as well as theistic). There are counter claims that a disciple was crucified instead of Jesus (Islam), that Jesus survived the cross, that Jesus' body was dumped in a Roman trash pit and eaten by dogs. The problem with all counter explanations for the empty tomb is there is no supporting evidence – none!

On the other hand, the most powerful evidence supporting Jesus' resurrection comes from the unnaturally changed lives of the Apostles. After Jesus' death, the Apostles all hid in their homes, afraid of being executed too. But after claiming to see the resurrected Jesus, all publicly risked their lives, and in fact were executed (except for John who was exiled) for their outspoken proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. People do not willingly go to their deaths for a lie!

Who was he? Jesus claimed to be God, and supported that claim by performing miracles, forgiving sin, announcing his death and resurrection in advance, then coming back from the dead showing himself to his Apostles, disciples and more than 500 other people. He supernaturally appeared to a Pharisee who had been arresting and executing Christians, in such a profound way, that this person changed his name from Saul to Paul and launched the Christian church into the rest of the world.

If you really want to know if God is real, investigate Jesus. Read about him in the gospels. He checks out as legit in every way. If he is correct, and you will find him believable, then he claims that God is real. Like C. S. Lewis said, we only have 3 choices: Jesus was a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. Nothing about him fits the first two choices. Everything about him fits the third!



## Mohammed Atta was no Moral Relativist

Moral Relativism – Situational Ethics – No Absolute Truth -- modern mantras that repackage similar concepts of the past. Remember these: Do Your Own Thing – I’m OK, You’re OK – If It Feels Good, Do It? Like a virus, “political correctness” and “tolerance” has swept our nation. Those who use such terms are, for the most part, trying to be loving. It feels good to be “inclusive.” But the ideas they promote are unhealthy and harmful, both for the individual as well as for our nation.

During our recent war in Afghanistan, our troops captured a Taliban soldier who turned out to be an American citizen named John Walker Lindh. As a child in California, John was taught to seek out his own truth, to find whatever worked for him. John wound up in Afghanistan, defending a militant government set on destroying Israel and its ally, the United States of America.

A well known evangelist was speaking at a major university. His subject was Absolute Truth. After the lecture, a young woman stood up during the Q & A session, to lambaste him for his claims. She said it was fine that he had his own moral code to live by, but that he shouldn’t try to force it upon others. The speaker, knowing this woman to be of Jewish heritage, asked her how she felt about the moral code of Adolph Hitler. The young woman placed her hand over her heart and said something to the effect: “Well, personally, I don’t like his morality, but I couldn’t make any moral judgments about his choices.” It seems the majority of Germany’s citizens must have agreed with her philosophy at the time of Hitler’s rule!

I would like to propose to you, that a moral code exists that we are really supposed to live by. When followed, people prosper, nations prosper. When neglected, ignored, or defied people suffer and nations fall in ruin. To lead you to it, I would like you to work through a short exercise. I call it the “4 Whys.” I wish I could remember the name of the speaker I first heard use this technique, but I’ve long since lost his name (if anyone knows it please email it to me, so I can give him due credit!).

The exercise goes like this:

On September 11, 2001 Mohammed Atta and several other men commandeered 4 commercial airliners. Three of them were crashed into the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon. One failed in its mission and crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attack. We got angry and said “Osama Bin Laden, you were wrong to do that. We are going to come after you and kick your butt!” We invaded Afghanistan, and have been after him ever since. I will play devil’s advocate and ask *“Why was he wrong? What was so wrong about what they did?”*

Before reading on, please take a moment, look away from these words and try answering the question yourself – What was so wrong about killing nearly 3,000 people?

Most people will say that it was wrong because the people killed were not combatants, they were innocent bystanders. *"So, Ok, they were innocent bystanders. So, what? Why is killing innocent bystanders so wrong?"*

For those of you trying to follow the exercise, stop here and answer the question in your own mind before continuing.....

There can be several answers to this, but the one I am looking for is this: Social order is not possible without rules. If we let people go around doing anything they want, like killing innocent bystanders, social structure falls apart. Alright. *"So why does social order matter? What do I care? Maybe I want the right to kill my neighbor for his VW Beetle. What's it to you?"*

Its that time again, no peeking!

With social order, we are safe to live, work, play, raise our kids. Well ordered societies keep you safe; they keep your kids safe. My final "why," then, is: *"So what? Why do you matter. Why should I care about your kids?"*

Last chance to try your own reasoning on this.....

We have two choices here. If we live in a godless universe and are the products of mere happenstance – products of purposeless evolution – then our lives don't matter. Our children's lives don't matter. Nothing matters. Life doesn't Matter. There is no Meaning. There is no Purpose for our existence. In this world-view, we can tell Osama that we don't *like* his actions. They threaten our individual survival and opportunities to follow our

genetic programming to reproduce. But there really is no such thing as Right and Wrong. We can stick those labels on behaviors that threaten our reproductive future, but they are just labels. If Afghanistan had been a world superpower, and the USA a small third world nation, we would all be dead or in prison by now. The ruling majority would be calling their actions “right” and our chosen society “wrong.” We could sit in our dungeons, yelling that they are wrong all we want; but, in this world-view, might makes right! The strong survive, the weak perish, and the strong call their actions “good” and “right.”

The other choice is that we live in a universe created by a god. If this is true, that god probably made the universe for a reason. He probably has rules about how things are supposed to work. He probably has decided for Himself just exactly what “good” and “right” are. Being concerned for my own wellbeing, I should think it would be important to try to find out just who this god is, and what His ideas are about such things. In this world-view, we can point our fingers at Osama and say “You were wrong!” But we can only do this if his version of this god is wrong.

So, now we have a dilemma. To really tell Osama he was wrong, we need to decide whether God is real, and if so, who’s God? Several years ago, I set out to do just that. I was raised Baptist, in a small east Texas church. They taught that dancing was a sin, as well as swimming, and gave me a hard time about my long hair (in the ‘70’s!). I found out that they had been teaching their own opinions as fact, and essentially lying to me. This little lesson taught me that the experts don’t always know what they are talking about or they don’t always tell the truth. Later, as an adult, I had been reading some of Carl Sagan’s books. He was talented at describing the cosmos in beautiful ways, and making science seem fascinating. Unfortunately though, he was an evangelical atheist. In several of his books, he would try to convince the reader that we didn’t need this silly idea of God. If we would just give science enough time, it would answer all of our questions. His approach to God bothered me, because it was unscientific. But I had to ask myself, how do I know he is wrong? I believed in God because my mom raised me that way. What if she was wrong?

So I went on a quest. What I found was compelling evidence that the Christian view of God is the correct one. Then I got busy finding out what He expects of us. The Bible holds a full complement of God’s view of morality. As you might guess, killing innocent bystanders for Allah is not on the acceptable list. God gave us government to reign in our evil tendencies. He assigns them the power to use lethal force in enforcing governmental boundaries. What Osama and Atta did violated those boundaries and we unleashed our lethal force to punish those responsible.

That brings us to the conclusion that we really can say that Osama was wrong. There really is a moral code that they violated. That code lays out specific behaviors that promote our well being. God warns us that ignoring that code brings sickness and death. Nations that defy that code are in the ash heap of history or currently on the road to it. I must ask you “Why would we want that for America?”

“Tolerance” (as defined today), “inclusiveness” (ditto), “No Absolute Truth,” “No Boundaries” – all these violate that code set down by the Creator of our Universe. It is not loving to tell someone “I know your lifestyle violates the laws of God, but I see that it works for you, so best wishes!” It is not patriotic to say “I can see that our nation is killing millions of God’s unborn children, but some of our judges say its right, so it must be OK.” It is not caring to ignore the gradual decay of our society’s standards of entertainment, because “I can’t make any moral judgments on their behavior!” God promises that these choices will lead to destruction and judgment.

I think you’ve figured out my view of moral relativism. Let me close with a hypothetical. Suppose you are a parent, and your child comes to you one day and says: “Mom/Dad, I feel like its OK to play in the highway. So, I’ll see you later! I’ll be playing in the highway for a while!” Now, as a follower of “No Absolute Truth,” to be loving and inclusive, you’d have to put your arm around the child and say “Well, I don’t feel that’s a good choice for me, but I hear it is OK for you, so best wishes in your playtime!” But we all know this would be cold hearted and cruel. The parent knows something the child does not. A loving parent would tell the child “Honey, I know it seems that way to you, but let me help you understand some things about the highway...” That parent would lovingly educate the child so that they can make better lifestyle choices in the future.

I know one complaint I will hear. “Yes, but all the world’s religions have moral codes. Even the Secular Humanists have a moral code that closely matches the Bible’s! How can that be bad?” This is one of the many strong arguments that actually back up the truth of the Bible. They all have elements that confirm what the Bible says. But they are all a little off. Try examining their moral codes and you will find horrors like the “untouchables” of Hinduism and the Humanists’ views on adultery. You will not find these horrors in God’s code for our lives.

I challenge anyone to read God’s Word – the whole thing – and tell me that it isn’t the right moral code for our nation. In fact, my challenge to us all is to read God’s Word on a regular basis, and pray for God’s helping Spirit upon our lives to enable us to live His Way. Oh what a place America would be! What a place our world would be!

“I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.” Isaiah 45:19

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Proverbs 14:12

“See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.” Jeremiah 21:8

“Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God,  
listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. Deuteronomy 30:19

## The Circle of Life

Toward the end of G. K. Chesterton's *Everlasting Man*, Chesterton is discussing the fact that the rise of Christianity in the world of religions was unique. Had Christianity not come yet, the religions of Europe would not really be any different than those of Asia.

*"It is what has been called already the wheel of Asia; all those recurrent arguments about cause and effect or things beginning and ending in the mind, which make it impossible for the soul really to strike out and go anywhere or do anything. And the point is that it is not necessarily peculiar to Asiatics; it would have been true in the end of Europeans-- if something had not happened. If the Church Militant had not been a thing marching, all men would have been marking time."*

It was his mention of the "wheel of Asia" and "marking time" that struck me as familiar. Remember the song "The Circle of Life" in the movie *The Lion King*? Written in 1925, Chesterton's observation is still true today. The religion of science – Evolution – seems like something new compared to the past, but really, it is the same wheel repackaged.

Reincarnation teaches that we are "recycled," so to speak. We die and our by-products – our soul and its collection of Karma, good and bad – are recycled into new life. The priests of Evolution teach that we are all bio-matter. We live and die, our matter is recycled through the plants, who are eaten by the animals, who are eaten by us. And the cycle starts again. The circle of life -- how hollow and how tragic – it is more like a circle of death. But Chesterton had it right. Without the hope offered by Christianity, we would all just be "marking time."

I heard a story told by Jim Dobson, on a Focus on the Family broadcast, about a caterpillar that will blindly follow the caterpillar in front of it. A scientist once put a line of these caterpillars on the rim of a pot, where they followed each other in a circle for days ignoring the wealth of food in the center of the pot. They eventually starved and died with food just inches away. The religions of the world, including Evolution, are just like those caterpillars. They are the "blind leading the blind," like Jesus said.

Without Christ, we are without hope; blind people marking time from birth to death, following the blind guide ahead of us. It is only Christ who offers us a chance to break from the circle of death into life. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis illustrated the uniqueness of the arrival of Christ on the scene.



“People often ask when the next step in evolution – the step to something beyond man – will happen. But in the Christian view, it has happened already. In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us.”

The very uniqueness of Christ emerging from a sea of melded sameness cries out: “Hey! Attention over here, please!” Christ’s offer to “evolve” us into something surprising, something different should catch our eye. He offers us the chance to break out of the wheel of eternal sameness. I like Lewis’ use of the evolutionary model to point this out. Imagine how evolutionists describe Life: From the primordial sea, emerged single celled creatures that developed into multi-celled creatures, that evolved into sea life, that evolved into land dwellers, that evolved into mammals and birds and reptiles. The whole picture moves from the microscopic to the enormous, as we reach the time of T-Rex. Following this flow, one would expect the next development to be something bigger, something more powerful. Who would have expected the next improvement to come in the small package of hairless, clawless, fangless apes? But the change was dramatic. We have become the dominant creature of the planet. With the power of our minds we are reshaping the planet to our needs, we have even escaped the planet to outer space. What a strange and unexpected development!

Today, when philosophers and writers imagine the next evolutionary milestone, we usually get stuff like Star Trek, where races of humans have turned into 150 pound brains or the power of our minds have allowed us to escape the bonds of our 3 dimensions. How sad that they have missed the actual next step. With Christ’s resurrection, Jesus showed us that we can indeed evolve. But like the last major change, this one comes in unexpected form. This change is one of the spirit. When we make this evolutionary leap, it is unlike anything we have ever seen. We are transformed into a new creature – a Child of God.

## The Problem of Evolution

Duck! You're being shot at! Hit the dirt! In-coming! -- What? You didn't know we're at war? We most certainly are. It is a different kind of war, though, a cultural war, a spiritual war, a war for your very soul. The City of God is under attack. It is taking hits from all quarters. It makes me think of Sarajevo or Lebanon. Once beautiful cities, now ravage by years of war. Beautiful buildings ripped open by bombs. Graveyards filled with children cut down by snipers as they walked home from school. Our "city," though is not one of buildings. It is not defined by geographical lines. It is made up of Christ's followers all around the globe. The war we are in doesn't use bombs or sniper rifles. It uses ideas.

Ideas have consequences. Our lives are shaped by the ideas we believe. On the foundation of ideas, we make choices. On ideas like: "...for the people, by the people...", "...certain inalienable rights..." – our nation was formed. We broke from England and the king, we sacrificed lives and went to war, over ideas. The things we think, matter. America is at war, right now, with Islamic terrorists around the globe. The terrorists are using bombs, airplanes, guns, and viruses to harm and scare people. These are not their greatest weapons, though. The greater threat comes from their ideas. With their ideas, they convince a young Muslim to strap explosives around his waist and blow himself up in the midst of others. With their ideas they create a world separated into zones of Islam, Peace with Islam, and War. Part of our task in fighting terrorism is to fight the spread of their ideas. If we can counter their ideas with ones of our own, we can cut their momentum.

War is not the only arena that relies heavily on ideas, though. Governments use ideas to shape society. Businesses use ideas to market their products. Parents use ideas to form the character of their children. Satan uses ideas to turn you away from God. Remember the Garden of Eden? Satan challenged Eve's ideas about God (God was lying about the fruit; "you won't surely die!" Genesis 3:4). He tempted her with ideas about herself ("You will be like God" Genesis 3:5). She bought into his ideas, or maybe Satan just tapped into ideas she already was harboring. Either way, those ideas led us all into a life of sin and suffering. God gave us the Bible to combat the lies of Satan and Jesus died on the cross and rose again to undo the effects of them. But with each successive generation, the battle wages anew. Satan knows that if he can plant doubt about God, doubt about His Word, in the minds of each new person, he has a chance that they will reject God.

Everyone is born with both the truth (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and a lie (Gen 3:5, i.e. we can be our own god, compare with Psalm 51:5) in their hearts. Satan's desire is that we buy into the lie. He has to fight the truth to do that, though. And he uses every trick in the book. One of his deadliest tricks is to undercut the believability of the Bible. If he can plant a seed of doubt about the truth of God's Word, then he can challenge other truths, like: Man is a sinful, fallen creature in need of salvation; like: Jesus was God in the flesh; like: Jesus was resurrected; like: God exists. By planting doubts about the truth of the Bible, Satan can eliminate Jesus and God in our minds. One of the most ingenious tools he has come up with is the theory (idea) of Evolution.

Now, Man has never needed Evolution to reject God in the past. People of all time have been fully aware of God's existence and still rejected Him. People without the Bible still have one of the most compelling testimonies that draw our hearts toward God -- nature itself. ["For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been](#)

made. So people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20) Satan must overcome this testimony to convince some of us that God is imaginary. He is doing this very well with the theory of Evolution. Evolution teaches that all “that has been made” wasn’t made at all! Life came about on its own! With Evolution, we can do away with the Garden of Eden. Without the Garden of Eden, there is no original sin. Without original sin, we each have the possibility that we are good at birth and will remain so, even if there is a God. Jesus didn’t need to die, God will let most of us into heaven, because we are good enough to be there with Him.

But wait! If Life came about on its own, then the Bible must be wrong about creation. If it is wrong about that, what else is it wrong about? What if it is wrong about God? Maybe God is not real either! Many people would like this to be true. In an interview, Julian Huxley, grandson of Thomas Huxley (Darwin’s marketing guru), explained the popularity of Evolution: "I think the idea is so popular because the idea of "god" conflicts with our sexual mores." {see <http://www.kennedycommentary.org/default.asp?pg=topicmessage&id=664>}. If God exists, then our choices in life will be measured by His standards. If the God of the Bible is real, we will someday be held accountable for our choices. For those who want to be the center of their own universes, the idea of God is undesirable. Evolution gives them an out. It allows for them a means to combat the mark of “eternity” that God placed in their hearts.

Satan has given us many other ways to reject the God of the Bible. For those who cannot deny the call of God in their hearts, false religions have developed over the centuries that lead to the worship of false gods. Within Christianity, even, others twist the nature of God and Jesus to the point they are no longer the God of the Bible (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Latter Day Saints {Mormons}, Universalists, Oneness, etc). But, with one fell swoop, Evolution helps us to both do away with the Bible and do away with God.

There are some who believe in the Bible and God, but want to say that God made all Life through the process of Evolution. I simply will ask them to take the time to closely examine Evolution and the Bible. The more you examine Evolution, the more its flaws become apparent. The more one examines the Bible, the more its truth becomes clear.

“God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.”  
Psalm 53:2

Seek the truth, my friends, and you will be found by Him!

## I Choose – Therefore God Is

A few years ago, I was talking with a man about the idea that it is pretty silly to take pride in ourselves; in our “grand” accomplishments. For all said and done, what of our lives can we really claim credit for? Did we pick the year of our birth? How about the nation or city of our birth? Race? Parents? Did we choose to be “able bodied” rather than be born without hands or feet? Did we choose our genetic or psychological make-up? No, all these were out of our control, yet nearly totally determine who we will be and what we will become and achieve. My friend added that he thought the one contribution he could claim was that he had to make the choices involved in getting him where he was.

And this is clearly true. Although, even this, the issue of choice, is *only* true in a world created by God. For in godless world, we are nothing more than bio-robots, the real “android” of the sci-fi genre. In a godless world, we are just the end product of millions of years of genetic programming; programming selected by natural forces that weeded out characteristics which didn’t promote reproduction. All of our most valued traits – art, music, even altruism – nothing more than genetic mutations that proved to aid in either attracting a mate and reproducing, or sustaining a society that would keep its participants alive long enough to reproduce. Free thought, choice, even love – merely genetic changes that “popped up” one day and proved to enhance its owner’s ability to produce progeny that would survive long enough to reproduce themselves. Why? Simply because something *did* billions of years ago in a primordial sea.

Is that the world you really want to live in? Oh, you can try to come up with grand ideas about the Human Race and why it is valuable and worth preserving. But anything you would say would just go on to prove my point. In the game of survival of the fittest, which person would be more likely to pass on their genetic material: one who envisions great meaning and purpose to their lives, or one who sees no value to Life at all? No, my friend, you would just be reaching deep into your highly tuned genetic programming in an effort to ensure that your genes get passed on.

In the world of the atheist, there really is no such thing as “love” and “choice,” just genetic programming. I thought about this at the funeral of my brother. How does the atheist explain mourning? Do people really mourn the loss of related genetic material? Is the passing on of our genes so important that we mourn the loss of genes that aren’t even our own, but related? What a tragic world view. And frankly, how mindless.

For as anyone who has lost a loved one knows, love is real. Choices are made, both good and bad. After all these millions and billions of years, why would natural selection have left “bad” choices in our genetic programming? But I digress. Love *is* real. But it is only in a God created world that it **matters**. It is only in a God created world that **you** matter. Out of the overflowing abundance of His love, God created mankind. He created you to share His love with. But to share His love, he needed a being that could love in return. To create that, He had to allow free choice. For without choice, there can be no love. Could you imagine programming your home computer to say “I LOVE YOU” every time you came into the room? Do you think that would feel very loving? No. We must be able to choose to love or not to love, for the loving relationship to be real.

And herein lies the rub. In giving us the free will to choose, God ran the risk that we would choose not to love Him. But that way leads to death. In fact the choice not to love God can be traced throughout history as the root of all death and suffering. All greed and malice, selfishness and hate, characteristics that lead to the destruction of societies and human relationships, actually result from the love of everything and anything else *but* God.

It is for this very reason that the ultimate ambition of the atheist/liberal/socialist/communist (advocates of utopian societies), can never exist. For in their world where there is no god to love and serve, there is only Man

to love and serve. If there is only Man, what better man to love and serve than self! No, utopian concept societies always fail, because they have no ultimate Truth to answer to. And the Ultimate Truth to answer to is God. Without Him, there is no truth, there is no "choice," there is no love. But with Him, oh boy! What a life that lies ahead of us! Ultimate meaning, ultimate worth, ultimate love are ours. And the amazing thing is that to possess it, all we have to do is -----choose!

## In The Image of God

Something I've been thinking about: In Genesis 1:26, God said "Let **us** make man in **our** image ... (v27) ... So God created man in his own image ..." (italics/bold added). I was asked, one time, "What about people born with missing hands, or feet, of people born with multiple sclerosis? Are they the image of God?"

Now, an easy answer is that God first created man perfectly, and it is the result of sin that mars us today. As in most issues dealing with God and humanity, though, there are often deeper, more multifaceted answers that we don't see at first glance. One thing that struck me, as I thought on the question, was how each of us are made of 3 parts: Body, soul (the mind), and spirit. We are one "being," yet made up of 3 distinct parts, each with its unique purpose. In "Spiritual Man," Watchman Nee said that he believes that when God breathed life into the flesh of Adam, the spirit God gave Adam joined with his flesh. Their combination formed his soul. It is an interesting way to visualize it. Scripture says that when the spirit leaves a person, that person dies even if the body still lives. We call that brain-dead, today. Our soul is our mind, our character, the part of us that chooses. Our body carries out our wishes, and the spirit communicates directly with the Holy Spirit and to us.

I believe it is in this respect that we are in God's image. For God is one God, yet made up of 3 distinct beings: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The similarity in spirits is obvious. The Son is the manifestation of God in the flesh. That leaves the Father as the "soul," if you will. He is the one who chooses and directs. Jesus said he was here on Earth to carry out the will of the Father, just as our physical manifestation (our body) carries out our will.

When you talk to me, are you talking to my physical body, or my mind, or to my spirit? The answer is YES! It is the same with God. We easily accept our tripartite nature, yet get all agitated when we hear that God is triune.

This whole issue is at the heart of why so many people are drawn to the Jehovah's Witnesses (one God, Jesus – a created being, Holy spirit – an electrical force), Mormonism (God and Jesus totally separate, 3 dimensional beings confined to our time and space), and "Unitarian" type sects (God is just God – acts as Jesus, acts as Holy Spirit). All of these religions give us a god that fits into our 3-dimensional universe and limited minds. It is a classic case of trying to make God fit us rather than trying to conform ourselves to God.

Just an idea.



# The Brotherhood

I recently got to welcome my dad into the brotherhood of servicemen, for he had just become a police officer. I sent him a copy of a speech given to a graduating class of helicopter pilots in which the speaker reminded them that the badges (wings) they wore were “forged with blood” and with them came a serious “charge to serve, to know, and to be dedicated.” Like the helicopter pilots, my dad had entered into an honorable profession, a brotherhood bought by the lives of those who had gone before. It got me to wondering, though, just what it was that was so honorable. Why is the willingness to sacrifice our own lives for the lives of others considered so honorable? I believe the answer lies in the fact that in the performance of our jobs, the lives of others are placed in our hands. Servicemen, whether police or military, are given the power to take lives in order to preserve the lives of our loved ones. In doing so, we hold evil in check and preserve order. In preserving order, we make life safe for people, we make people safe. And why is that so important? Because God said so. God made Man in His image, and told us that we are not to kill those made in His image. In fact the first death penalty was established by God for anyone found murdering His image bearers: [Genesis 9:6](#) “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; *for in the image of God has God made man.*” (italics mine)

Because of our evil hearts, God made government. Romans 13:1-6 “...the authorities that exist have been established by God...For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong...(f)or he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” So, our profession of arms was established by God to protect His image bearers, the lives of the people He made. It is a tall order, all the way from the Top!

Doing our jobs, though, is risky and the arms bearer must be willing to risk his life performing his duty. But we are only following the example of God himself. He sent Jesus to give His life so that we might live. Jesus taught us “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” [John 15:13](#) Yet, in his example, Jesus exceeded even this, as He died for friend and foe, for all Mankind.

Doing this, Jesus began a new “brotherhood,” one bought by blood. It is a Brotherhood open to all, and like other brotherhoods, members must be willing to die. This one is unique though, because the death He asks of us is to our old sinful self. This Brotherhood can only be joined by dying to self. Membership includes a new life, granted us immediately upon swearing in. This new life cannot be lost and comes with a lifetime membership. Yes, we will all “retire” from service as our old “uniform” or body wears out; but unlike other retirements, this one comes as a major step up in quality of life!

In comparison, it is obvious that these other brotherhoods are images and reflections of the ultimate Brotherhood. It is only because of this ultimate Brotherhood that our service to our brothers even matters. It is only the existence and authority of God Himself that establishes true value of human life. Without Him, we are just water bags carrying genetic material. I don’t know about you, but I personally wouldn’t lay my life on the line against an enemy to protect a nation of water bags! Why would I even care?

No, our service to our fellow Man is only made meaningful by God’s authority. It is because of His unimaginable love for us that our lives take on such meaning as to be worth dying for. It is the grace and mercy of God toward such a miserable creature as Man that makes a sacrificed life honorable. And so – honorable it is. Keeping the peace, preserving and protecting, defending the nation are honorable roles to dedicate our lives to. These are worth living for, and they are certainly worth dying for.





## The Meaning of Life

I found an interesting quote recently. It was a “Quote of the Day” torn from a newspaper and posted on a bulletin board in a YMCA. It said:

“More than any time in history, mankind is at a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness; the other to total extinction.

Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly.” –Woody Allen

Now, I don’t know the context this quote was taken from. And I certainly don’t know Woody Allen’s theological views. But I have to wonder just who it is that he is recommending we pray to? To tell you the truth, if these are the only two options Mr. Allen sees for mankind, it would seem that he doesn’t believe in God at all. For the two choices he presents precisely fit the world view of the atheist. In the godless world of the atheist, Life has no meaning, no purpose whatever. We all evolved by pure happenstance from single-celled creatures that just happened to have behaviors/characteristics that effected their survival and reproduction. There was no purpose for the 1<sup>st</sup> reproduction, it just happened. Other cells that happened to reproduce lived on, while non-reproducing creatures died out. Our desire to reproduce, then, is nothing more than instinctive, inherited characteristics passed down through the ages from the primordial creatures that originally came across this trait by chance.

All of life on this planet is a fluke, a result of a multitude of coincidences, and therefore meaningless. Right and Wrong, Human Rights, Save the Earth – all artificial concepts created out of in-bred survival traits forced upon us through genetic history. Inalienable Rights? Hogwash! Humans don’t even have the freedom of choice. We all march to the same instincts of our ancestors. Therefore, if we are all here as the result of a chance electrical strike in an ancient sea of amino acids, and the laws of physics took over; why worry about pollution, starvation, or crime? Why should we care? We exist and work and toil our lives away strictly for the purpose of reproducing; all because some chemicals bumped into each other in the primordial sea a few million years ago. The wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, concluded the same thing after attempting to find meaning in life apart from God.

“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for my labor.

Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done, and what I had toiled to achieve,

Everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;

Nothing was gained under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

He had it all, yet he concluded it was all meaningless. If the atheistic view of Life is correct, Solomon’s and Allen’s conclusions are right. There are only two choices – Mankind survives or Mankind goes extinct. In this world view, if Mankind survives it is a hopeless existence filled with despair. There is nothing to hope for. We’re

born, we live, we die, then dust. All of our struggles, all our pain, our war against disease, our efforts to feed the world's starving poor – all meaningless. Oh, certainly, people find their own reasons to justify the struggle. People go to great lengths to assign a “meaning” to their lives. But that is simply their opinion, designed to make their struggles with inevitable decay and death more palatable.

Here's a quote I like better:

“See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.” Jeremiah 21:8

“Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths,  
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,  
and you will find rest for your souls.” -YHWH, Jeremiah 6:16

Just what are the “ancient paths?” Which is the “good way” that leads to life rather than death? The key lies in the imagery of the crossroads. When a traveler reaches a crossroads, the choice is usually easy because the traveler knows why he is on the road in the first place. In Life, we know how to choose the “good way” only when we know the answer to the fundamental question – Why are we here? We really are here for a reason. But you will only find that reason in a universe created by God. Our lives really do have meaning. God created all of Life for a purpose. All created things have purpose. Artists create their art to share their feelings, or capture beauty for all to see. Craftsmen make chairs and tables, tools and utensils, all to be used for specific tasks. God's creations have purpose as well. His purposes for some things are easier to see than others. We've always known the tree is a home to birds and insects and a shade for us in the heat. It wasn't until recently, though, that we discovered that they convert CO<sup>2</sup> into oxygen for us to breathe. God's creations, from the mighty sun to the tiny ant, all support the existence of Life. But what of Man? Why are we here? What purpose do we serve?

One image we get clearly in the Bible is that when we believe in Jesus and accept His gift of salvation, we are “born again” (John 3:3). We are born into the family of God. He calls us His “children” (Romans 8:13). Jesus taught us to pray to God as our “Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). He calls the Father “daddy” (Mark 14:36) as we do through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:15). As God's children we are “co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). So, it would appear that God is building a family. In fact, the image of us as God's children is used extensively throughout the Bible.

But there's more, because as it turns out, our Father is a king. In fact He is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16). Jesus tells us to seek this “kingdom” (Matthew 6:33) and many come to Him asking how to enter it. Jesus explains that those of us freed from our sins by his blood have been “made...to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (Revelation 1:6). So, God is also building a kingdom. We are His loyal subjects. The Bible uses this imagery extensively as well.

As you might expect, kings always have commands and expect obedience. Our King is no different. He tells us to “be careful to obey so that it may go well with you” (Deuteronomy 6:3). Jesus even tells us “to obey everything I have commanded” (Matthew 28:20). But God's commands are different than one expects from earthly kings. And they can all be summarized by His ultimate command:

**“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?” Jesus replied “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:36-37**

It is here that we arrive at the meaning of Life. “God is love” (1John 4:16) and He created us for the purpose of sharing that love with us. As our Father, He loves us (John 3:16), He knows our needs and provides for us (Matthew 6:25-34), He protects us (Psalm 32:7), He instructs us and counsels us (Psalm 32:8), and He disciplines us in love for our own good (Hebrews 12:6,10). As His children, we share our lives with Him (Deuteronomy 10:12-13; Micah 6:8). We depend upon Him for all our needs (Matthew 6:25-34). We love Him (Matthew 22:36-37). In our love for Him we obey him as King (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We serve Him with our lives (II Corinthians 5:15). We give our all to Him (I Corinthians 15:58). We sing His praises (Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13) and give Him all the glory (I Corinthians 10:31). For, honestly, our lives are not our own (Jeremiah 10:23; I Corinthians 6:19-20). Everything we are is made by God, through Jesus, for Jesus (Romans 11:36; Hebrews 1:1-3). The Creator of all things deserves the honor, respect, fear, adoration, obedience and love of His creation. It is why we are here. And that makes us pretty important! To keep it all in perspective, though, C.S. Lewis in his book, “Mere Christianity,” said:

“Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His already. So that when we talk of doing anything for God, I will tell you what it is like. It is like a small child going to its father and saying, ‘Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.’ Of course the father does, and he is pleased with the child’s present.”

God already owns everything (Job 41:12). What He really gets from our gifts is our love. What He really wants is our hearts. Even as King, he prefers our obedience to come out of our love, rather than fear. Certainly fear has its place as any child fears the consequences of disobeying a parent, or we fear the consequences of breaking our nation’s laws. But the best children will obey the rules because they love their parents. The best citizens will obey the law because they love their country. And so, God cherishes our gifts and service and obedience because of our love for Him.

How does this all relate to the crossroads? In creating Life, God put us on a road. As we go down the roads of our lives, we face many crossroads as we chose how to live. Jesus describes the biggest one we all face when He teaches of the two roads of Life.

**“For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)**

And so we find the meaning of the “ancient paths,” the “good way” that leads to life rather than death. There really is a better choice than the two offered in Woody Allen’s quote. That choice is Jesus. Jesus said that He is “the way” (John 14:6) and belief in Him as Lord and Savior is the path that leads to eternal life.

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,**

but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son." John 3:16-18

Our lives have meaning, but we are not forced to live out our purposes. God gives us the free will to choose. Love is meaningless otherwise. Choosing to reject God, though, takes one down the path described by Woody Allen – the path of hopelessness and destruction.

To misquote Allen, I pray that God gives us the wisdom to choose correctly.

## ***Chapter 2: Narrowing it Down***

Once I saw that the evidence pointed powerfully at the existence of God and Jesus, I began learning that there were even conflicting views about Jesus. Whose “Jesus” was the real one? They cannot all be true. Do all roads lead to God? Are we all God’s children? The answers have serious implications. Modern psychology says to follow your heart, find what “works for you.” But I had seen the disastrous effects of that philosophy played out in so many aspects of life, that I knew there must be something more concrete.

I wanted to know the truth. What does the evidence say?



## Are All Religions True?

Today's culture teaches that it is loving and caring to embrace all cultures, lifestyles, and accept all beliefs as good and true. A recent poll showed that up to 40% of "professing" Christians believe all roads lead to god and heaven. This belief has grown to the point that it should be classified as a religion unto itself; for, all religions claim exclusive rights to Absolute Truth. And the followers of this system (let's call it the All Roads Faith – or ARF) will deny all other "truths" (even logic, fact, science) in supporting their claims to it.

A major component of ARF doctrine is that person's faith creates their own truth. I would like to approach this idea with 3 names: 1) Carl Sagan, 2) Mohammed Atta, and 3) Jesus. If ARF is true, where is Carl Sagan? Sagan was an astrophysicist (wrote the books "Cosmos" and "Contact") and an evangelical atheist. Sagan went to his death, proud of his determination not to crawl to an imaginary god. Now, if his belief system was true, then Carl Sagan is now just dust; no soul, no heaven, no hell. However to the Hindu or Buddhist, Sagan is now reincarnated (possibly a cow). In the world of the Christian, Sagan is eternally separated from God in Hell. The Mormon will say he is temporarily dead, but will be resurrected to the Celestial Kingdom (the lowest of the 3 Mormon heavens. Only the worst of the worst go to Mormon hell). This list could go on, but you get my point. So, my question is: Where is Carl Sagan?

Do you remember the name Mohammed Atta? He was one of the terrorist pilots that flew an airliner into a World Trade Center building. Mohammed Atta died for his beliefs. Included in that belief (Islam) is that as a martyr, he would be rewarded in heaven by God (Allah) with wine and 72 virgins. If ARF is true, Atta is in heaven now, being patted on the back by God and living the high life with all the booze and sex he can handle, all for killing nearly 3,000 innocent men and women.

I think this idea would have been pretty shocking to the third person on this list, Jesus of Nazareth. Who was Jesus? To the:

Christian – God incarnate

Mormon – A spirit child of another man from another planet who had reached god-hood.

Jehovah's Witness – Archangel Michael

Islam – A prophet, but just a man

Hindu/Buddhist – an enlightened man

Atheist – a man

If ARF is true, Jesus must be all these mutually exclusive things at the same time.

One must reject all logic and factual knowledge to hold to the tenets of ARF. When confronted with these 3 dilemmas, an ARF proponent once responded that God is so far beyond our comprehension that these things just aren't answerable in our level of understanding. His answer exposes a more foundational concept of ARF – that, really, none of our belief systems are true – just his!

In holding to ARF, the claimant becomes God. Since the ARF'ian's faith is creating his own truth, then "God" must conform to the ARF'ian, thereby making God answerable to man. Yet when challenged, not one ARF follower can hold out a hand and make a rock appear in his palm. Not a single ARF proponent would step off a tall skyscraper and stand in thin air, supported by the "truth" of his faith. No, faith does not create reality. Faith does not create truth. Faith must be based on truth, or the faithful will get hurt. All children have faith that their



parents will not abuse them; but many get abused. All children have faith that their parents will never leave them; but many leave. All newlyweds have faith that their spouses will remain faithful to them; but many don't. No, I know of no circumstance in the universe where faith "creates" truth. The evidence indicates otherwise.

I'll close with an example. During WWII, many Japanese believed their emperor divine. As a god, he could not possibly lose the war! Even after the war ended, many continued to fight, living in denial of the truth. This was their FAITH! According to ARF, their religion was true. Yet, we all know it was not.

"All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations..." Isaiah 65:2

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." John 14:6

## We're All God's Children – Aren't We?

There is a vicious lie I keep hearing. "We are all God's children. Everyone will go to heaven." Sounds loving, doesn't it? We all wish it were true. Other than the serious atheist, or the most hard core God-hater, we all want to go to heaven and wish the same for all mankind. But it is an evil lie. Oh, the people saying it don't mean it for evil. But it *is* evil, because it is a lie. It lures people into a false sense of peace. It is a peace of complacency created by ignorance of the Truth. If we all go to heaven, then why worry about reading the Bible? If we all go to heaven, what's wrong with doing life my own way? Heck, we can party-hearty! We can have all the sex we want! We can abort babies! We can marry whomever we want, as often as we want! We can ... whatever ... and it's Ok, because, well, we're all going to heaven anyway. Right?

Like the All Religions Are True fallacy, the We Are All God's Children mantra is claimed by those who want to live life on their own terms. They know enough to know that God is real, but either reject His version of reality (the Bible) or just don't know what His version of it is. You've heard the saying "Ignorance is Bliss." Bill Perkins, *Steeling the Mind of America, Vol II*, said "Ignorance is not bliss – it's dangerous." I couldn't agree more.

I met a woman who is a practicing Catholic who believes we all go to heaven. I met a man who wanted to follow Jesus but believed there was no hell. I can't imagine where they got their ideas, but I know it wasn't from the Bible. To hold these beliefs, they must reject the Jesus it depicts. It is said that Jesus taught more about hell than He did about heaven. It is Jesus who said:

**"Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it."**

Matthew 7:13-14 Net Bible

Just a cursory scan of Jesus' teachings reveals 27 times that Jesus directly mentions hell and those who are headed there. This doesn't count the Old Testament references, or the indirect references of Jesus' teachings, or the direct or indirect references of the rest of the New Testament books. I will list the references I found at the end; but, the essentials are:

- Hell is punishment
- Hell is eternal
- More will go there than will go to heaven
- Jesus is the only way to avoid it.

One of the most dramatic portrayals of hell comes from the story of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus.

**"There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. But at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus whose body was covered with sores, who longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table. In addition, the dogs came and licked his sores.**

**"Now the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell, as he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in this fire.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus likewise bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, and no**

one can cross from there to us.’ So the rich man said, ‘Then I beg you, father—send Lazarus to my father’s house (for I have five brothers) to warn them so that they don’t come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to them.’ Then the rich man said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He replied to him, ‘If they do not respond to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

#### Luke 16:19-31 Net Bible

Luke gives us this story at the end of a long line of parables, and its format fits that of a parable. I have heard it said, though, that this one is unique. It is the only parable with names – Lazarus and Abraham. It is thought that this may indicate that it depicts an actual event (it is interesting that only the name of the guilty was omitted!). Even if it is a parable, the details are significant since Jesus used fictionalized parables to describe actual characteristics of the kingdom of God. I find it revealing that the man in hell never asked to be let out. It’s as if he realizes his punishment is just. Sadly, Abraham’s proclamation - that his relatives “will not be convinced [about hell] even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31) – proved prophetic of most of mankind as people daily reject even the risen Christ and His warnings about hell.

Today, we have someone who rose from the dead, who cries out to each of us “Choose life!” (Deuteronomy 30:19) But:

“These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD’s instruction.

They say to the seers, ‘See no more visions!’ and to the prophets, ‘Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.

Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!’”

#### Isaiah 30:9-11 NIV

He cries “the LORD will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all Mankind.” (Jeremiah 25:37) But we refuse to listen, just as Abraham warned in Jesus’ parable,

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

#### II Timothy 4:3-4 NIV

If Jesus taught that hell is real and many will go there, where do we get this idea that all go to heaven? It comes from “our own desires.” (II Timothy 4:3) It comes from our roots. It is the original sin of Adam and Eve, embedded with the original lie – “Do what you want; no harm will come to you!” It comes from Satan from the beginning of mankind. And we’re still toting it around, passing it on to our children dressed up like a pretty present, a loving gift. But inside the gift is Death.

It is a horrible thing to perpetuate that lie. Wouldn’t it be so much better to pursue the Truth? Jesus said:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

You know the way to the place where I am going."

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:1-4, 6

Jesus was talking to his people, children of God. Are we all children of God? In a sense it is a half-truth. Luke listed Adam's father as God (Luke 3:38). Following the Hebrew custom of labeling all descendants of a man as that man's children, then, yes, we are all children of God. The problem is that after Adam and Eve's sin, we are all dead on arrival. We are born into sin and condemned. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they condemned all mankind to death.

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life....since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 3:17-19

Since Adam, all of God's "children" are dead. In their death, they are slaves to sin and "owned" by Satan, the prince of this world. Jesus called the Pharisees "children of the devil" (John 8:42-47) and chastised them:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."

Matthew 23:13-14 NIV

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

Matthew 23:33 NIV

Jesus' sad message was "For many are invited, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14 NIV) So, clearly, Jesus taught that not all go to heaven. To get to heaven, Jesus said that we must be born again:

"In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'"

John 3:3

"...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

John 3:5-6

Jesus offers life to those who are dead. He offers "living water" (John 10:10) to those dying of spiritual thirst.

"...whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 10:14

Those who drink are reborn in the spirit and given life.

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

John 17:3

Those who believe become children of God.

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Romans 10:9-10

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

John 5:24

When we are saved, when we are born again, God sets “his seal of ownership on us, and put(s) his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” (II Corinthians 1:22 NIV) As children of god:

“you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (or adoption). And by him we cry, ‘Abba,’ Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Romans 8:15-17

That is the good news of Jesus’ message! But there is no way that one can study Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God and come away with the idea that we all go to heaven. His message is clear – Repent, be born again, or face eternal punishment in hell. It’s not my message, it is from the Lord Jesus Himself.

Is that harsh? To the sensibilities of this world, yes. Is it unloving? Not at all. Just as parents with high standards must be firm in upholding family standards, God, the ultimate Parent, has the highest standards and upholds them. In both cases it is done out of love and care for the children. Parental standards are there because they know it will best serve the overall health of the child and the welfare of the family. God’s standards do the same for His children and the welfare of His kingdom. It is God’s kingdom. It is God’s standards that must be met. How foolish of mankind to try to ignore those standards and invent our own! God forgive us! I pray for our nation. I pray that He will open eyes and hearts to His Truth.

Thank you for seeking His truth today. It is not hard to find. I will list below the verses I found in my cursory sweep of Jesus’ teachings on hell. Like I mentioned above, they are just the direct references. There are actually many more that speak of it less directly.

God bless you all.

#### **Jesus’ Direct References to Hell:**

{Note: duplicate quotes in other books have been omitted}

##### Matthew

7:13-14; 7:21-23; 8:10-12; 10:28; 13:40-43; 18:21-35; 19:16-26; 22:1-14; 23:13,33; 24:36-51; 25:1-13; 25:14-30; 25:36-51

##### Mark

14:24; 16:16

##### Luke

13:22-38; 14:15-23; 16-19-31

##### John

3:3; 3:8,36; 6:43-51; 8:42-46; 12:25; 12:47-49; 14:6; 17:14-16; 18:37-38

## Reincarnation, A Letter to a Brother

I did a good deal of research on the reincarnation question. The folks at Probe Ministries carry a good discussion of it on their website, [www.Probe.org](http://www.Probe.org). The following summarizes my findings so far:

Big Picture: Is the Bible a reliable source? I've done a few years of study on this and have found it to be true in every respect. Science, archaeology, medicine, social studies, history – all continue to verify the Bible's truth. (Lee Strobel's "A Case for Christ" is very good on this subject) So, how does the Bible's story of existence compare to that of Eastern reincarnation/Karma?

<b>Eastern Teachings</b> God: Impersonal, uninvolved with us <b>Bible</b> God: -Personal; knew each of us before we were born; planned good works for us to do "in advance"; wove each of us in our mother's wombs; numbered the hairs on our heads; LOVES US; disciplines us; trains us; shapes us Is holy, perfect; cannot tolerate sin
<b>Eastern Teachings</b> The Soul: pre-existing with God; some versions teach that we are part of God and will return to meld with him when our lessons are learned and/or enough good Karma is amassed <b>Bible</b> The Soul: A "made" thing (John 1:3 "Through him (Jesus) all things were made"). A finite beginning with eternal existence, either in heaven or hell. Came <i>after</i> the flesh was made
<b>Eastern Teachings</b> Man: A mere prop used for teaching the soul lessons it needs to learn. Capable of doing enough good deeds to perfect himself (through multiple lives). In fact, some versions teach that all living beings are used this way, animal, insects, etc. <b>Bible</b> Man: - Created in the image of God, by God. Separated from animals, with a "breathed" in spirit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Loved by God</li><li>- Imperfect, and incapable of attaining perfection by works (works would obligate God to owing us eternal life.)</li><li>- Condemned from Adam (Jesus: "but whoever does not believe stands condemned already" Paul: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God")</li></ul>

Works are “as filthy rags”
<b>Eastern Teachings</b> Universe: Unknown beginning, unknown end; some versions teach multiple universes <b>Bible</b> Universe: Definite beginning, definite end; science verifies this with Big Bang beginning; laws of thermodynamics demand an end as all energy dissipates over time (heat death)
<b>Eastern Teachings</b> Afterlife: perpetually “reborn” to learn lessons/work off bad Karma; some versions teach that multiple lives are being lived simultaneously in multiple universes. Final resting place is when soul merges with God, becoming one with God. All will reach “nirvana,” or continue cycle of rebirth. <b>Bible</b> Afterlife: - “Just as man is destined to die once, <b>and after that</b> to face judgment,” Heb 9:27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before Jesus, soul entered Sheol or Hades, a holding place for believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers held in hell, believers in “Abraham’s bosom.”</li> <li>- After death on the cross, Jesus went to Hades and brought believers to heaven. On final Judgment Day, those in hell will be cast into Lake of Fire with Satan and demons.</li> <li>- At end of time, all bodies will be resurrected in perfect form to be united with souls – either to spend eternity with God or eternity separated from God.</li> </ul> Jesus: “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matt 7:13, 14

Other thoughts: - Reincarnation teaches that Mankind is actively involved in redeeming Himself. (In fact, all religions except Christianity teach this.) The Bible teaches that Man is incapable of doing so, and therefore God came to Earth Himself to pay the price of our redemption “once, for all.”

- Paul teaches us in Acts 17:26,27 “From one man, He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him though He is not far from each one of us.” God knows our hearts (many verses on this), and knew this in advance. He placed us just exactly where we needed to be, in time and space, to find Him when we decide to. To imply that we might need several lives to do that would require a god that isn’t smart enough to figure us out, or one that is unable to control our universe, or one more like the Eastern teachings, that is uninvolved, unknowing, uncaring, and unloving. This is not the God I know and love, nor is it the God depicted in the Bible.
- Hell: In Lee Strobel’s “A Case for Faith,” he points out that eternal hell is not so much a punishment (although it certainly is), but that God is “honoring” us by granting us our very wish – to be eternally separated from Him. For those who live their lives each day in pursuit of “self,” he grants them their wish

- an eternity with self. For God to force someone to live with His purity and glory for all eternity when they don't want to would be a far greater punishment, and an act of violence upon their free will
- If reincarnation is true, whom did King Saul talk to when he had a witch connect him to Samuel, who was already dead? Also, at one point, Jesus was "transfigured" before his disciples and Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Him. If Samuel, Moses, and Elijah were already merged with God, who was talking with Saul and Jesus?
- Jesus, who is God in the flesh, certainly knew whether reincarnation was true or not. Knowing this, why did He spend so much time trying to convince us to believe in Him now? Why was He saddened by our unbelief?

All said and done, from what I see in science, the Bible, and the teachings of Jesus, we get one shot at it.



## Food for Thought for the Mormon

This page could be just one verse:

Isaiah 43:10

“...Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.”

But here's another:

Isaiah 44:6

“I am the first and I am the last, apart from me there is no other God.”

And how about:

Isaiah 45:5

“I am the Lord, and there is no other, apart from me there is no God.”

It is Mormon doctrine that God and his wife were people like us on another planet closer to the center of our galaxy. They lived the good life and were rewarded by “god-hood” over Earth. All people on Earth are God’s “spirit children” and Jesus and Satan were his children as well. Jesus and Satan fought over God’s plan for Mankind. Satan lost and became the Devil. God (in his physical body) had actual sex with Mary, and sired Jesus in the flesh. Like them, we too can aspire to god-hood and become gods over our own planet in the universe with an infinite number of other gods.

There are many obvious problems, but they begin with the fact that Mormon doctrine also accepts the Bible as God’s word (in as much as it was accurately translated). I am puzzled, then, with how they approach these verses in Isaiah. In God’s own words, he “stretched out the heavens” by his own hand. Try Isaiah 44:24 “...I am the Lord, **who made all things**, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.” The Hebrew for “the heavens” always includes the entire universe. God could not have done this were he a man on another planet. Or Isaiah 45:12 “My own hands stretched out the heavens, I marshaled their starry hosts.” My final question, for now, is that God says in many places, like Psalm 90:2, Psalm 93:2, (even in the Mormon scriptures like Moroni 8:18, which says amazingly “For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but his is *unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity*.”) that he is God “**from** everlasting **to** everlasting,” “**from** all eternity **to** all eternity.” When was He a man?

I am a Truth seeker. I keep an open mind and take no man’s word alone, no matter how reputable. I have been searching for the Truth steadily since 1989, and find the Bible to be completely sound in every way. One example: Archaeology continues to verify the names, places, and dates in every book in the Bible. Did you know that NOT ONE name, place, or date of The Book of Mormon has ever been verified?

Some may think, "Does it really matter? They're still worshiping Jesus." Paul warns us about following just any "jesus." Let's exaggerate. What if my religion taught that Jesus was the reincarnated Easter Bunny. Do you think my faith in that "jesus" would get me into God's Family?

## Jehovah's Witness: "Just Any Jesus..."

I have met very dedicated and "fired up" people who love the Lord and follow the teachings of the Jehovah's Witness and the Watch Tower Organization. Like the Mormon's, though, I would challenge you to look closely at just who it is that you are dedicating your life to.

The Watch Tower teaches a few things, crucial things, that don't quite "jive" with God's Word. For example:

### A. The Name of God

They teach that unless one calls on the "true" name of God – Jehovah – one cannot be saved. I think the thief on the cross next to Jesus would be surprised at this claim. He never knew the English word "Jehovah," and in fact never uttered a name at all in his plea to Jesus, yet Jesus told him "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43) In fact, God used many names for Himself, from I AM, Yahweh, King of Kings, etc. The creation of the name Jehovah came about as a mistake when Christian translators combined the Hebrew letters YHWH with the vowels of ADONAY (which the Massoretes substituted as e, o, and a). This can be found in the Encyclopedia Britannica. Jesus said "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25, 26) Didn't mention the English word "Jehovah" there.

### B. Just Who is Jesus?

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was not God in the flesh, but Archangel Michael. Jesus' body was "incinerated" in the tomb, and Michael returned to heaven. Now, let us see just who the Apostles believed Jesus to be. Paul, who got his instruction directly from Jesus, said that Jesus is the "Christ, who is God over all." (Romans 9:5) Again, lest there be any doubt, in Titus 2:13, he called Him "...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Doubting Thomas, when confronted with the holes in Jesus' hands and side, fell to his knees and cried "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28) In Colossians 2:9, Paul says "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives (Hebrew word for this is present tense) in bodily form," and warns us in verse 18 about the "worship of angels." You will never find an angel in the Bible that would accept worship, yet Jesus accepted people's worship several times. The entire first chapter of the book of Hebrews is devoted to denouncing the worship of angels. No, the people who knew Jesus and were chosen by God to record His word to us knew that Jesus was in fact God.

### C. False Prophecies of the Watch Tower

According to Deuteronomy 18:20-22, a true prophet makes predictions that come true. All else are false prophets. Let us check the track record of the Watch Tower.

1. In 1889, the issue "The Time is at Hand," pg 101, states "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." Christ did not return in 1914.
2. In 1918, in "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," pg 89, states "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in Hebrews 11 to condition of human perfection." Another false prophesy.

3. The August 15, 1968 issue, "Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?" pg 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Didn't happen.
4. In their book, "You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth," pg 154, they state "Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it." There are very few people still alive today from the 1914 generation. Soon, the Watch Tower will have another false prophesy.

There are other issues, but these are the ones that should really make one stop and think. My church, when I was a kid (a small, independent Baptist) used to teach us that it was a sin to dance and go to the swimming pool. I was sinning, according to them, when I let my hair get long (in the '70's!). It didn't take much digging of my own to learn that they were teaching their own personal beliefs as God's word. I encourage anyone thinking about worshiping the Jesus of the Jehovah's Witnesses to do a little digging as well.

### ***Chapter 3: Diving In***

Ok! I'm a committed Christian. What is that? Salvation, Sanctification, Prayer: words I'd heard all my life; but what do they really mean? I can't see, touch, or hear God, how am I supposed to love Him? Thankfully, the Lord put some gifted teachers and scholars in my path (mostly on Christian talk radio) as I was asking these questions. I learned from R.C. Sproul, Alistair Begg, D. James Kennedy, Hank Hanegraaff, and many more. But mostly, I learned that for the real Truth, one should always go to God's Word. It's tried and true. It's tested in countless lives over the centuries. God designed Life, and gave us His plan on how to live it. Deviate from it if you like, but suffer the consequences for it you will (as Yoda would say!).

So, I started digging. Every time I had a question about something, I would sit down with paper and pen and start digging into the Word. The following essays came about this way.



# **The Thief on the Cross**

We all want to go to heaven. Many grow up with the feeling that we all will go there. They have a vague idea that we're to do the best we can, while in this life, treating others as we would have others treat us, and when we get to heaven, God will sort it all out. Some of this comes from Hollywood. Some comes from parents telling generalities, like when a relative dies and we tell our kids "Uncle Tommy is in heaven, now." The root of all doubt, though, comes from not knowing the facts. And the facts are there to be had. It's all in the Bible. Yet, even for those who study the Bible in depth, there are differing claims as to what it takes to get to heaven. Some teach you must be baptized. There is a church in my home town that got into trouble with the law for forcibly baptizing children without their consent, because they believe a baptism alone, with or without consent will do the trick. Some denominations baptize their babies, believing it places them into God's family and on the road to heaven. Some teach a ritualized method of salvation. Some require works.

When I set out to learn the truth on the issue, one thing that struck me was the thief on the cross next to Jesus. Jesus was crucified between two "robbers." At the beginning, everyone "heaped insults on him" (Matthew 27:44) including the thieves, taunting him to save himself. But something happened to one of them during the ordeal. We are not told what it was, but toward the end, one of the thieves had a change of heart. Luke tells us that one of them rebuked the other and turning to Jesus said "'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Luke 23:42-43). Over time, I have found this one event clears up many different controversies. Let's examine it to see what it says about:

## **Baptism**

Had the thief ever been baptized? Baptism was fairly new on the scene. The Jews were using it to induct Gentiles into the Jewish religion. John "the Baptizer" used it to introduce Jesus before He began his 3 year ministry. We don't know how long the thief was imprisoned before his execution, nor do we know his religious beliefs. The Bible is silent on these things. What we do know, is that he went to the cross an unbeliever in Jesus. Considering the circumstances, my bet is that he had never been baptized.

## **Good Works**

Here again, we have very little information to go by. He was a thief, a "robber," a criminal. The Bible doesn't speak kindly of those who rob others. He went to his execution with a legacy of "robber." It's not the good works we think of when we imagine earning our way to heaven.

## **Rituals/Procedures**

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim one must specifically call on the name "Jehovah" to be saved. Catholics teach you must comply with a list of things to reach heaven. Mormons have their own specific list of requirements that must be met. There are more denominational 'isms out there that are not evident in the history of this thief.

## **Just what did he do?**

The first thing I see with the thief was that he recognized his sinful state: "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve." (Luke 23:4) Next, we see that he believed Jesus. He believed Jesus was the King of a kingdom that was not of this world. He believed Jesus had the power to include him in it. And he confessed his belief. When he asked Jesus to "remember me," he confessed publicly his belief in Jesus as Lord.

Jesus taught that “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36). Through Paul, God explains that “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10). No baptism, no works, no ritual.

Don’t mistake me. I am not saying that baptism is unimportant; Jesus himself set that example (Matthew, Mark, & Luke). I am not saying good works are not needed. They are the evidence of our faith (James 2:18). If the thief had the opportunity, I believe we would have seen both of these develop in his life. But, what we clearly see is a belief in Jesus as Lord and a verbal confession of it. Jesus then said that he would be with Him in paradise that day. Very simple.

What about you? Have you taken the simple “leap of faith” of the thief? God knows our hearts. He knows yours. Will you be joining us in the Kingdom of Heaven? It is easy to do. There is no formula, here. Most people simply tell God that they want to follow Jesus as Lord of their lives. All recognize the need for forgiveness of their sins, and invite Jesus into their hearts. They recognize that Jesus died for us, paying the price for our sinful hearts and ways, and accept His free gift of eternal life. Let me show you some verses.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

“If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this, not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:9

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” II Corinthians 5:17

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” Romans 8:16

Now, go to God, giving Him your heart and soul, and become a “Child of God.”

If you just committed your heart and life to our Savior -- Welcome to the Kingdom of God! But this is just the beginning of a new and wonderful life. If you don’t have one, get a modern translation of the Bible (unless you just love the 15<sup>th</sup> century Shakespearian English of the old King James Version!) and start learning about God, about Jesus, and about who you are now. Start growing! Start asking questions. Start falling in love with the Creator and Lover of our souls.



## Baptism – Is it necessary for salvation?

There are large denominations that teach baptism as a necessary ingredient for salvation. Let's look at it in depth. Since there are a few verses that can lead to such a conclusion, let's begin with Peter's sermon at Pentecost:

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.' With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Acts 2:37-41

Also:

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'"

John 3:5-6

Must we be baptized to be saved? I fully understand the confusion! Peter's proclamation "Repent and be baptized" or Jesus' promise "Believe and be baptized" (Mark 16:16) make it sound like baptism is required for salvation. Ananias' charge to Saul (soon to be called Paul) in Acts 22:16 seems to be saying the same thing:

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

Whole denominations that have been created based upon this debate. I'm sure the scholars who started them had years of training in the Word and I would never try to compare my meager grasp of the Word to hundreds of pastors around the country who teach the requirement of baptism for salvation. But, I just cannot see it. I will show you what I've found in Scripture and you can be the judge for yourself. Let us be "Bereans" and dig into God's Word!

I would like to start with Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus first, because it actually holds the answer in those two little verses. But we will support it with other Scripture as well. Let's look at the whole conversation:

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.' In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked. 'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to

save the world through him. **Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."**

John 3:1-18

Nicodemus was seeking answers. He recognized Jesus' authority as testified by His miracles. Jesus cut to the chase and told Nicodemus that he needed to be saved (which was probably Nicodemus' purpose for visiting Jesus). But Jesus told him that he must be "born again." Nicodemus was totally confused and asked "How can a man be born when he is old?" This is where Jesus mentioned the water. But the water doesn't mean baptism. In fact, Jesus explains in the very next verse: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." I'm sure you've heard the saying "Hon, it's time to go to the hospital; my water just broke! The baby's coming!" Jesus is telling Nicodemus that one human birth is enough. The rebirth is one of the spirit. We are born into this life the human way ("flesh gives birth to flesh"), but we enter into God's kingdom through the work of God's Spirit ("Spirit gives birth to spirit"). You'll notice that through the rest of Jesus' teaching, baptism is never mentioned. The core issue is belief. Those who believe receive eternal life. Those who do not believe "are condemned already."

In fact, an interesting way to analyze this debate is to look at the condemned and what makes them condemned. You will never find a verse that says "And they were cast into the Lake of Fire because they were not baptized" or "Many had believed, but for lack of baptism they will be cast out into darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." No, the condemned will receive their punishment for their hard hearts and unbelief. Many will be eternally separated from God for their stubborn pride. Many will miss heaven because they thought they had earned it. Their works, they believe will endear them to God. But the Bible, in fact Jesus Himself, makes it clear that salvation is a work of God alone. This was one of the key issues, if not *the* key issue that drove Martin Luther to leave the Roman Catholic Church. I believe it was his 13<sup>th</sup> complaint that stated "Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" (forgive me if that is not exact, I'm writing from memory). He was essentially paraphrasing Ephesians 2:8-10:

"For it is **by grace** you have been saved, **through faith** – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

**"Does God give you his Spirit** and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because **you believe** what you heard?"

Galatians 3:5

"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by **faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.**"

Galatians 3:14

"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being **given through faith in Jesus Christ**, might be given to those who believe."

Galatians 3:22

So, we can clearly see that our salvation is based upon God's work, not our own. Baptism is an act of obedience, a following of Christ, a public declaration of our faith in Christ and submission to him, a visual symbol of our death to sin and resurrection to new life; but it is a human work. Human works cannot save. What then, do these verses mean? Let's go back to Acts for clarity. Peter, in his sermon in Acts 2, quotes Joel:

**"And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."**

Joel 2:32; Act 2:21

There are many verses in the Old Testament that say the same thing, and they never mention baptism. Later, Peter is teaching the gospel to the Roman centurion, Cornelius:

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So they ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Acts 10:43-48

This is a powerful example because it shows that Cornelius and his family were saved while Peter was speaking! It was their heartfelt belief that triggered their salvation. Their baptism came afterwards. It is interesting that this incident mirrors what happened to the apostles at Pentecost. A few days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in power. It was through the Spirit that Peter gave his speech that we have been talking about. Before Jesus ascension, He told the apostles:

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Mark 16:16

“For John baptized you with water, but in a few days **you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**”

Acts 1:5

Here, we are beginning to understand the baptism that Jesus means. Paul teaches in Titus:

“...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done [baptism], **but because of his mercy**. He saved us **through the washing of rebirth** and renewal by the Holy Spirit; whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that **having been justified [saved] by his grace** we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Titus 3:5

“For we were **all baptized by one Spirit** into one body...”

I Corinthians 12:13

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, **cleansing her by the washing with water through the word**, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Ephesians 5:25-27

Because of God’s mercy, because of His grace, we are “washed” by rebirth by the Holy Spirit; baptizing us into the Body of Christ. By the “water” of the word (which we know to be Jesus, John 1:1) we are cleansed of our sins and made holy and blameless. This then, is the baptism that Jesus told us to preach to all nations. Yes, certainly, we follow Him into the waters of baptism as we enter our life of obedience to Him; but like Cornelius, we have been reborn already before we walk into that water.

God uses many images in the Bible that help us visualize something that happens in the spiritual realm, and this is one of them. The Bible must be taken as a whole. If the two verses at the top are to mean that the human act of baptism is required for salvation, then we have problems with a great many other verses. The preponderance of the Bible speaks to salvation coming, like Luther said, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

As a final note, it is interesting that you will always see baptism mentioned second behind belief or repentance. It is never mentioned first, like "Be baptized and repent!" Oddly, the Catholic practice follows this backward order. As children, they are baptized into God's family. Only later as children and adults do they repent. I think the order is significant. Obedience to God must be voluntary, must be from the heart to be valid in God's eyes. How can acts done by others to a child before the age of accountability effect a spiritual rebirth? It goes against anything I read in God's word. No, we repent and in faith we are saved. As a new creation, washed by the Spirit, we follow Jesus' example in public baptism. Was Jesus saved by His baptism? Certainly not! He was just setting the example for his redeemed children to follow, children redeemed by grace, through faith.

"...wash me and I will be whiter than snow."

Psalms 51:7

"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Isaiah 1:18

## ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED?

There are some people and some denominations that believe that every time you sin you lose your salvation and must be re-saved. The idea that someone could ever lose their salvation and then regain it (daily? hourly?) reveals a couple of fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of God and the nature of mankind.

I've never personally talked with someone who holds this view, but my guess is that people of this view have little or no idea of the pervasiveness of sin in our daily lives. I have heard discussions of the life of Martin Luther, the man who led the Protestant breakaway from the Catholic church. Luther was a priest, himself, but would sit in confession for hours at a time every day. For a long time, I couldn't understand how anyone could find enough sins to confess for even one hour, much less 3 or 6 hours each day. But as I've studied God's view of sin, I've grown more convinced of the total corruption of our lives. Without the hand of the Holy Spirit working within us "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:2) we would hardly be able to breathe or move without sinning. For the sake of brevity, let me just demonstrate using I Corinthians 10:31 – "so whether you eat or drink of whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." It is, after all, the meaning and purpose of our existence (glorifying God). So go through your day. Do you get up in the morning to glorify God? Do you give Him the glory when you brush your teeth and shave? Do you thank Him for in-door plumbing when you go to the bathroom and praise Him for hot and cold running water each shower? You can see where I'm headed with this. Our sins of commission are just the tip of the iceberg compared to our sins of omission. This is, I think, where Luther must have found himself each day in the confessional booth.

For those who worry that each sin is cause for losing one's salvation and fear dying without asking for forgiveness – I ask: is there any hope of heaven being filled with even one soul? I'd say it's extremely unlikely if this view of salvation is correct. Yet, God tells us that there will be a chorus filled by peoples from every nation numbering more than one can count (Rev 7:9)! So there is something wrong with this whole idea.

What strikes me about this view of getting saved, sinning, asking for forgiveness, getting saved again, sinning, asking for forgiveness, getting saved again – ad infinitum – is that salvation has become a work. Salvation in this way depends upon our own diligence, our own persistence. It turns God into a circuit breaker on a GFI plug. We sin – God pops out. We confess and push the circuit breaker back in! Wow, how easy! Yet, this is nowhere near the God I see in the Bible. Which brings us to the second major misunderstanding I see in this philosophy of salvation: the nature of God.

Let me run some verses by you that depict the nature of God that I see revealed in scripture:

*"Fear not I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine."*

Isaiah 43:1

*"No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"*

Isaiah 43:13

*"I have swept away your sins like a cloud, your sins like a morning mist."*

Isaiah 44:22

Who calls us to salvation? Right, God. And He calls us by name. Does God make mistakes? When the role is called in heaven and people are missing will God snap His fingers in frustration and say "Gee, I could have sworn old John Doe was going to be saved! Shucks, I must have been wrong about him, oh well!" I don't think so.

So, if God calls us to salvation, can you reverse it? No, no one can change or undo what God has done. Jesus tells us that He *"gives life to whom he is pleased to give it."* John 5:21 Can Jesus make a mistake? He goes on to say that *"no one can come to me unless the Father enables him,"* (John 5:65) and *"All that the Father gives*

me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” (John 6:37) Also, “if anyone is in Christ, he is anew creation; the old has gone the new has come!” II Cor 5:17

No, my friends, if God picked you out, called you by name, enabled you to come to Jesus, Jesus gives you life, and you become a new creation – who are you to “undo” the will and acts of the Triune God!

I understand the easily misunderstood verses in Hebrews that, without study, by themselves give people the impression that salvation can be lost. But this is a common problem we face in reading isolated verses. There are many verses in the Bible that can lead to some wild ideas if taken by themselves without studying them in context of both the surrounding verses as well as in context with the rest of scripture as a whole. The verses in Hebrews warn Jews who have turned to Christianity not to go back to relying on the Law for their salvation. The point is that they are not trusting in the grace and forgiveness of God, but in their own works in the Law to be saved.

We see the same thing in people who have “once been enlightened,” ... “who have tasted the goodness of the word...” (Heb 6:4) and fall away. Verses 7 & 8 explain. You look at the fruit. Do these people “produce a crop useful” or “thorns and thistles.” People saved by God produce “good fruit” in their lives (John 15:5). Those that have fallen away in Hebrews only “tasted” the gospel, they did not consume it. They had a head knowledge and were enlightened, but not the heart knowledge of the surrendered soul. They were never made “a new creation.”

When you surrender your heart and soul to God the Spirit gives you life (John 6:63). God puts “his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit (II Cor 1:22, 5:5) guaranteeing our salvation (Eph 1:14). Could you imagine the Spirit like a yoyo getting put in, then yanked, put in, then yanked every time we sin and repent, sin and repent? Sounds pretty ridiculous, and frankly unlike anything God does in the Bible. Jesus did not tell Nicodemus that to be saved he must be born again – and again – and again. No, He said that to enter heaven we are born of water (natural birth) and Spirit (spiritual birth) (John 3:5) and become heirs to the kingdom of God.

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, ... but you received the Spirit of redemption ... the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”

#### Romans 8:15-17

We could go on, but I think the point is clear. When God washed all your sins away by nailing all of them to the cross of Jesus, He did it “once for all” adopting all believers into the Family of God. We don’t un-adopt children, neither does God.

#### A Rebuttal:

Bruce,

I believe you may be slightly off the mark here. My point is that God is not going to force us to love and obey Him, just as parents do not chain their children in their rooms so as to keep them home and safe.

There are a few points I'd like to make here.....

SCRIPTURE: There is no passage in the Bible which suggests that salvation cannot be lost. Quite the contrary, *“See then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be*

cut off" (Rom. 11:22).... "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit (John 15:1)... "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries... Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy of punishment, the one who has trampled the Son of God, and who has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified ....Now, "the Just shall live by faith. But if he draws back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." [Heb 10:26-39]

FATHERS: The writings of the Apostles and early Christians do not support the idea that salvation cannot be lost; *"But if any one relapse into strife, he will be cast out of the tower, and will lose his life. Life is the possession of all who keep the commandments of the Lord" [Hermas, The Shepherd, 80 A.D.].... "Eternal fire was prepared for him who voluntarily departed from God and for all who, without repentance, persevere in apostasy" [Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 156 A.D.]*

NATURAL LAW: Following the balance of natural law, it is reasonable to conclude that free-will is likewise balanced and ordered; that is; just we have the capacity to embrace God, we also have an equal and opposite capacity to reject Him. This capacity was revealed at the creation of the universe, with Adam and Eve. They lived in the garden in a most profound way; they were in the constant presence of our Lord and had everything they could possibly need. Yet even living in perfection in the direct presence of the Almighty, they freely chose to deny Him.

It also follows logical sense that we must contain this ability in order to fully realize our complete dependence on God. If it were not this way; if we could never lose our salvation (this is first presuming salvation is granted at a single instant in time), then it could be easy to rationalize away sinful behavior. A Christian could simply say; "If I am already saved, what need is there to do anything else?" This is ultimately the mindset that someone who believes OSAS can fall into, and Satan would like nothing more than to trick us into complacency and indifference; for this is one offense that hurts God the most. Jesus Himself stated how deeply indifference offends Him; *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth!" [Rev 3:16]*

In Christ,

A Brother

My Brother!

Thank you for your letter. It is clear you have a passion for God and His Word! I appreciate your thoughtful approach to the issue and your reasoned arguments. I'm sure you're aware that theologians have spent life-times researching this issue and have come down on opposite sides of the fence after all their careful work. As an "in-house" debate, some say that it doesn't really matter; but I value the discussion because it forces one to delve deeply into God's Word, and that is always a profitable endeavor. No matter what the issue, a long and deep search through the Word expands our understanding of the nature of God, the nature of ourselves, and further implants the Living Word in our hearts.

You have brought many issues into the discussion, which individually could take volumes of text to discuss. Your challenge brought me to Revelation where Jesus refers to His “book of life.” Here is a summary of what I found:

### The City of God

“Nothing impure will enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those *whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*” Revelation 21:27

### Lake of Fire

- “*If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life* he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:15

- “All the inhabitants of the earth...will worship the beast – *all whose names haven’t been written in the book of life.*” Revelation 13:8

### Whose names are entered?

- “He who *overcomes* will, like them, be dressed in white. *I will never blot out his name from the book of life...*” Revelation 3:5

(Jesus was talking to members of the church at Sardis who had “a reputation of being alive, but [were] dead.” Revelation 3:1)

- “*To him who overcomes*, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:7

### How do we “Overcome”?

- “Who is it that overcomes the world? *Only he who believes that Jesus is the son of God.*” I John 5:5
- “...For *everyone born of God* overcomes the world.” I John 5:4

### When were Names Entered?

- “The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written *in the book of life from the creation of the world...*” Revelation 17:8
- “To God’s elect...who have been *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...*” I Peter 1:2
- “...*because from the beginning* God chose you to be saved...” II Thessalonians 2:13
- “*For God did not appoint us [brothers] to suffer wrath but to receive salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I Thessalonians 5:9
- In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he names women and men and fellow workers “whose names are in the book of life.” Philippians 4:3

### Do we keep ourselves safe and blameless?

- “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the *one who is born of God [Jesus] keeps him safe*, and the evil one cannot harm him.” I John 5:18
- “May your whole spirit, soul, and body *be kept blameless* at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and *he will do it.*” I Thessalonians 5:23-24
- “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*” Philippians 1:12-13

### Points

- Before the beginning of time, God knows His children and writes their names in the book of life.
- God sends His Word and Spirit to these children and 1) gives them Life, 2) grows and nourishes them, and 3) protects them.



- Those born of God overcome the world. Overcomer's names are written in the book of life. Names are never blotted out.

So what do we make of verses that appear to be describing children of God, turning from Him, rejecting Him?

- God's foreknowledge cannot be wrong. Those who are "elect" will not reject God. He knew before time began those who would choose Him and those who would reject Him. Why would He enable, call, and give Life to one He knows will reject Him? In fact, the verses we have just seen show that He does not do this.
- Therefore, something else is going on here. The people Jesus was talking to in the church of Sardis are a good case in point. They had a "reputation of being alive, but [were] dead." (Rev 3:1) They had the appearance to others of a child of God. People around them thought they were Christians. But Jesus said they were dead. They had never been born again. If one walked away after "tasting the goodness of the word of God" (Heb 6:6), it was because his name had never been written in the Lamb's book of life in the first place. When Peter talks of these people he describes them as a dog who returns to his vomit (II Pet 2:22). When the dog vomits and walks away, he is still a dog, even if he hops on a chair at the dinner table with you. The fact that he returns to his vomit does not imply he had been converted to a human at the table and then changed back. It simply confirms the nature that had always been his – that of a dog. Likewise, those who "fall away" were never born again, they were never written in the book of life. Like the dog and swine, they were always dogs and swine.
- As I studied this issue, I reviewed the Hebrews 10:29 verse you referenced: "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, **who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him**, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" It sounds like he is talking about someone who had been saved, but who has turned against God. But, does it really? It says the person had been "sanctified." This is not the same as being redeemed, or born again. The word is used to describe an act of God by which believers become more and more conformed to Christ's image (NIV, dictionary of terms). But it is also used to describe someone or something "set apart; to make holy" (NIV, dictionary of terms). We see the use of this second form in I Corinthians 7:14

*"For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."*

We see here that the unbelieving spouses and their children (whether believers or not) are "sanctified" or "made holy." Does this mean they are saved? No. The presence of the believer sets the other family members apart to God's service. They are "holy" in that they are instruments of God to be used "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (i.e. the believing spouse) (Rom 8:28). Therefore, the sanctified person referenced in the Hebrews passage is not necessarily a believer. It is unlikely that he is, else none of the verses we have studied so far make sense.

You offer the example of Adam and Eve. It is a good example of free will and their ability to choose to abandon God and eternal life. But here is how it fails to support the claim that we can walk into and out of Life ourselves. Even though they had free will, Adam and Eve did not have the capability to walk back into Life after losing it. They could not lose it and take it back and lose it, ad infinitum. Theirs was a special circumstance. They lived in a pristine relationship with God. When they chose to sin, they ruined that relationship and permanently separated themselves from God. After that moment, there's not a single thing they could do to redeem themselves. No matter how desperately they wanted, Adam and Eve could never again will themselves back into the family of God. But God, before the beginning of time, knew who would join Him when given the chance. When Jesus died for us on the cross, He went to Hades to preach the gospel to the lost of the pre-Noah era (Eph 4:8). He already knew their hearts. When He led believers in His "train" as He ascended from "prison" (I Pet 3:18-20), He brought with Him those whose names were already written in His book of life. Adam and Eve were probably among them. Do you think it possible that He had to take some of them back because they changed their minds? Can you imagine Him looking at the Father after returning a few and saying "Whoops! Guess we were wrong about those!"

The fall of Adam and Eve, like the fall of Satan, proves the existence of free will. But from the beginning of time, Adam and Eve's names were written in the Lamb's book of life. God knew their hearts and redeemed them with Jesus' blood. Those that "fall away" are the lost. They may have the "appearance of being alive" like a well-mannered dog at the dinner table; but they were dead all along.

["Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."](#) 1 Samuel 16:7

I agree with your point that the idea of permanent salvation can tempt one to become complacent. That is in our nature. But complacency itself is not a sign of being lost. At the same time, good works and Christian activity are not sure signs of salvation. There are famous examples of people who by all outward appearances were Christians: Templeton, the contemporary of Billy Graham, was an evangelist who walked away from God; Khrushchev as a boy memorized the entire Old Testament. To the outward observer, both of these people would appear to be Christians who later rejected God. But we cannot see their hearts. Maybe their motives for "serving" God were self-serving instead. Maybe they had never really surrendered their hearts. Only God knows. But it would fit the verses we have been studying here. I think an interesting aspect of free will is that it keeps us from totally and completely knowing whether we are written in God's book of life or not. That is why Paul constantly challenges us to persevere, to run the race to completion.

As I study God's word, I sometimes come across verses that seem to contradict other verses. On this issue there are clearly verses that teach of the permanence of salvation. Yet there are verses that seem to support the idea that it can be lost -- a contradiction. So far, though, every time I dig into a contradiction, I find that there is a logical explanation.

PS: I recently heard a discussion about the Hebrews 6 verses, (about once tasting the Holy Spirit and then walking away.) The speaker pointed something out, that once he said it, I couldn't believe I had never seen it before! The verse says: (6:4) "It is **impossible** ... (v6) if they fall away, **to be brought back to repentance.**" (emphasis mine)

If one is to take the Hebrews teaching to mean that salvation can be lost, then they must accept the teaching in full, and realize that it is lost permanently. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that if it were rejected, salvation can never be regained.

Romans 11 is often cited in arguing against OSAS, specifically Romans 11:22:

["...consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God; sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."](#)

This argument quickly falls apart when you read the entire context of the verse from 11:11 to 11:26. Paul is talking of the nation of Israel and whole nations of Gentiles. He clearly states his context in v.13 "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles..." and vrs 7 and 25:

["What Israel sought so earnestly..."](#)

["Israel has experienced a hardening..."](#)

When he talks of branches being "broken off" and "cut off," he is not referring to individuals, but entire nations, masses of peoples, or else it doesn't make any sense. How could a Jew who was "broken off" the vine in Jesus' day be grafted "in again" after the full number of Gentiles has come in (v 25)? No, Paul is speaking of the fulfillment of prophesy when God warned Israel that their rejection of Him would result in their own rejection as Bride and a new Bride (the Gentiles) would be selected, making them jealous.

But even these verses, if taken to mean that salvation can be lost, would have to mean the same as the Hebrews verses, in that, the loss is permanent.

## How Do We Learn To Love God?

We love ice cream. We love red sports cars. We love our little babies. We love LOVE! But how do we love God? I heard a sermon on this that spelled it out completely. In brief, it went something like this:

You golf fanatics out there already know what I'm going to say. Golfers will spend hours at the golf course working on their short game; working on their swing, working on the sand trap. When they can't be at the course, they spend hours reading about golf in magazines and newspapers, or watching it on TV. It is their passion. It is their focus.

How do we fall in love with each other? Initially, we spend some cautious time meeting over lunch, or walking in the park, getting to know each other. We get to the point where each day, if we can't be together, we call each other, sharing our deepest dreams and baring our most painful sorrows. We are totally focused on the other person.

It is the same with God. When you make God the focus of your life; as you start spending more and more time with Him; as you share your deepest thoughts, dreams, and pain; as you learn everything about Him that you can (mainly by reading His love letters to you – the Bible) you will fall deeply in love with Him.

You will learn how dearly He loves you. You will find Him totally faithful, utterly worthy of your trust. You will look back on all your past days, wishing you could have them all back so that you can pour your love for Him into each and every one of them. Oh, how wonderful His is!

It's just a matter of focus. Pure and simple. The things that we make the focus of our lives will become the love of our lives. Do that with God and let the romance begin!



## Surrender – What does that mean?

Wow! What a question! It sounded simple at first, but as I thought about it, I realized I didn't really know how I was going to put it into words. I'm a retired Air Force pilot, and a guy who likes science, so I tend to think in terms of steps and procedures. This question, though, comes more from the heart.

I think of surrender as a two-fold concept. It is a life commitment decision and it is a life-time process. For me, surrender came as a major decision, years ago, to give myself totally to God. I had been investigating the evidence for the existence of God, the truth of the Bible, and the legitimacy of Jesus. I got to the point I was convinced it was all true, but I was still living my life for me – not God. I was reading the story of King Saul, how he was half-way living for God and half-way doing things his own way<sup>1</sup>. I felt God grab my heart and realized I was doing the same thing in my life! God tormented Saul with an unclean spirit and rejected him as king. I felt, likewise, that God was using pain in my life to get my attention. I completely broke. I bawled my eyes out, and asked God to forgive me for wasting 20 years of my life living for myself. I told Him that the reigns of my life were His. I told Him that I wanted to live for Him and serve Him with everything that I am. That was my “major decision.”

Now, though, as I wake up each day, and go about daily life, I find that surrender is a process that God is guiding me through. The more I learn about God, the more I fall in love with Him. His Spirit exposes things in my character, things in my way of life, attitudes and choices, etc. that I must surrender to Him<sup>2</sup>. As I grow in my desire to please Him, I see things in myself that don't line up with the godly character traits we see in His Word<sup>3</sup>, and I long to change. My heart yearns to be led by His Spirit<sup>4</sup>. Demands of daily life and my carnal ego constantly distract me from growing in this way<sup>5</sup>, but I trust God to lead me as I stumble my way along<sup>6</sup>. So, my point here is – there is an aspect of Christian living, of Christian growth as a child of God, which involves daily (even hourly, even minutely) effort at re-focusing my attention and desire on God<sup>7</sup>. There is a subtle process where I lose focus on God, throughout my day, and I find the “reigns” of my life back in my own hands. I have a tendency to re-take control of my life, subconsciously (or sometimes intentionally!) to live my life for myself – to please myself – rather than God. Each time I discover this, I go to Him asking for forgiveness, telling Him that I trust Him with my life. I pray that His will be done, not mine<sup>8</sup>.

I could probably write a whole book on this, but I'll try to summarize with some other imagery. God gives us a picture of Himself as our King and as our Husband. If we lived in a land ruled by a king, and we personally worked for him, we would be pretty concerned about obeying him. Kings had a tendency to lop off the heads of disobedient servants<sup>9</sup>! Well, God is our king. If we believe He is real, and personally involved with each of us<sup>10</sup>, we should be pretty concerned about being obedient to Him. If He

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<sup>1</sup> I Samuel Chaps 9-13; specifically I Sam 9:8 & 13:8-14. Also, I Sam 15.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 2:10-16; John 14:26; II Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12-13

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:16-26

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:5-8

<sup>5</sup> Gal 5:17

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 3:5-6

<sup>7</sup> Prov 4:25-27

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:42-43

<sup>9</sup> Prov 28:14

<sup>10</sup> I Chronicles 28:9; Matt 6:25-34

is a King we really *want* to serve, then we will commit ourselves to Him (surrender). He will be our Lord and master<sup>11</sup>. We will serve him with all our heart, mind, and strength<sup>12</sup>.

Likewise, as a loving spouse, if God is our husband and we truly love Him, we will want to serve Him selflessly. A definition of love that I like is the act of putting our wants and desires on the shelf and devoting ourselves to enriching the life of another<sup>13</sup>. As we grow in our love for God, we will ever increasingly want to love Him in this way. We know His love for us is total<sup>14</sup> and His plans for us are perfect<sup>15</sup>. We can, therefore, trust Him with our welfare, not worrying or fretting about our needs<sup>16</sup>, and just spend our time loving Him and serving Him (surrender).

I hope this helps. I didn't fill the discussion with supporting verses because I was trying to relate my personal experience, but I've footnoted each issue if you would care to meditate on God's Word concerning the subject. I highly recommend it. It is through reading God's Word that we truly come to understand the depth of His love for us, and in turn grow in our love for Him. As our love grows, our desire to surrender our lives to Him gets stronger.

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

John 12:25-26, Luke 17:33, Matt 10:39

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 10:9; Luke 23:39-42 – I love the account of the thief on the cross beside Jesus! He did no works to earn salvation. He simply recognized his sinful state, deserving punishment; recognized Jesus as LORD and king of a kingdom with the power to grant membership; and asked.

<sup>12</sup> Matt 22:37

<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:4-8

<sup>14</sup> John 3:16; Eph 1:4-5; Eph 2:4-5; Eph 3:18-19; Psalm 138:8

<sup>15</sup> Jeremiah 29:10-13

<sup>16</sup> Matt 6:25-34; Psalm 37:8

## A Jog Through Sanctification

*Sanctification: Act of God by which believers become more and more conformed to Christ's image (I Thess. 4:3)  
[NIV Dictionary of Terms]*

Several years ago, a popular televangelist shocked the nation when it was revealed he had been having an affair outside his marriage. Affairs are always appalling because of the emotional damage done by violating a loved one's trust, but the national outrage expressed both in the press as well as in the Christian community was far greater than that expressed at the fall of any other public figure. This man had been preaching to us weekly, warning us of the folly of sin! He was a "man of God!" How could he do such a thing?! I know people who have the idea that when a person accepts Christ, becoming a child of God, their nature is changed and they stop sinning. Oh, how I wish it were true.

Of course, it is true that we are given a new nature, as our spirits are reborn into the Life of Christ. Our hearts (souls/spirits) come alive as God gives us a living heart of flesh to replace the dead one of stone (Ezekiel 11:19) that we are born with. But, as long as we are in this world, we are saddled with a "body of death" – our old sin nature (Romans 7:18; :24). It wars against our new nature and God's Spirit, trying to drag us back into sin and rebellion (Galatians 5:16-18). If Paul could not go through life without sin and failure (Romans 7:14-20), how are we to expect a televangelist, our ourselves, to do any better? No, my friends, as children of God we are commanded to grow and follow God's Spirit in our lives; but stumble we will.

Sanctification is a process that lasts until we are called home to be with the Father. And like the NIV dictionary says, it is a process that God is in charge of. Don't get me wrong, we participate with Him as He guides us through it; but it is a work He does in us as we learn to follow His ways.

["...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Philippians 2:12-13](#)

["...being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6](#)

Notice when the process is finished: "...will carry it on to completion *until the day of Christ Jesus.*" God is not done with His work in us until Judgment Day, when we get our glorified bodies and become like Christ (I Corinthians 15:12-54, specifically 15:49). Until then, we have work to do.

I was jogging yesterday. The path I was on had a slight downhill grade. I didn't notice the slope, though, until I reached my half-way point and turned around to come back. The hot sun and my reduced energy level added to

the impression the uphill climb was having on me. It struck me that my spiritual life was a lot like this jogging path. Living life the world's way, the "natural" way, was like the first half of my jog. Going downhill was easy; didn't even notice it. It was only when I turned to God and made an effort to follow His ways that the going got tough. The uphill grade made me well aware of the weight of my "body of death." Every day now, as a child of God, when I lose sight of Him and return to my old ways, the going seems effortless. I can do it in the blink of an eye. But, when the Lord calls me and reminds me to get back on His path, it takes a great amount of will power. It feels like I must drag my flesh, my sin nature, behind me as I turn back uphill. I'm starting to know Paul's frustration as my old nature wars against my new spirit.

Intellectually, I am totally convinced of the truth of the Bible, of the existence of God, and of Jesus' substitutionary act of salvation for my soul and accept His free gift of salvation (I've been "justified," made new "just as if I'd" never sinned in God's eyes). The struggle now, is for my heart (sanctification). It is here that the war rages daily. It is like there are two hearts, one belonging to the old flesh, the other to my new spirit. As each challenge surfaces, each temptation confronts, the hearts compete for my allegiance. "Pick me!" one cries, as I'm tempted to get mad about something. "No, choose me!" shouts the other in the split second I have before I react. Often I choose the wrong one.

"Learn from the mistakes of others. You don't have time in your life to make them all yourself." It seems I'm still trying to make them all myself. I think one of the main differences, though, between the sin of Christians and the sin of unbelievers is that for the Christian, the event was a trial, a test, to expose our developmental needs. Unbelievers, on the other hand, sin as a normal way of life. They stumble and don't understand why. Our Father disciplines us to help us grow. As we grow, His glory shines ever brighter in our lives.

"The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn,  
shining ever brighter till the full light of day.  
But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know what makes them stumble."

Proverbs 4:18-19

One more illustration. There is a business axiom that says: If you are not growing, you are dying. I never quite believed this had to be so. What is wrong with reaching a comfortable size and stay there? Can't a business, in meeting the need of its customer base, reach a point of stasis? I'm no businessman. But if our businesses are any reflection of Mankind, the axiom is probably true. Clint Eastwood said "Without constant challenge, the body and mind wither." Boy, was he right! Just wait till you're 50, you'll see what he means! To his thought, though, I would add "the soul." Jesus said there is no middle ground as He chided the Laodiceans for being lukewarm (Revelation 3:16). They had reached a comfortable stasis and were "neither hot nor cold" for His way. Paul goaded the Galatians to struggle against the sin nature (Galatians, whole book). He pleaded with the Ephesians to put off the old self (Ephesians 4). He encouraged the Philippians to imitate Christ's nature (Philippians 2). Every book of the New Testament is aimed at birthing new Christian babies, feeding them with the Bread of Life, and teaching them to grow, chastising those who would prefer to remain babies.



I wish I could remember the source (might have been C. S. Lewis, maybe Augustine), but I read a discussion of how we all would have stayed in our mother's wombs, if left to our own choices. But a life of constant darkness and inaction is not life at all. It is only by being born and growing up that we experience real life. In the same way, the child of God must grow, coming into the Light and "shining brighter till the full light of day." That is sanctification!

OK, so we know that sanctification is God's work in us. We know we have to participate. How do we do that? Maybe a look at how we fall into a life of sin will give some clues. Forgive me if I misquote this:

"Nurture a thought, give life to an action.

Nurture an action, give life to a habit.

Nurture a habit, give life to a compulsion."

James said it long ago:

But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.

Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin,

and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death.

James 1:14-15

So, if we can lead ourselves into sin with our thoughts, maybe we can lead ourselves into Christ's way with our thoughts as well. When we nurture those kinds of thoughts, it should lead us into righteous actions, which will develop holy habits. Paul recommended this approach when he said:

"Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble,

whatever is right, whatever is pure,

whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable

– if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –

think about such things.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me – put it into practice."

Philippians 4:8-9

I guess that says it all, doesn't it? Following God's way must become our focus. Like learning to love Him ("How Do We Learn To Love God?"), learning to follow Him requires dedicated focus. We have to *want it!* I mean *really bad!* We have to want to follow Jesus more than we want our old ways. When Jesus said that we must "carry [our] cross and follow [him]" (Luke 14:27) he must have had this in mind. The weight of our "cross" is laden with our fleshly desires and old habits. Every time we are hit with something we don't like, like an insult or someone cuts you off in traffic, we feel the weight of that cross as it tries to drag us down into our old ways. But it is only heavy when we resist giving in! We don't feel the weight at all when we snap back in anger.

So there we have it. Our side of sanctification is first: Wanting it, second: Focusing on it, and third: Choosing it. As we work hand-in-hand with our Daddy the King, it will become more of who we are on a daily basis (or so I'm told! I'm still learning myself! 😊).

Go with God my Brothers and Sisters! Take up your thought-life cross. Let's follow Jesus!

## Prayer and Talking to God

How long do we keep on praying? How long do we hope? Jesus taught on this a couple of times. One was in Luke 18:1-8. It starts by saying "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." It is a story about a widow who pesters a judge continually until he grants her justice.

His other message is in Luke 11:5-13. It tells of a man that rattles a friend's door at midnight, boldly asking for assistance in a matter. I love this second one particularly, because it says a lot about God as our loving Father. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" This passage tells me 2 things: 1) God loves us enough to give us "good gifts" in answer to our prayers. This doesn't mean that He will give us what we are asking for. In His perfect knowledge of us and our future, the thing we ask for may actually be bad for us or bad for God's Kingdom! Being a loving Father, He will only give us what He knows to be good. A beautiful example of this comes from our Savior's prayer in the garden before His crucifixion. Read Luke 22:39-44. Jesus asked the Father "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." What did the Father do? He sent an angel from heaven to strengthen him! Now, the second thing the Luke story tells me, and believe me, I still struggle with understanding this, but God tells us that in answer to our prayers, He gives us -- "the Holy Spirit." I believe this is similar to what happened to Jesus in the garden. Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Comforter." Maybe when we plead with God for something that is not in His plans for us, either at the moment, or long term, He sends the Holy Spirit to comfort us. Either way, a key is Jesus' attitude in His garden prayer when He said "yet not my will, by your will be done." I try to remember to add this to my prayers and then let God's peace fill my heart with the knowledge that if the answer turns out to be "no" it is for the best, both in my life and for His Kingdom.

I don't know precisely what you are asking God for, but I know this -- sometimes we can want something so badly that it becomes more important to us than God Himself. Then it becomes our idol. I want to want God, and His plans, more than I want anything else in my life! It is said that one of the purposes of prayer is to align our hearts with God's heart. When we love God with ALL our heart, He will grant us our every wish, because our every wish will be for Him and His glory! Now, having said that, He still has plans for us and wants us to come to him with our heartfelt desires. So, don't stop. But do search your heart and constantly analyze your motives. You want your motive to be God's glory. You may wonder if maybe you should "move on to something else?" Let me encourage you, that whatever you pray for, never put your service to God on hold. While I wait for God's hand in my life, I must still work for Him, and serve Him.

It can get frustrating. Please, don't worry! He wants us to come to Him with those frustrations. The Psalms and the prophets are loaded with frustrations! He knows them better than we do ourselves. Try reading some of David's Psalms. They are full of his fears and frustrations. But one thing David always does by the end is that he reminds himself of God's love. He always ends up praising God before he's done.

["My comfort in my suffering is this:](#)

[Your promise preserves my life."](#)

[Psalm 119:50](#)

["It was good for me to be afflicted](#)

[so that I might learn your decrees."](#)

[Psalm 119:71](#)

Talking to God: I will divide this into two areas -- communication through Scripture and direct talk/prayer.

A. Years ago, my sister-in-law persuaded me to do a daily Bible reading; 15-30 minutes per day; with the goal to read through the entire Bible. She reads at night before bed. I can't do that, I'll fall asleep! So I started getting up 30 minutes earlier than I have to, and I do my reading with my milk and bagel each morning. Before you start, go to God in prayer. Thank Him for blessing us with His Word. Ask Him to renew your mind and open your eyes. Ask that He teach you with this reading and grow you in wisdom. Then begin reading. Many times, I have come across a passage and God has shown me something special about it, something I didn't see before. As the Spirit grows you, He will reveal more and more of His beautiful truth in the Word. Many times, I have been blessed by my daily reading in unexpected passages, and unexpected ways. That is just one of the Spirit's roles as God grows us.

B. Conversing with God. As far as I know, there is no actual verse that says that God talks, conversationally, with everyone. In Scripture, He talked directly to selected individuals for specific reasons, like Abraham, Moses and the prophets. "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles" (Numbers 12:6-8) But today, it is believed by many scholars that God only talks to us through the Word: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1) There is a wonderful theologian, R. C. Sproul, who does not believe that God speaks directly to us anymore, but "works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:13) Sproul's advice is that as we strive to love God with all our hearts, God will transform us. As we dedicate our every action to Him, He will bless our efforts and work them into His plans for the Kingdom. He says, (in a rough quote) "Love God with all your heart, then do whatever you want to do! Because if you love God, your actions will be designed to please Him." According to this philosophy, God does not talk directly to us.

But! There are just as many respected scholars who think God does talk to us. I have personally had experiences that I am convinced came from God. The danger with following this path, is that there are other sources that such "talk" can come from. Satan can plant thoughts in our minds (remember Peter?). Our own desires, our flesh that wars against the Spirit, can sound just like something from God. Additionally, chemical imbalances in our brains can generate thoughts and even audible voices (the Son of Sam killer suffered these). How do we defend ourselves from so many counterfeits? The primary defense is Scripture. We must be so familiar with Scripture that we can recognize dangerous or misleading thoughts as they conflict with God's Word. I have seen TV interviews with spirit mediums, and channelers, who believed themselves to be Christians and prayed to God to help them understand whether it was OK to be channeling these spirits. They didn't sense God's disapproval (probably because they didn't want to hear it!) and continued with their evil practices. If they had only read their Bibles, they would know without a doubt that spiritists and mediums are abhorrent to God. Now, having Scripture as our shield, most who talk with God follow the practice of "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) Read the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-18. God came to Elijah in a "gentle whisper." This is how I have experienced Him. When I jog, my mind is clear of all distractions. I sing praise songs to Him and thank Him for His mercy and love for me. I pray for family and other concerns. Often, God will lead my thoughts to something He wants to show me, and a thought will come. Usually, it is something I wouldn't have thought myself on the issue. So I respond and talk back about it, and God makes it clear what He is wanting me to understand. I immediately run this through my filter of Scripture, and as it passes that test, then I can only trust that God is protecting me from all other sources. If it is a command to do something or change something in my life, as long as it doesn't violate Scripture, I dedicate it to the Lord and do it. "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3). Other people use other methods to have quiet time with the Lord. You have to do whatever fits into your life and personality. Like Sproul's method, this one also depends upon our fervent pursuit of God and our intent to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37) Then, all you can do is trust.

God knows our needs, actually better than we know ourselves. The true joy and comfort in that knowledge comes from knowing God well enough that you are utterly convinced of this. God loves you more than you love yourself. He wants the best for you more than you want it for yourself. As His Child, He will care for you better than you can yourself! But I can say this all day and it won't help you have peace, only reading it for yourself will do that. As you read the Bible, the Word (which is Jesus and the Spirit) grows in you. He renews your mind every time His Word enters your soul. It is a growth process. People that never read their Bibles are like babies that never eat nourishing food, but get by on a diet of french fries and Butterfinger candy bars; their growth is stunted. So, the comfort and joy that comes from a strong faith, comes from getting to know and love our Daddy the King! And that only comes from studying His love letters to us.



## Real Examples of Answered Prayers

### CASE 1

Shortly after I had re-surrendered my life to Christ, I learned of a Promise Keeper convention coming to my city. Our church had tickets to go and I signed up. A couple of weeks before the event, though, we learned that the convention had been moved from an 18,000 seat arena to an 8,000 seat arena, and we lost our seats! So, I asked God, "Lord, if you want me to go to this event, I need tickets." Days went by with no answer. About 4 or 5 days before the convention, I was exercising at the gym, the only guy in the weight room, and went to the water fountain for a drink. Once more I prayed "Lord if you want me there, I really need a ticket."

When I returned to the weight room, there was an older guy there (grey hair, maybe 54) sitting on a weight bench wearing a grey T-shirt. I read the emblem on the shirt and it said "PROMISE KEEPERS!" I told the guy my predicament and he said "Well, I have 3 tickets and I only need 2. Why don't you come by my office tomorrow and I'll give you one."!!!

### CASE 2

One day, at the end of my morning devotional time, I asked the Lord to show me the next thing in my character that needed changing. I had been working on personal growth, trying to let God rearrange my heart, making it more His and less mine.

It was a school day and I was to drive my daughter to school that morning. At leaving time, my wife and I argued over something and in frustration, I got my daughter and rushed out of the house as fast as I could. In the car, I hit the garage remote, put the car in reverse and – BANG! – slammed into the half-open garage door, breaking the bottom 2 panels!

After clearing enough debris to get the car out and head down the street, I asked God "What was that for?" A single word, in capital letters flashed in my mind: PATIENCE. I realized God had just answered my prayer! I needed to work on having more patience with my wife. It was something in my character that He didn't like and wanted me to work on.

### CASE 3

I was growing in interest with this new idea, to me at the time, of "walking with God." I wanted to be responsive to the leading of the Spirit. On a lay-over in Santiago, Chile, at dinner, I felt the distinct urge to buy a large steak dinner, eat half and take the doggy-bag to a homeless person on the way back to the hotel. Now, I knew this was from God for several reasons. First, I almost never eat steak. I eat chicken and fish, and on the rare occasion that I order a steak it will be something small. Secondly, I had never been sympathetic to the homeless. I came from poor roots, worked hard and succeeded. Why should I subsidize someone that just sponges off of everyone else? And thirdly, I didn't see any homeless on the way to the restaurant.

Oh, I ordered the dinner and ate half, but at the end, I chickened out and didn't request a doggy-bag. On the way out, three steps from leaving the door, I was shoulder to shoulder with a homeless man walking down the sidewalk! My heart was stabbed with guilt for disobeying the Spirit. I remembered the verse about trusting in the Lord with all your heart, leaning not on our own understanding, and He will make our ways straight.

## Bird Poop & Flowers

I saw something, one day, under a tree. It was a mix of little black and white flowers fallen on the sidewalk mixed with black and white bird poop from the same tree. From a distance, it was hard to tell which ones were flowers and which were poop. It made me think of our works. We like to think of our works as good. But are they, and how do we tell the difference?

**“No one is good – except God alone.”**

Luke 18:19

“So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

“...(man’s) work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

I Cor 3:7, 13

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

II Cor 2:10

“The one who sows to please the sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction, but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

Gal 6:8

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Eph 2:10



“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!’”

Matt 6:21-23

“My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

John 7:16

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”

John 6:38

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”

“Be imitators of God.”

Eph 4:30; 5:1

In Ephesians, Paul is teaching how to “put off the old self” and “put on the new;” how to live as Children of God, guided by the Spirit; giving examples of righteous living (controlling anger, working so as to give to the needy, clean speech) and right in the middle says – Don’t grieve the Spirit!

It is the Spirit that led Jesus into the desert to be tested by Satan, and the Spirit that empowered Him to begin His ministry. It is through the Spirit that God “works within us to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Phil 2:13)

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.”

Rom 8:8-9

When we act to please our self-centered urges (even altruistic deeds!) our works are “filthy rags.” (Isa 64:6) Only deeds done in answer to the Spirit’s call are righteous and worthy of praise. (Phil 3:8) Dietrich Bonhoeffer described action as either in line with “reality” or out of step with it, because it is Jesus who is reality:

“In Jesus Christ, the real man, the whole of reality is taken up and comprised together; in Him it has its origin, its essence and its goal. For that reason, it is only in Him, and with Him as its point of departure, that there can be an action which is in accordance with reality.”  
(Bonhoeffer, Ethics)

Dietrich is saying that only works that originate from Christ, with Christ as their goal, count. All other action is denying reality. All action done for any other reason than serving, obeying or glorifying Christ is a rejection of Christ and is idolatry. (I Cor 10:31) Deeds done for ourselves or for selfish reasons, make us the goal, making us our own idol. Ecology, Save the Whales, Animal welfare, etc, -- if not done at the call of the Spirit, for the glory of Christ, make the cause itself the idol.

“When the deed is performed” [with God considered] “then this deed is delivered up solely to God at the moment of its performance. Ultimate ignorance of one’s own good and evil, and with it a complete reliance upon grace is an essential property of responsible action. The man who acts ideologically sees himself justified in his idea, the responsible man commits his action into the hands of God and lives by God’s grace and favour.” (Bonhoeffer, Ethics)

It is not for us to decide (judge) the merits of our work. We are to offer them as “living sacrifices” to God and His glory.

There is this dichotomy where we are charged to “do good,” yet we read that it is God who works within us “to will and act according to his good purpose”:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Heb 13:15, 16

Vs

“May the God of peace ... equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him...”

Heb 13:20,21

“... for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

Phil 2:13

Yet, if our hearts are “deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9), how are we to know if what we pursue in life is pleasing to God? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and do whatever you want!” I heard this from R. C. Sproul in a talk about knowing God’s will. His point was that if our goal is to know and love God above all else, then whatever our heart yearns for, will naturally be aimed at pleasing God!

“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”

Ps 37:4-6

This verse is often misunderstood, or misused, to say that God will give you riches and fulfill your worldly needs if you just love Him enough. “There’s a Cadillac out there with your name on it! You just need to name it and claim it!” I actually heard a prosperity preacher say that on TV one night. But what the verse is saying, is that when God becomes your goal, when He is the highest thing your heart burns for, He will give you what you are seeking – Himself! He will join with you, become One with you, and you will become One with Him. When God is your Reality, and your ways are dedicated to walking and talking and serving Him on a daily basis, your works will be focused on God and His Glory.

“Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law, or because you believe what you heard?”

Gal 3:5

Ideas have consequences. We live by what we believe to be true. Our decisions and actions in life are based upon what we believe. When we believe in God to the point where we actually recognize that He is Reality, we begin to “live by faith” (Gal 3:11) and our lives will show it. When we are truly convinced that He is King and deserves our obedience and service, we will dedicate our lives to Him. When we come to Him as the Provider of our life and breath, we can “... approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and grace in our time of need.” (Heb 5:16). And He will “... make our paths straight.” (Prov 3:6)

Like John the Baptist said, when we become less and God becomes more, the Spirit will have free reign in our will and actions. THOSE works will be righteous. They will be found to be the flowers among the poop.

## Tithing

The tithe was officially established by God as He established the nation of Israel. (Though, it is believed that it existed even before that! Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God, Gen 4:3,4; Abraham gave 10% to Melchizedek, Gen 14:20) He gave them the Law and required them to live by it as a sign of their devotion to Him. The tithe was part of that. He set the tithe at 10% and wanted the first-fruits of their crops, herds, and even children. It is not all the Jews gave, though. If you add all the gifts given to the temple at each of their festivals, they wound up giving approximately 21% of their “earnings,” to put it in today’s language.

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law, including the requirement to tithe. People no longer have to live by the law for their salvation (which we now know really didn’t “save” them. It was their belief and obedience to God that He was looking for). Today, what God wants from us is our faith, our repentance, our obedience and our love. Some people think that God’s requirements for us got easier after Jesus came, since He freed us from the Law. In truth, Jesus always made things harder!

Jesus said "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” (Matt 5:21-22). He said “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5:27-28). When the Pharisees asked Him what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matt 22:37).

What would it look like if we really loved God with all our heart? How much would we give Him of our time, our money, and our resources if we truly loved God more than anything else in the world, even more than ourselves? Yes, we would give our all. So, Jesus made things harder than before. Now, having said that, God clearly does not call each of us to the same tasks. We are not all meant to preach. We are not all meant to go out to the mission fields. He actually picked the time and place for each of us (Acts 17:26), and has given us skills and gifts for our service to Him. I’m an airline pilot. God put me here to witness to folks I work with. The same goes for our finances. Each of us must go to God in prayer and ask for His leading in how much to give to Him. We then follow our hearts, trusting that He will guide us, as we decide how much to give. Many people begin by picking the 10% God used with Israel as a guide. It is high enough to challenge our dedication, to be a real sacrifice in giving, yet not so high as to incapacitate us. Some give more, some give less. It is between you and the Lord.

Now, where should this money go? God teaches us through Paul that we are to support our spiritual leaders, our pastors, as they serve us with their lives. God tells us to help the fatherless, the widow, and those in prison. He tells us to lend to those in need without expecting anything in return. In fact, it is said that Jesus taught more about money than any other subject in the Bible! But, here’s why – it points to our hearts! God really doesn’t need our money. It’s all His anyway. The whole earth is His and everything in it. The only thing we can withhold from Him is our hearts. Since the focus of most of us is usually on ourselves, Jesus used our spending habits to pinpoint the focus of our hearts. So, as we grow in our love for Him, as we mature in our obedience to Him, our spending habits will show that love. The way we use our money will reflect this.

It is a subject most of us grow up knowing something about, but little of its applicability to our daily lives. God promises to bless us as we trust Him with our resources and surrender them to His service (Mal 3:10).

For those “Bereans” (Acts 17:11) out there, I offer the following Bible study:

Cain and Abel offer sacrifices of their firstfruits to God: Genesis 4:3,4

Abraham gives 10% of everything he had to Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God: Genesis 14:20

Jacob vowed to give 10% to God: Genesis 28:22

God requires the “firstfruits” at festivals: Exodus 23:14-19

God wants our heart-felt giving: Exodus 25: 1-2; Exodus 35:21

God wants us to give Him our best: Leviticus 1:3; Lev 2:1

First use of the term “tithe” associated with 10%: Leviticus 27:30-33

God requires the people to bring the tithe and other gifts to the temple: Deuteronomy 12:4-7; 12:17-19

Tithe used to support the priests in their lifetime devotion to studying the Law: II Chronicles 31:4-5

God promises to bless us when we tithe: Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:10

**Jesus’ attitude toward money:**

- \* Give to the needy: Luke 6:30
- \* Lend without expecting a return: Luke 6:34-35
- \* God will bless you when you give: Luke 6:38
- \* He supported tithing: Luke 11:42
- \* Hoarding our riches is bad: Luke 12:13-21
- \* God wants us to love Him more than our money: Matthew 22:37; 19:16-30
- \* It is God’s money that He entrusts to us for His service: Matthew 25:14-30

**Paul’s teaching on money and riches;**

- \* II Corinthians 9:6-15
  - We reap what we sow (vs 6)
  - We should follow our hearts, God loves a cheerful giver (vs 7)
  - God provides everything we need to do good works (vs 8)
  - We are given our “riches” SO THAT we can be generous SO THAT God will be praised (vs 10-13)
- \* I Timothy 6:3-19
  - Godliness is not a means to riches (vs5)
  - Contentment with what we have is great gain (vs 6)
  - Chasing riches is falling into a trap (vs 9)
  - The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (vs 10)
  - Our hope is not in our wealth, but in God alone (vs 17)
  - We are given riches to enjoy (vs 17)
  - But giving generously lays up eternal riches (vs 19)

\* I Corinthians 9:7-14

- God commands that preachers should earn their living from teaching the gospel (vs 14)

There is more, but this should get you started. Go and grow with God my Brothers and Sisters!

Visit Crown Financial Ministries for in-depth help with finances, budgeting, and tithing questions. Also, there is a wealth of books on the subject. One I read and was blessed by is "The Treasure Principle" by Randy Alcorn.

"Bless us, Lord, as we learn to love You and follow Your ways"



## ***Chapter 4: Questions Christians Ask***

My search for God, Meaning, and essential doctrine was solidifying. In the process, though, interesting questions would pop up. Each time I looked into these things, my understanding of the nature of God and Man grew. The simplest question can lead to wonderful and life-changing discoveries. The more time we spend in God's Word, the more The Word grows in us. God becomes more real and our view of our world expands. Often we find our world-views are totally off-base.

God wants us to think. He challenges us to delve deeply into The Word. As you read the results of my various questions, you will be faced with questions of your own. Go after them! Dig into God's Word and collect all the verses you can find on the topic. They will bring clarity and you will be enriched.





## EVIL

Evil has been around a long time, and most of us recognize it when we see it. But it isn't really as obvious as most of us grow up believing, and you will sometimes find that your version of it differs from someone else's. Many examples can be found. The atrocities of Hitler and Stalin come to mind. Some people think guns are evil. Some call war evil. Some think Hillary Clinton is evil and others call George W. Bush evil.

Let me show you evil:

- A man washing dishes
- A woman feeding a baby
- A carpenter building a house
- A preacher giving a sermon

Surprised? Now I'll show you good:

- A man washing dishes
- A woman feeding a baby
- A carpenter building a house
- A preacher giving a sermon

"Hey! They're the same thing!" you say. Our problem in defining evil is that we usually characterize it by our own likes and dislikes. Our views of good and evil are colored by our personal views of how life should be. And if this is our only basis for the definition, then you can already see that almost no two people are going to have exactly the same view.

Let me show you an example. Picture this:

Sam turns to Sally and forcefully punches her in the nose, knocking her unconscious.

Good or evil? I think many would instantly say – Evil! But, what if I were to tell you that Sally was standing in the middle of a Kindergarten classroom full of children about to pull the pin on a grenade? Now, what would your reaction be? Only a very rare person would still try to say Evil. What we have just seen is that an act, by its self, is neither good nor evil. It is the intent of the person we are actually evaluating.

But even in this example, you will find disagreement. If we change Sally's name to Indira Al-Atta and say the kids in the room were Jews, you will find a large number of people in the world that will praise her effort and groan at Sam's intervention. Their view of good and evil is completely reversed on this issue from our own.

So, how are we to define Evil? Let me cut to the chase. If we live in a godless universe, then there is no such thing as Evil. There are things that aid our survival and ability to reproduce, and there are things that threaten them. But, if we live in a universe created by God (and I refer here to the Christian God, as no other religion's views of God and the universe stand close scrutiny), then we actually are able to find a definition of Evil. The God that created us also gave us an "owner's manual," so to speak, on how we should live. It defines healthy behavior and unhealthy behavior. It defines good and evil. This manual, we call the Bible, tells us time and again that God judges our actions by the intent of our heart.

Let me give you some verses:

"He (Jesus at Judgment Day) will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears..." Isaiah 11:3

"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." I Samuel 16:7

At one point in ancient Israel, God grew angry and rejected the sacrifices and offerings given at the temple. Later, Jesus lambasted the Jewish leaders' spiritual practices. Why? In both cases the people were going through the motions of worship, but their hearts were dedicated to serving themselves rather than God. They sought their own gratification and glory rather than God's. Most of Israel's kings after David were condemned for "doing evil." What did they do?

Solomon -- "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God ... So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely ..." I Kings 11:4,6

Rehoboam -- "did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD." II Chron 12:14

Jehoram -- "did evil in the eyes of the Lord"..."because (he) had forsaken the LORD." II Chron 21:6, 10

Amon -- "did evil in the eyes of the LORD as his father Manasseh had done. Amon worshipped and offered sacrifices to all the idols Manasseh had made." II Chron 33:22

God defines evil as placing anyone or anything on the throne of your heart besides Him. When we become the object of our own worship, we have set idols in our hearts. Serving ourselves before God becomes idolatry. And idolatry is at the heart of all evil. Through the entire book of Isaiah, God rails against Israel's idolatry. Through Jeremiah, God warns them to stop following "other gods to (their) own harm." (Jer 7:6) He explains:

"The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the LORD. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it." Jer 7:30

"...they have not obeyed me or followed my law. Instead they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts." Jer 9:13

Paul challenges us to "set (our) minds on things above, not on earthly things," because when our focus is on earthly things (like sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed) they become idolatry.

All our thoughts and actions, when done in compliance with God's will and done for God's glory are "good." All actions done for our own glory are "evil." Jesus teaches about this when He taught on false prophets. He said that they "come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." "Many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers!" Matt 57:15,22 These people were doing miracles, casting out demons. Certainly those are good things aren't they? Yet Jesus said they were doing evil. The key lies in verse 15 where Jesus exposes their hearts.

So now you can see how the man washing dishes at the beginning of our discussion could be doing evil or good. We just see a man washing dishes; but God knows his heart. He may be doing it with deep resentment against a wife that he feels should be doing it instead. His resentment is based upon pride and his desire to be the lord and king of his family, seeking glory for himself. Or, he could be doing it as a selfless service of love for his wife, freeing her to take a load off her feet after a day of looking after the kids. His selflessness, coming from his desire to serve God, glorifies God. Same act to the outside observer -- totally different motives; one good, the other evil.

So there you have it. God wants our hearts. His first commandment to us is “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). Worshiping ourselves violates this and was the root of the sin of Adam and Eve, and is the root of all evil.

“live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord.” Eph 5:8,10

“...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” 1 Cor 10:31



# HELL

Just stare at that word for a while.

It's an unsettling word, isn't it? Just having it sit up there at the top of the page gives me the creeps; like standing on a path under a tree with a vulture staring down from a low, overhanging branch.

Our culture has trivialized the word by the overuse of it as common slang. I tell you this – if you can look at that word without any sensation at all – I'd be a little concerned, if I were you.

It is a real place, a gruesome place devoid of the beauty and peace found only with God. I don't want to use this space discussing Biblical proof for the existence of hell. You can read about that in my article "Are We All God's Children?" I want to investigate hell itself. I'm going to use a lot of scripture, because I want you to see it yourself. I have heard many a sermon on hell; but, the Word has power to transmit truth that no other source has.

First, I want to point out that the condemned will be there physically. After Christ's millennial reign, there will be the second resurrection of the dead (the first resurrection will be of those who were killed for refusing the mark of the Beast during the great Tribulation, Revelation 20:4-5):

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Revelation 20:12-15 NIV

Jesus, himself, warned of this day:

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

John 5:28-29 NIV

We can see in both of these texts, that the "dead" are rising from places like the sea and the grave. These are physical bodies. John says that "death and Hades" will give up their dead, too. I believe this is the spirit/soul which will be reunited with the body. After the Judgment, those not found in the "book of life" are "thrown" into the lake of fire. I want to emphasize this, because there is sometimes a tendency to imagine the afterlife as a fuzzy, spiritual, dream-like existence. No, my friends. It is as real as right here and now! Living, physical people will be thrown into the lake of fire. That is horrific stuff.

Just what do we know about hell? We've seen some obvious aspects already. Hell is an eternally burning fire. In Matthew 5:17-22, Jesus is teaching about the Law, and how we are all guilty of breaking it. He says that we are "in danger of the fire of hell." Later, when teaching about Judgment Day, he said that the condemned will be told:

"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Matthew 24:41 NIV

Some, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, teach that the condemned will be instantly burned to ash; but Jesus clearly said:

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Matthew 24:46 NIV

Quoting Isaiah 66:24, Jesus warns about being "thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'" (Mark 9:48).

As an eternal punishment, the fire will cause torment.

"In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side:"

Luke 16:23 NIV

"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Revelation 20:10

Many times, Jesus said that there "will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Ashes do not weep. That only comes from living people.

Unrelenting, never-ending, merciless fire would probably tend to cause some weeping. I've always been curious about the "gnashing of teeth" phrase, though. I realize that intense physical pain, whether brief or sustained, can cause a clenching of the jaw. I always took it for granted that the phrase described two physical reactions to suffering. But the more I look at it, the more it looks like two different emotions. Just imagine trying to weep aloud, actually sobbing, and then clenching your jaw. They just don't go together.

Long ago, I heard a sermon on this very subject where the pastor thought that the emotion eliciting such action was actually anger and rage.

"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

Luke 13:28

Notice that there is no reference to fire or torment in this verse. In fact, the weeping and gnashing occur "*when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.*" Jesus had just been confronted by the Pharisees for healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath. After shaming them, He went on to describe the kingdom of God. He also told of those who would not be included. He was talking about those, including the Jewish leadership, who reject Him as savior. In hell, they will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets receiving their reward. During their earthly life, the Pharisees were convinced that they were important! Everyone bowed to them. They wore the finest robes. They sat at the seats for the elite. They *deserved* to be at God's right hand! Now, they are in hell. They're furious!

We saw them react this way at the execution of Stephen:

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

**When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.** But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

#### Acts 7:51-57 NIV

It is something we do when we are frustrated, when circumstances are not to our liking. There will be many in hell that didn't like God's plan for humanity. It is popular, today, to say that all roads lead to heaven. We want to "find our own way." We have created God in our own image and plan to spend our eternities in a heaven of our own design. It is pride. It is difficult to submit ourselves to the rule of another. We want to be the king of our own world! Many reject the One true God because they don't want to submit to Him. They would rather spend an eternity apart from God than to live a few decades on this earth subject to His rule.

God will honor that sentiment – it's called hell.

**"They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord."**

#### II Thessalonians 1:9

Those who reject God and His Son, Jesus the messiah, will be eternally separated from Him. In a sense, they are getting exactly what they wanted. From the beginning of creation mankind has been rejecting God's right to rule. Adam and Eve knew God! Yet they still wanted to follow their own way. The penalty was separation from God.

**"So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."**

#### Genesis 3:23-24 NIV

God used to walk in the garden with them, but in their pride, they lost that privilege. Later, the nation of Israel faced the same consequence. God had raised them up as a great nation, blessed in every way. But, their success went to their heads. They became proud and rejected God. So, God banished them to live in slavery in foreign lands.

Again, God gave them another chance as He sent His son Jesus to call them to His loving side. The coming of the messiah had been prophesied for centuries. They knew the signs of His coming.

**"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."'"**

#### Matthew 1:1-6 NIV

Yet, they still rejected Jesus.

**"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"**

#### Psalms 118:22

There will be no innocents in hell. All there will have rejected the Lordship of Jesus. They are there by choice. The ultimate example of this is found in Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus.

**"There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. But at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus whose body was covered with sores, who longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table. In addition, the dogs came and licked his sores."**



Now the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell, as he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in this fire.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus likewise bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' So the rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father-send Lazarus to my father's house (for I have five brothers) to warn them so that they don't come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to them.' Then the rich man said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He replied to him, 'If they do not respond to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Luke 16:19-31 Net Bible

I think it is telling that the rich man didn't beg to be released. Like the thief on the cross, this man recognizes that he is receiving a just penalty. But unlike the thief, this man is unrepentant. He is still unwilling to submit to the Lordship of Jesus. He's worried about his brothers, but there is no sign that this man regrets his sins.

The final aspect of hell I would like to discuss is highlighted both here, and in Jesus' teaching in Luke 13:28 -- "**when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.**" Both of these texts make it clear that those in hell can see and hear those in heaven. Those in hell will live in darkness:

"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Matthew 22:13 NIV

while the children of God will bask in His radiated light

"The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

Revelation 21:13

In the final irony, those who reject God in this life, will spend all eternity having to see God being praised and loved by His people. Those who rejected God's reign over their lives will have to watch as the King of kings reigns over His Kingdom. In their anger, they will weep and gnash their teeth. I don't want to trivialize the physical suffering of hell. But, I think the greatest torment will come to its residents as they live with the eternal conclusion to a life lived for personal pride.

Those in heaven are there because they have surrendered their pride to glorify God. Those in hell never surrendered it. They will be eternally snubbed. Convinced of their own righteousness, they will have to eternally endure the only Righteous One in His glory. Yes, they will be separated by "**a great chasm**" (Luke 16:26) that cannot be crossed; but they will still see God enjoying his loved ones for all time.

We live in a life of "do-overs" and "Mulligans." Everything in society is returnable, from clothes to marriages. Reincarnation is popular with many because if we don't get it right this time, we get to try again. But this is not the reality taught by Jesus.

"Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

Hebrews 9:27-28 NIV

We get one try at it. Have you made your choice? Now is the time. There may be no tomorrow for you.

“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts... ‘ See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

Hebrews 3:7-8; 12

The choice is yours



## CALVINISM VS FREE WILL

Let me say right up front – I’m no expert on Calvinism (one aspect of which teaches that God decides who is saved; our free-will choice has nothing to do with it). I heard a debate on the issue and have read the verses used by both sides to support their arguments. And I have to say that my verdict on the debate is this: They’re both right!

“Hold on now!” you might say. “The two sides are mutually exclusive, aren’t they?” Seems that way on the surface, sure. But, how many things of God go only skin deep? One fundamental thing I know, and without this, the whole thing is moot – God’s Word is true. The things we read in the Bible are true. So, with that as a starting point, let’s take a look at what God tells us about how we become His children.

From the Calvinist perspective we know that God says:

“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” Ex 33:19

and:

“... even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.” John 5:21

also:

“...no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” John 6:65

and:

“All that the Father gives to me will come to me...” John 6:37

Additionally, there are many verses where the children of God are called “the elect.” The very term implies that God has hand-picked us for salvation. Now, alone, these verses clearly explain that 1) God chooses people to be saved, 2) The chosen ones cannot come to Jesus unless “enabled” by the Father, 3) Those chosen by the Father will come to Jesus, 4) No one else can come to Jesus, and 5) Jesus chooses who He will give eternal life to.

Ok, hold that thought. Now what does the Bible say about free will? Let me first begin this section with this thought: If free will were not possible; if God was simply turning us from dead people into Children of God like a person takes an empty flashlight and puts batteries in it and turns on the light – we wouldn’t need the Bible at

all! God would just “activate” us and , presto-chango, we would all be saved! But, that’s not what we’re dealing with is it? No, God went to great lengths, over several thousand years, through the lives of dozens of leaders, prophets, and apostles, even going to the extreme of coming to Earth Himself and teaching us before His crucifixion – why?-- for the purpose of convincing us to return to Him. He went to great lengths to provide us with the information we need to choose Him and obey Him. In fact the tiny concordance in the back of my Bible lists 25 verses spanning both Testaments which talk of obedience. Obedience is a non-issue if we don’t have free will.

So let us review a few verses:

Adam and Eve were already God’s children and sinless before they chose to disobey God. (I know, that wasn’t a verse; but it summarizes a large section of verses)

*“...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...” Joshua 24:15*

*“I have sought your face with all my heart...” Psalm 119:58*

*“Because you have depended on your own strength...” Hosea 10:13*

*“He looked around at them in anger, and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...” Mark 3:5*

Boy, that last one said a lot. Jesus was angry at their stubbornness! Yet, this is the same Jesus that said no one could come to him unless sent by the Father! Now we are approaching what I believe is at the heart of the issue. Jesus knew that we are unable to come to him without being sent by the Father. If we were but automatons, toys made of flesh and bone, activated like a flashlight; then Jesus would have no reason to be angry at the unbelievers. His very anger reveals that we are actively, knowingly choosing to reject him. In fact, the entire Old Testament is full of God’s anger at the Israelite’s constant rejection and disobedience, because of their “obstinate and stubborn” hearts (Ezekiel 2:4). He is angry because “the house of Israel is not willing to listen (Ezekiel 3:7). Why would God be angry at them if they had no choice in their bad behavior? No, it is clear throughout Israel’s history that they were being punished for their willful disobedience.

But how can it be simultaneously true that we choose God of our own free will and that God chooses those who will come to Him? Before I give you my answer, let me give you some verses, both Old and New Testaments, that show both sides of the argument happening at the same time:

From Psalm 119 [Italics = free will; CAPS = God’s action]

*I seek you with all my heart;*

**DO NOT LET ME STRAY FROM YOUR COMMANDS.**

*Your statues are my delight;*

THEY ARE MY COUNCELORS.

*I have chosen the way of truth;*

TURN MY HEART TOWARD YOUR STATUTES

Joel 2:32

*And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;*

For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors  
WHOM THE LORD CALLS

Philippians 2:12

*"...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is*

*GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU to will and to act according to his good purpose."*

In both of these passages we see both sides of the argument – our free will and God's actions within us – happening simultaneously. Within the limits of our 3-dimensional minds, we may never be able to comprehend this, but here is how I've heard it described and I like the analogy. Picture all of Creation as a woven tapestry. You can see the whole story of existence, from Adam to the end of time, displayed fully from one end to the other. This is our side, the side we live in, making choices both good and evil. Now, flip it over, and you can see all the knots where God tied all the strings together. As God picked up the string for Billy Graham, He knew every choice Billy would make, both good and evil, where ever He put him in the Tapestry. Being God, He knew just the right place to put Billy so that the free-will choices he made would play into God's over all plan for His Kingdom. God didn't force Billy's choices, He simply worked those choices into the lives of us all to accomplish His goals.

Paul touches on this in his speech to the Athenians when he said:

*"... and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him..." Acts 17:26*

David adds:

*"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Psalm 138:16*

God tells us through Jeremiah:

[“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” Jeremiah 1:5](#)

I believe it is here that we get a glimmer of the answer. Before God said the first “Let there be...,” He knew all our hearts. He knew every heart that would love Him and every heart that would reject Him. So He picked our times and places so we would hear His gospel and find Him.

The trouble is that after sin and death entered the world through Adam, we are all born “dead.” Jesus says this (John 3:18) when He explains that those who don’t believe “are condemned already.” Like Lazarus in the tomb, we must all be called to Life. Like Jesus ordering Lazarus back from the dead, God gives us a “heart of flesh” rather than “one of stone” as we humble ourselves and repent of our sins. And as we grow as God’s children we see the same dynamic taking place. We choose to obey (or else what does obedience mean?) as God “works within us.”

God does chose us for salvation. He does have His own criteria; but He makes those criteria clear all through the Bible: a humble heart, repentance, obedience, and a heart that seeks after Him. Jesus is pleased to give life to those He chooses. Who does He chose? Those of you who: “confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead.” (Rom 10:9)

Yes, my friends, God does enable us, He chooses us, He gives us Life. But if that were all to it, you could skip church and just sit in front of your TV every day until it happens to you! But the Bible makes it clear that it can never happen that way. We must choose to seek Him out. We must choose to turn from our sin and accept the love, the forgiveness, and the Lordship of Jesus the Messiah.

But, whatever you do, don’t take my word for it. Get into God’s Word yourself. Check it out. When you do, you will find an amazing, incredible God who acts in mysterious and marvelous ways!

## Worry

Do you worry? We know Jesus taught that we shouldn't worry (Matthew 6:25-34). Psalm 37:8 tells us that fretting "leads only to evil." The difficulty for all of us, as growing Christian children of God, is just how do we pull it off!? I personally don't have a problem with worry, but there are other teachings of Jesus that I completely understand intellectually, but haven't the faintest idea how to actually integrate into my way of thinking and living. So I can empathize with you on this!

Worry – I think we can say that there is a clear difference between having a healthy concern about a troubling issue and just worrying about it. When faced with a difficulty in life, especially something fearful or stressful, it is only right that we become concerned about it. That concern will push us, or motivate us to seek answers, to make plans, to ask for help. We will do whatever we can to remedy the situation. Once this is done, though, there is often a time of waiting for the issue to be resolved. Sometimes we don't know if we've done enough to resolve it. Sometimes the problem is something we can't actually do anything about at all. In any case, once we reach that point, where we know we've done everything we can do, this is where the worry sets in. Worry is really just fear. It's that rolling around in the bed – can't sleep at night – fear. Now, fear is quite natural. Heck, sometimes it can be down-right healthy and useful, like when you hear that car horn blaring just as you are about to step off the curb into its path! It can give you an adrenaline kick that will help you react quickly.

The fear that drives us to worry, though, is quite harmful. As I'm sure you know, worrying robs us of needed sleep. Sleep deprivation saps us of energy and clarity of mind. Long term worry can weaken our immune system making us more vulnerable to illness. It can lead to physical manifestations like ulcers, heart problems, and other physical ailments. But that's the least of my concerns about worry. Fear is a tool of Satan. Satan is "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44), and one of his most common lies is that we can't trust God. Trust is the foundation that all relationships are built upon, both human and spiritual. We cannot have a full and rewarding love relationship with God if we cannot trust Him. Satan knows this and will whisper lies of fear into our hearts to distract us from relying upon God.

Peter, in I Peter 5:7-9, warns us of this:

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

We can see a few useful things in this passage. The most important one is the God "cares for you." We can "cast all [our] anxiety on him." Believe me, God cares more about us than we do ourselves! He's the best Daddy there is! We can run to him, like king Hezekiah did, laying our concerns at the foot of His throne. Assyrian troops surrounded Jerusalem and put them to siege. They put their demands for surrender in a letter to Hezekiah.

"Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. The he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed..." (II Kings 19:14-15)

Sometimes I actually picture my worries as a scroll that I unroll at the throne of God. I ask Him to take care of these and thank Him for His perfect will in the matter. Then, still in my mind, I walk away, leaving the scroll at the throne. With a big sigh, I let go and leave my worries there.

Back to Peter's teaching, we can also see that we need to be "alert." We need to be ready for Satan's attack on our fears. That way, when they come, it is no surprise. It deflates the fear and we can "resist him." We resist him by "in faith" telling ourselves that our fear is unjustified and immediately taking it to God in prayer. Something important about Peter's description of Satan as a roaring lion, is that, if you are a child of God, Satan cannot touch you. He cannot harm you (unless God specifically permits it in His plans for you). Most powerful



animals roar. The roar is intended to scare others. But we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who is not “a spirit who makes you a slave again to fear...” (Romans 8:15).

Now, none of this diminishes the hardship we are facing. I don’t want to pretend that any of this makes that go away. What I do want us to focus on, though, is that we can face them, react to them, cry about them, pray about them, go through them and then – what? We can get angry about it. We can resent it all. We can make ourselves sick worrying. Or we can go to the Lord, telling Him that we’ve done everything we know to do, and leave the rest at His feet.

My last offering to you is King David. Read the Psalms. Most of them were written while he was running from King Saul. Saul was trying to kill David and David worried and fretted a lot! You can see it in Psalm after Psalm. But after David cried his worries to God, he always ended each Psalm with a reminder to himself of God’s faithfulness, of His love and mercy, of His power and control over human affairs. I love Psalm 42 because David even argues with himself throughout the psalm:

“Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.”

“Why so downcast, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.”

Psalm 42:6 & 11

Job is always my mentor in trials and trouble. When he got word of losing all his wealth (livestock) and all his children,

“Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head [signs of mourning]. Then he fell to the ground in worship...”

Job 1:20

After Satan afflicted him with boils and sores, he said

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.”

Job 13:15

The key here is that we can look through the fear and pain and focus our eyes on God. As we worship Him amid our struggles, our mind comes off our worries, off ourselves, and focuses on our joy – our Lord and Savior. This is where God wants us. Whether in luxury or poverty; whether in ecstasy or misery; God wants our minds on Him. Again, Job teaches us:

“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” Job 2:10

Focusing on God, whatever our circumstance, brings peace. When you find yourself worrying, stop. Force yourself to sing a praise song to the Lord. Tell Him how much you love Him and thank Him for His love for you. Humble yourself before Him and surrender yourself to His will. Ask Him to mold you and shape you into the Child that He wants you to be. Spend some time praying for missionaries around the world. Pray for our brothers and sisters across the globe that are facing arrest, physical attack, and death for their witness to a lost world. Spend some time just being silent, enjoying His presence and love. Pretty soon, you'll have forgotten your worries and will have spent some quality time growing in your relationship with the Lover of your soul.

Like all other issues, this one is helped by getting into God's Word. If we don't know God and His character, it is impossible to truly trust Him. Without trust, we really have no hope of relying upon His providence. So, I encourage you to read His Word daily, even if it is for 5 minutes. I try to read 15-30 minutes per day and I go through the whole Bible in about a year and a half. I've made a few full laps in the last 8 years! It's really helped me. As the living God comes alive to me, as I learn about His faithfulness and His love, I fall deeper in love with Him. My trust for Him is strengthened as the truth of His Word grows in my soul. Until I started a daily Bible reading, I had so many misconceptions about God and His nature. These can only be exposed and cleared up by getting into The Word.



## GOD USES SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL

WARNING – The following discussion is focused around the sexual union of man and wife, and may not be suitable for young children or someone struggling with sexual addiction.

Now that I've gotten your attention, I'm going to take us into an area that may be uncomfortable to some. But I consider it beneficial anytime we learn more about ourselves, this life, and our God. I am learning that every aspect of our lives can be used for good or evil; can improve our relationship with God or harm it; can symbolize our submission to God or our rejection of Him. Sex is no different. When Paul said ["whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"](#) (1 Cor 10:31 NIV), he meant *everything*! In fact he says it again in [Colossians 3:17 \(NIV\): "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."](#). This applies to our sexual relationships with our spouses – it is a vivid portrayal of our relationship to God, and should be treated as holy. Let us take a look....

["For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."](#)  
Genesis 2:24 NIV

One of the great mysteries of God's creation is His imagery of husband and wife becoming "one flesh." The Net Bible translators think the connotation is that their union creates a new entity – the family unit. Whatever the depth of the meaning, the sexual union between man and woman creates something new, something greater than themselves. Together, we more fully represent the image of God.

["God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."](#)  
Gen 1:27 Net Bible

Throughout the Bible, God uses a variety of images to help us visualize certain concepts and relationships that go beyond our 3 dimensional world. The relationship I am interested here, is the one between God and His people, between God and the church. Both in the Old Testament and the New, God uses the marriage to describe His relationship with us. In Jeremiah 31:32, God calls Himself the "husband" of Israel. The whole book of Hosea and much of the language of the other prophets describes Israel as God's bride. Revelation uses this imagery as it describes the church at the end of time as the bride of Christ (Rev 21:2, 9). The image depicts God's people becoming "one" with Him. But how does this happen?

In the human marriage, it is commonly held that a marriage really isn't official until it is consummated sexually. It is the most private and intimate of relational activities. It involves us totally, as we give ourselves over to each other physically, mentally, and emotionally. When done properly, though, it is only the culmination of a process. Men naturally want to be wanted, and women want to be desired. As they court each other, they get to know each other in growing levels of intimacy. By the time we marry, a level of trust is reached that permits us to enter and be entered where no one else is allowed to go. A union is formed that is greater than any other. And out of this union comes new life!

In every way, this is a beautiful portrayal of the process in which we become "one" with Christ. First, we seek God. Our reasons for looking for Him are as varied as those that drive us to seek a human spouse, but they all boil down to the same thing -- we are looking for God. When we find Him, we get to know Him. As we learn about Him, his qualities of love, protectiveness, faithfulness, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy gradually win our hearts and trust. We reach a point where we don't want to live without Him. We want to join with Him in a permanent relationship. We commit ourselves to Him and accept His commitment to us. Then we open ourselves to Him and something incomprehensible happens. Something so wonderful happens to us that we are never the same again. God enters us. We become one with Him as His Spirit moves within us and fills us. And just like the human union, this spiritual one produces new life. This time, though, the life is our own as we are "born again."

It is fascinating, though, that the analogy doesn't stop there. Our passion for God often evolves over time just as it does for our human spouses. Just like human newlyweds, at first, we can't get enough. Our passion for Him drives us to want Him all the time. We want to taste every aspect of Him. We want Him during the day. We want Him at night. We want Him at work, at home, at the movie theater! Later, though, it begins to get routine. Our passion fades and we fall into a rut. At some point, we find ourselves just going through the motions. This can happen to us with God, just like it can happen in our marriages, if we've been neglecting the relationship. We can start to take Him for granted. We can even begin adulterous relationships. But, these things don't have to happen to us.

In fact, there are marriages, and spiritual relationships, that start right and prosper because people were taught from an early age how to seek a Godly spouse. They were taught the crucial relational principals that cause relationships to flourish and grow. If you are like me, though, and didn't get that teaching, there is still hope! Our marriages and relationships with God can grow and prosper, even after terribly messing them up. Learning God's principals can both save us from destroying our relationships or save those relationships after we've destroyed them. Our passion for God and our spouses can grow richer, broader, and deeper. But it takes a desire to learn. We have to want to learn God's ways.

When we break our intimacy with God, forgiveness is available. New beginnings will blossom and the relationship can be repaired. The new life that sprouted from our union continues to grow as we share in the riches God makes available to us in His Word. God even does this without demanding that we fix our problems first! All it takes is a humble heart and contrite spirit. God accepts us back right away! Then, hand in hand, He leads us through life, helping us to make the changes necessary to have a richer relationship with Him.

It is a beautiful image; one that we would be wise to meditate on and apply to our lives. If you would like to study some verses that paint this picture, I've listed some below. It is a long list, yet only scratches the surface. The entire Bible, in fact, follows this theme!

### **God's View's on Sex**

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Genesis 2:23-24

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Genesis 1:28

Leviticus Chapter 18 – Lists unacceptable sexual relations: Sex with relatives, with animals, with same-sex partners, and adultery.

-- Romans 1:26-27 confirms the prohibition of homosexual sex.

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality (*sex outside marriage!*), that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;..." I Thessalonians 4:3-5

### **Getting to Know God**

"The LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you;..." I Chronicles 28:9

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11

"Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. Proverbs 22:17

"I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word."  
Psalm 119:15-16

### **God's Character**

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." Exodus 34:6

"...it is impossible for God to lie,..." Hebrews 6:18, Titus 1:2, Numbers 23:19

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." I John 4:9

### **Love and Trust God**

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart..." Proverbs 3:5

"In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation."  
Psalm 5:3

"I will lay down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety." Psalm 4:8

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37

### **Surrender to Him**

"That if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price." I Corinthians 6:20

"Then he said to them all: **"If anyone would come after me; he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."** Luke 9:23-24

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." Romans 8:5-8

### **When We Unite With God his Spirit Enters Us**

"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Act 2:38

"We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." I John 4:13-16

"...For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit."  
"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"  
I Corinthians 6:16,17, 19

### **United With Christ, We Are "Born Again" Into Eternal Life**

“Jesus answered: ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying ‘You must be born again.’” John 3:5-7

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...” I John 5:1

“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” I John 5:11-12

I guess you’ve already figured out that I’m not going to get too explicit in this article about sex. Sorry for the misleading title! ☺ Like all aspects of God’s creation, sex is one that should be treated with the utmost respect. How can we treat God with respect, if we won’t respect His creation? Sex is one of the most powerful drives within us. This is one of the reasons that God spends so much time in the Bible warning us to not abuse it. Like any hunger, the sexual urge can control us and become our master – which is idolatry (this is why pornography is so dangerous). Rejecting God’s rules about sex, rejects God. God makes it clear – sex outside of marriage, sex with animals, homosexual sex – all reject God’s plans for us. This is why I even treat self-gratification (masturbation) with caution. Genesis 38:1-10 is thought by some to teach against it, but I don’t think the case is clear (see Note below). I do know, though, that it can become an addiction and control you just as powerfully as alcohol or drugs. This, again, is idolatry. God wants us to be enslaved to nothing else but Him. God created sex as a process in which we unify ourselves with another. We don’t need that kind of help unifying with ourselves! God has to spend enough time teaching us to die to self, as it is! As a minimum, it is using God’s creation for something other than that for which it was created. The cautious approach would be to just avoid it.

The reason for caution? – because we love our God and want to please Him! All choices should be measured by this standard.

I hope this article is of some service in your search for a deeper love for our great God and Savior. He loves us dearly. We are the “apple of [his] eye” (Psalm 27:8; Deut 32:10). Zealously guard your sexual life. Zealously pursue God. He is wonderful and worthy of our heart’s desire!

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Note: In Genesis 38, God is building the nation Israel from Jacob’s 12 sons. Judah’s son, Er, was wicked and put to death by God, leaving Judah’s daughter-in-law widowed. At the time, custom dictated that another brother should marry the widow and sire a child through her to carry on the blood-line. Onan was given this task. But, Onan did not want to give a child to someone else and disobeyed his father (Honor your father and your mother!), thus hindering God’s chosen path in creating Israel. As if this wasn’t enough, he repeatedly had sex with his sister-in-law with no intent of giving her a child – he was just using her for sexual gratification. The verse in debate could mean that he masturbated, but it easily could be that he was using the “withdrawal method.” In fact, if you read the whole sentence, Onan’s “spilling” action comes as he is having sex with her. Should we thus conclude that the withdrawal method is “wicked”? That can be another debate! It is likely that God’s displeasure with Onan was his selfish heart and disobedience to both his father and God.

## Is God Divorced?

My morning devotional reading has taken me, once more, through the rise and fall of Israel. God uses marriage to describe His relationship with them. Israel, though, was an adulterous wife and prostituted herself to idols and other nations, breaking her covenant with God. God threw out the old covenant, and threw Israel out of their home when He destroyed them with Assyria and Babylon. So does this mean God got divorced? Let's see what the Bible says.

In Ezekiel chapter 16, God describes how He raised Israel from birth, fed her, clothed her and adorned her in beauty. He "married" her with the covenant ceremony He performed with Abraham (Genesis 15:9-21)[for an in-depth discussion of this ceremony see Al Jensenn's book "The Marriage Masterpiece"] and she became His wife. He blessed his wife and lavished her with "grain, wine, oil, gold and silver" (Hosea 2:8) – everything she needed. Yet, she rejected Him and pursued other gods. She adulterated herself to other lovers. The covenant relationship God established with her through Abraham was broken.

["...they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD."](#) Jeremiah 31:32

Requiring justice, God destroyed Israel as a nation and banished them to live in foreign lands. A new covenant was promised and carried out with the death of Jesus on the cross (Matthew 26:26-29). A new people were invited into the brideship – the Gentiles! At first glance, it appeared that God had divorced His bride and remarried! In Malachi 2:16 God said that He "hates divorce." Was this because He went through it and therefore knows how it feels?

After some research, I can say – not exactly! But before we go on, let's clear up the Malachi question. In one interpretation of Malachi 2:15, it says "But the one who is our father did not do this" (break the faith with His spouse), "not as long as life remained in him. And what was he seeking? An offspring from God." (NIV, note a.). God's Son, Jesus, came from His bride Israel, through the line of David. So, clearly, God did not divorce His bride. As you read God's punishment of Israel, you will always see that He promises to save a remnant. So, what we witness is more like God doing liposuction or plastic surgery on his bride. He cut away the fat. He surgically removed dead and damaged parts, and brought out of surgery a leaner, cleaner bride.

["I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me."](#) Ezekiel 20:38

["'Return faithless people,' declares the LORD, 'for I am your husband. I will choose you – one from a town and two from a clan – and bring you to Zion.'" Jeremiah 3:14](#)

Yes, the covenant was broken. We see in Ezekiel 16:59-63, though, that God promises Israel that He will establish an "everlasting covenant" (v 60) with her. He says that He "will make atonement for (her) for all (she) has done." (v 63) This, we all know He did through Jesus' death on the cross. A broken covenant in Abraham's day required a blood payment – the death penalty. In His mercy, God bore the penalty Himself to spare His bride. What we see happening is actually like the relationship of Hosea and Gomer. Hosea married a woman who left him and became a prostitute. Hosea went for her, found her, paid to redeem her and brought her back home. So



too, God went back for Israel and redeemed her through the price of Jesus' blood. With the new covenant, God is "re-doing" His marriage vows with His bride. As we say of today's couples that have separated, then gotten back together, they "reconciled" their relationship.

What about the "other woman" – the Gentiles? Here we get into the difficulties of trying to describe spiritual things, things beyond our 3-dimensional world, with 3-dimensional symbols. God helps us to understand through Paul's teachings in the book of Romans. He points out that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." (Romans 9:6) He quotes from Hosea 2:23 where God is saying: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," (Romans 9:25) describing his invitation to the Gentiles. God saved a "remnant chosen by grace" (Romans 11:5) of Israel, but "grafted in" the Gentiles (Romans 11:17). Here, Paul uses the symbol of the vine. God broke off "some of the branches" and "grafted in" the Gentiles. So, the bride is still Israel, but she has been changed. Purified by the blood of Christ, she now includes "Everyone who call on the name of the Lord" and is "saved." (Romans 10:13).

# The Question of Marriage – Same Sex

## Truth

“I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.” Isaiah 45:19

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Proverbs 14:12

“But who are you, O man to talk back to God?” Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?” Romans 9:20-21

“For a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” II Timothy 4:3-4

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak of visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD....And to all who follow the stubbornness of their own hearts they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’...every man’s own word becomes his oracle and so you distort the words of the living God.” Jeremiah 23:16-17, 36

## Marriage

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

“‘Haven’t you read’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’” Matthew 19:4

## Unacceptable sex

“Do not lie with man as one lies with woman; that is detestable.” Leviticus 18:22

“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie...Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relation for unnatural ones. In the same way men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” Romans 1:25-27

“...they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” Rom 1:32

Big Picture: God created Mankind to have a relationship with Him. This relationship is hard for us to fully understand, but He makes it clear that it must be on His terms, not ours. In an effort to help us visualize this relationship, He uses several pictures: A King and his loyal people, A Sheppard and his sheep, A Husband and his bride. Using marriage, Jesus shows us that the united husband and wife, together, more fully represent the “image” of God. God uses His relationship with Israel in a similar way. The mysterious ritual He performs with Abraham, in Genesis 15:9-21, is a “covenant” promise as if God “married” Abraham, and thus Israel. Israel gives “birth” to God’s people. Since Israel later “left” God and adulterated herself with other “lovers” (false gods), the marriage covenant was broken. Through Jesus, God redeemed His bride and made a new covenant. All now who accept Christ are called the “bride of Christ.” All attempts to recreate marriage our own way reject God’s chosen way. That is never a good thing to do!

Jesus’ own teachings support marriage being between a man and a woman. We cannot try to say “well that’s just because that was the custom of their day.” There were many customs of Jesus’ day that Jesus broke, turned upside down, and/or taught against. He forgave prostitutes and adulteresses (both punishable by

stoning!). He “worked” on the Sabbath (punishable by stoning!), he treated women with respect, he touched lepers (which Jewish Law said made you unclean). Jesus was not afraid to teach shocking news, therefore I feel strongly he would not have hesitated to clear up this marriage/same sex issue if it were really true.

In conclusion, in seeking what is “right,” we must seek God and His truth. There are many things we would like to be true, or like to be right; but as God said in Proverbs, in the end, this kind of thinking leads to death. In fact, this kind of thinking brought death into the world as Adam and Eve decided that they liked their version of truth better than God’s.

“Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant?

Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and the torches you have set ablaze.

This is what you shall receive from my hands: You will lie down in torment.”

Isaiah 50:10-11

God is clear that those who reject His truth, do so at their own peril. Those who walk in His “light,” or truth will be blessed.

“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.” Amos 5:14

May God bless you and shine His light upon you!

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PS: There is a logic problem with this issue as well. When our society decides to redefine marriage, when we open the door to new definitions of marriage, there is no justification for closing the door on **any** definition of marriage. The Massachusetts judge that first opened this door said that a person should be able to marry anyone they choose. What gives that judge the right to say that a spouse must be a “person?” I know several people who would marry their dogs! There was a man in the ‘80’s that wanted to marry his Cadillac. There was a man in Colorado that wanted to marry his horse. There is a man in jail for having multiple wives. There are people who want to marry children. When you open that door, there is no justification for closing it on anyone else’s idea of marriage.

## Aborted Logic

Two hot topics are dividing our nation right now – abortion and embryonic stem-cell research. Liberal America wants them both. Both are murder. Let me explain.

### The Constitution and The Law

In the United States of America, it is illegal to kill someone, except under very specific conditions. It is permissible to kill under capital punishment, self defense, and war. When we take someone to court for murder, we must prove them guilty without “a reasonable doubt.” If there is doubt, we must acquit the accused. An acquittal doesn’t mean innocence, but it does mean there is enough doubt about guilt that we must take the cautious approach and not execute (kill) the accused.

When the Supreme Court struggled with setting a trimester for legal abortion, their difficulty rested upon the question of just when does “legal” human life begin. I believe they chose to use the criteria that the infant must be “self-sustaining” to be legally human, which is roughly around the third trimester. My point, here, is that our Supreme Court Justices are unable to determine, “without a reasonable doubt,” when legal human life begins. Shouldn’t innocent, unborn children get the same cautious approach that we give accused murders? If there is doubt, we should not kill.

### Logic

I recently read an editorial in the New York Times where the newspaper man was mad at President Bush for calling a human embryo a human life. According to the editor, an embryo is just a “cell cluster.” Well, let’s examine this cell cluster. First, is the cell cluster alive or dead? Alive, right! Is the cell cluster dog, fish, or human? Human, right again! So now we have a living, human cell cluster that contains the entire genetic code of a unique human being. The code is not its mother’s, or its fathers, it is uniquely its own. So, what do we have? We have a unique, living human. Killing it, whether through abortion or by sucking out key stem cells, destroys a unique, living human individual. Pro-abortionists cry that a woman has the right to do whatever she wants with her body. This is true. But when an abortion is performed, they are not attacking their body, but the body of someone else. It is the body of a uniquely different human being. Our constitution says that humans have the right to life.

California Democrat, Barbara Boxer, has been quoted as saying that a newborn child shouldn’t have constitutional rights to life until it is carried out of the hospital by its parents. I would be alarmed if many Americans agree with her view. Let’s go through a hypothetical exercise, though, to determine just when it is OK to kill the child.

Imagine watching a video of a child from conception to just after it was born. The nurse is holding it, cleaning it and wrapping it in a warm towel. Now press the “hold” button on the video. Is it OK to kill the child at this point? No? Now press the “rewind” button and stop where the baby has just come from its mother, but the toes are still in. Is it OK to kill it now? No? Backwards some more; and the legs are in. Kill now? No? Backwards some more; and only the head is out. Kill now? No? Keep going. Do you see where this is headed? Keep running the tape backwards and tell me when it is OK to kill this child.

When the Supreme Court was debating this issue, a reporter interviewed Carl Sagan, a famous scientist and atheist, asking him when human life begins. Sagan's answer was fascinating. He said that human life is an unbroken chain of life. We came from a human long ago that had in his body a living cell that joined together with a living cell from a woman's body. Those living cells continued to grow into another fully grown human whose body contained another living cell that, when combined with a living cell from another woman's body, grew into another living human, etc, etc. So human life never ends; it is an unbroken chain, unless we break it.

## Conclusion

Proponents of abortion like to keep the focus of the discussion on terms like "choice" and "women's rights." But, when you look at the question, in full, it is "When does a *woman* have the *right* to *choose* to kill her unborn child?" The Constitution of the United States limits our choices in killing human beings. Our judicial system requires certainty before killing. Shouldn't our unborn children get the same protection that burglars and accused murders get?

You've probably noticed that this entire discussion took place without a single reference to God or the Bible. I did this to show that this issue is clear enough already, just under the issues of caution, logic, and constitutional/legal protections. For those who care about God and His will for Humanity, I'll run through it briefly.

- God is the Creator (Genesis 1 & 2; John 1:3-4)
- He created Adam and Eve and commanded them to multiply (Genesis 1:27-28)
- We are His workmanship, woven in our mother's wombs (Eph 2:10; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13-16)
- God chose us before time began and has plans for us (I Peter 1:1-2; Ephesians 2:10)
- He picked the time and place of our birth (Acts 17:24-26)
- He established the first death penalty for murder with Adam and Eve (Genesis 9:6)
- As well as for killing the unborn (Exodus 21:22-25)
- And warns not to execute the innocent (Exodus 23:7)

This issue is a serious one and should be approached with caution. If we are to err, it should be on the side of caution, giving the benefit of the doubt to the unborn child.

God bless and keep you all!

## A Study on the Death Penalty

“Thou shalt not kill.”

Exodus 20:13 (KJV)

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

Genesis 9:6 (NIV)

“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’”

John 8:7 (NIV)

“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

Romans 13:3-4 (NIV)

“But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

Exodus 21:23-25 (NIV)

“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Matthew 5:39 (NIV)

The death penalty has been around for a long time. It is a contentious issue because many believe that it is wrong and should be abolished. The USA, originally a Christian nation, has always practiced it, yet there are several nations around the world who have quit using it. The Catholic church is officially against it. Today, as we read the paper, we see a steady flow of prisoners being set free from death sentences as they are cleared by new DNA testing technology. Are we wrong in using the death penalty?

As a Christian, my first reaction is to go to God’s Word for guidance. Yet, as the verses above show, the message seems to be mixed. There are believers who say that Jesus did away with the death penalty. There are some who think that if you are a true follower of Jesus, you should not be a policeman or in the military, because killing of any kind is wrong.

I am convinced that the answer does lie in the Bible. At first glance, there are confusing messages on the issue, but I have dealt with seeming conflicts before and have learned that careful study will always clear things up. So, let's take a look at this and see where God's Word takes us, shall we?

On this one, I think we should go back to the beginning.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

"And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"

Genesis 2:16-17 (NIV)

Here, we see that God made mankind and gave them a single rule to live by. As we all know, they broke that rule. In essence, they said "God is no longer our ruler, we will rule ourselves. His rules don't matter to us." But, in reality, God was still their ruler. He promised them consequences if they defied Him. True to His word, God executed the first death sentence.

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Genesis 2:19 (NIV)

Adam and Eve were created perfect. It is believed they would have lived forever, had they not sinned. Now, they, and all humanity, are cursed and condemned to die. So, we see that God, himself, established and executed the first death penalty. Man will later be given this task as well, but let's take a look at the first murder.

In Genesis chapter 4, Cain and Able had just given their offerings to God. Cain was jealous of Able and became very angry. God knew what Cain was about to do and warned him:

"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

The LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'

Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is more than I can bear.

Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'

But the LORD said to him, 'Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.' Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no-one who found him would kill him."

(Genesis 4:6-15 NIV)

Here, we have a clear case where the death penalty could have been applied; yet God chose to essentially give Cain “life without parole.” God doesn’t explain to us why He did this, we can only guess. For example, we know that Noah came from the line of Seth; but, we don’t know the lineage of his wife or of his sons’ wives. Maybe one or more of them were to come from Cain’s lineage. When God banished Cain, He already knew His plans for all mankind, for all history. In weaving this plan, maybe God planned to use the descendants of Cain. It is just a guess, though. What we see, however, is that God did not use the death penalty unwaveringly. Even He allowed exceptions.

The next time we see God use the death penalty is at Noah’s flood:

“The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

So the LORD said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth.’”

(Genesis 6:5-7 NIV)

“For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth.

The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water.

They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered.

The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet.

Every living thing that moved on the earth perished — birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind.”

(Genesis 7:17-21 NIV)

Mankind, with the exception of Noah, had totally rejected God’s role as king. It is often asked why God would have allowed mankind to run amok, only to wipe them off the face of the earth. Again, we can only speculate. Here’s my “what if.” God was building a kingdom. He wanted the person and people of Noah, who would bring us Israel and Jesus (not to mention the rest of all of us!). It is possible that this was the best way to bring that about. In the process, God brought to us a living example of what happens to humanity when left to our own governance. Without rules, without law, mankind runs amok. In rejecting God and His rule over us, we enter a death spiral to destruction. So, getting what they deserved, God destroyed them. The death penalty -- demonstrated on a global scale.

To this point, we have seen God’s direct rule over the affairs of mankind, and his sovereign right to use the death penalty. One of the tenants of today’s Right to Life movement is that God made Man and it is only God that has the right to decide who should live or die. Now, this is sometimes misconstrued to mean that it is only God who can take a life. These are not the same thing. It is God’s right to determine right from wrong. It is God’s right to determine who lives and dies. As we shall see, after Noah’s flood, God begins to create social structure for mankind. As part of that, for the first time, He delegates the responsibility for the death penalty to us.



God's commands for Adam and Eve were few. They were to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and rule over it (Genesis 1:28). To this, God added a little more structure for Noah and his family:

"Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.

And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, *by man* (italics added) shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

(Genesis 9:1-7 NIV)

Along with new dietary laws, God gives man responsibility for taking a life to uphold social structure. For the first time, He gives us the job of punishing killers by taking their lives. He uses the next 900 years to rebuild the human race and we find humanity in disarray again. It is a barbaric time. Each city has a king who raids other cities -- killing, raping, enslaving entire towns. Religions have sprung up where people honor their gods by burning their babies in red hot metal bowls, or by passing them through a fire. Others honor their gods by having sex with temple prostitutes at the altar. By now, though, God has raised up a new nation named Israel. Through His servant, Moses, God clamps down on all the mayhem. He gives Israel a list of rules to live by. Many violations are punishable by death. [It is interesting to note that God is telling us to kill as a punishment for killing. Catch 22? Not really. The difference is the intent. One is unauthorized, and motivated by a sinful heart. The other is commanded by God, and is done in obedience and reverence for God's sovereign rule.]

By today's standards, many of the death penalty cases we see in the Mosaic law seem ludicrous. We could debate the issue of whose laws are proper, today's or Moses', but that is another discussion. The point, here, is that these were vicious times. Serious times required serious measures. Have we not taken similar steps in modern times? Global, lethal force was required to stop the murderous atrocities of WWII Japan and Germany. When God gave Moses the Law, He was saying "Enough is enough! It's time to lock this murderous behavior down!" Speaking of murder, this would be a good time to clear up the "Thou shalt not kill" issue. I intentionally used the KJV with this verse, because it is used by many to support their claim that the death penalty is wrong. You will notice, though, that all modern translations of the Bible use the word "murder" in this command. It is the actual intent of the original Hebrew. Another command that is often misused is the "eye for an eye" verse. When God gave Moses these laws, he had already set up his system of judges. These commands were to be enforced by Israel's leadership. They were never intended for individual, or vigilante style enforcement. It is also important to note that when someone was charged with murder in those days, God required two or more eye-witnesses before a death penalty could be meted out (Numbers 35:30).

Getting back to Israel, we now have a nation ruled completely by God, set apart from other nations with a firm social structure defined by laws given by God. God used Israel to wipe out and punish entire nations that had rejected God's rule. He established Israel as a shining beacon for all to see. Ironically, during this process, the people of Israel couldn't bear the shame of working with God so closely. They wanted some distance from God and asked to be ruled by Man. God granted them their wish by progressively by giving them Moses, then judges, and finally a king to rule over them. All along, though, He made it clear that these people were ruling on God's throne. It was God's authority that they ruled with (however poorly or well that may be!). Jesus underscored this in his comments to Pontius Pilate (John 19:11) and Paul reiterates it in Romans 13:3-4.

The point is that mankind cannot function without the rule of law. Following God's Law, Israel prospered. Disobeying it led to chaos and destruction. This principal has never changed. Any cursory review of history will confirm this. The only confusion about any of this comes when we read the teachings of Jesus. Did Jesus really teach that the death penalty was wrong? Did He teach that Christians cannot kill?

Short version – no! Jesus never uttered any of these words. I have heard and read thoroughly constructed arguments on both sides of this issue. If you just read the teachings of Jesus, out of context of the whole Bible, it is possible to get the idea that Jesus would advocate never fighting back, never using force, or never killing. You will notice, though, that Jesus' teachings were always focused upon the individual. He left government out of the picture. In fact, any time the government was brought up, His practice was to obey the laws of the land and to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21).

It is said that Jesus freed us from the Law of Moses. To be exactly correct, Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law. Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-20 NIV) [Don't misunderstand these verses to mean that one can enter heaven simply by following the Law. Nor should you take the last verse to mean that there is no hope of entering heaven. Please read Romans for more on this!] When Jesus said that the greatest commandment was "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37), he made things harder, not easier! His point was that if we really loved God with all our heart, we would follow His Law because we loved him, not because it was our ticket to heaven.

When Israel's rulers brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, He didn't deny her guilt requiring death. He simply said that the one without sin (in other words, the one without death hanging over their own heads) should throw the first stone. He didn't come to condemn her, she was condemned already (John 3:18). Jesus came to save those who are already condemned to death. In the woman's case, Jesus pardoned her. We can assume she had a repentant heart.

Did Jesus pardon everyone, though? I searched to find if Jesus ever condoned deadly action against anyone. I could not find a single case. Even in the Garden, during Jesus' arrest, He reprimanded Peter for using the sword with the warning that "...all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52 NIV); but, more on this in a minute. It was clear, though, that Jesus was not in a pardoning mood when it came to the stiff necked Pharisees. He reviled them several times, calling them sons of the devil (John 8:44) and warned them of their pending doom (Matthew 23:13-14, 33). You'll notice that his condemnation came from the Father's authority and their sentence would be carried out on Judgment Day.

Jesus' concern was in establishing His kingdom. He came to claim His rightful throne and call those who would join Him in the kingdom of God. He showed little concern for earthly governments, it was not His reason for walking among us. Was He unconcerned about the governments of mankind? Paul said that he got his instructions directly from the risen Christ. Part of his instructions for Christian living were to obey our governments. In those instructions, he clearly stated that the government ruled over us at God's command.

Here is what I see happening. Imagine a world in which everyone, every single person alive, surrendered their heart and soul to Christ. Let's pretend that we were so blessed with the power of the Spirit, that we all walked as Jesus walked. We wouldn't need a government at all, would we? The "sword" of law enforcement would be obsolete. The military would no longer be needed to defend our borders and our freedoms. In this ideal world, the death penalty would be moot. But, as we all know, that world will not exist until the day Jesus comes back to rule the earth in person (Revelation 21:3-4). Until then, "there will be wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6). Man will continue needing governance. Boundaries will need enforcement.

So what does this mean for the Christian? Aren't we supposed to walk as Jesus walked, even in this contentious world? For this, I want to go back to the Old Testament. I want us to look at a man who God said was "after his own heart" (I Samuel 13:14) – David. David was just like us. He sinned, he lied, he lusted, he even murdered. But God used him to do great things. God used David to lead Israel to its height of greatness as a nation. In the process, God used David, and Israel, as an instrument of wrath. God destroyed the Canaanite nations through David's hand. Following God's direction, David was personally responsible for "executing" thousands of people. Yet, God blessed David greatly. At the end of his life, God promised to establish an eternal kingdom through his descendants (II Samuel 7:5-16). It would be through David's line that the Messiah would come.

When the Messiah came, he came to begin the conversion process that would produce the loyal subjects of His kingdom. As Christians, we are no longer of this world. We live in an evil world that must be constrained by force. Like ambassadors to a foreign land, we live in a foreign country and must abide by its laws. When we meet with our own "countrymen," we treat each other by the laws of our King. That is why we are not to sue fellow Christians, or take interest from each other. But, as we interact with the fallen world, we are to honor its laws and comply with their systems. Yes, there are times that we must obey God over man, but for the most part, we are to obey the lawful orders of our overseers.

Ah! But is lethal force, like the death penalty, really a "lawful" order? I think so. Remember the pretend world we looked at earlier, where everyone in the world was following Christ? The early church, right after Jesus' resurrection, was a close approximation of that. People were living collectively, sharing their resources to survive. There was almost no structure or official governing body. They were God's children following God's lead. They were the body of Christ, letting Jesus be the head. Yet, even among them, there was an execution. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? They came to the believers with a financial gift of support from selling some land. They claimed the gift was the whole amount, but had secretly held back some for themselves. Both were killed by God for putting Him to the test and attempting to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). So, even in this near perfect Christian community, the death sentence was being used.

The main difference there was that God carried out the execution. If we could create a society that reversed the course of time, by slowly eliminating "kings" and slowly removing the need for judges, and eventually making preachers/prophets obsolete because we were ever increasingly relying on God's leadership; I think we would see our responsibility for overseeing the death penalty gradually recede. As we became ever more dependent upon God for our governance, He would resume the role as arbiter of the death penalty, like we saw in the early church. But, like the early church, which operated in this age between the first and second coming of our Lord, the need to govern mankind with force, even lethal force, will continue to be needed. It is only after Christ's return that the need for lethal force will be done away with.

Consider this: if it is wrong to kill our fellow man using the death penalty, wouldn't it be wrong to kill in self-defense? If we decided that it is wrong for man to kill man, is it wrong for our nation to have armed police? What would become of national defense in the form of a military? If you say there is justification for any of these, then there is justification for them all. I realize that there are total pacifists that believe killing is wrong in all its forms. I have heard their proposals for how nations could control behavior with collective peaceful non-cooperation. I do not believe that it can ever work in the world in which we live. And I don't believe it is the way God provided for us to structure our societies. C.S. Lewis said, "Pacifism means taking the straight road to a world in which there will be no pacifists." God knew our evil hearts. He demonstrated how the world would look without structure. He gave us our leadership, and gave them "the sword" to keep a tight reign on our evil. Who are we to say that He is wrong? How can we dare to stand up and say "But God, we figured out a better way!"?

If you would like to do away with the death penalty, if you would like to do away with war, here is what you can do:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20

When you have finished doing this, Jesus will return and set up His kingdom on the earth.

In the mean time, I would like to point out that after reading the restrictions God gave Israel on their use of the death penalty, I am concerned that the US of A has become way too loose in our use of it. Remember Numbers 35:30? He required them to have a minimum of 2 witnesses. Recent calls for a moratorium on the death penalty, so that our nation can study the issue, are probably wise.

I don't claim to have this one completely figured out. But this is what I see when I look to Scripture on the issue.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Pr 27:17 NIV)

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD.” (Isaiah 1:18)



## Death Penalty Revisited

I have been asked to take a serious look at the teachings and life of Jesus to see if a case can be built to support the idea that Christians should be against the death penalty. The following is that effort. It has a strong emotional appeal, and I can see why some very dedicated people want to serve our Lord using an anti-violence, no-lethal-force lifestyle. At the end of the day, I am not sure that I agree with their stand and will discuss my reasons at the end of the article. I respect those who make this a part of their life. It is a powerful witness to a violent world in need of a savior.

Let us begin:

**"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth,' but I tell you do not resist an evil person."**

Matthew 5:38-42

**"You have heard that it was said 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."**

Matthew 5:43-44

**"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."**

John 15:12

How did Jesus love?

**"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."**

John 15:13

But here Jesus is talking to believers about believers. What about non-believers?

**"When they came to the place called the Skull here they crucified him...Jesus said 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.'"**

Luke 23:33-34

And finally,

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

John 13:34

It was in the upper room of Jesus' "last supper." Jesus was preparing His disciples for his coming execution, resurrection, and return to the Father. Four times in His dialog, Jesus told them **"If you love me you will obey what I command."** (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10) What was His command? **"Love each other as I have loved you"** (15:12). He illustrated His love by saying **"Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends"** (vs 13).

True to His word, Jesus went to His execution without resistance to save His loved ones. His act was the ultimate demonstration of His love for us, for God's love for the whole world (John 3:16). From His birth to His human death, Jesus' life was a demonstration of God's mercy, grace, and love.

God had already demonstrated His sovereign right to rule and His wrath for the disobedient from the time of Adam to the time of Jesus. And in truth, the world remains under the consequences of our rebellion and the effects of God's wrath until the day of Christ's return. But, is it possible, that with Jesus' incarnation, life and death – with His "new command" – that we now live in a new era of grace and mercy? What I mean is, as followers of Christ, are we to live a new way? Does Jesus' life, his teachings, his new command put an end to our use of "the sword" to protect ourselves, or enforce law? As a Christian, should I be against our nation's use of the death penalty?

When Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God, He commanded His followers to live as He lived. His new command would make them stand out and warned them that the world would hate them, even kill them, because of His name (John 15:18 – 16:4). But He promised the Holy Spirit, who would give them peace and make their joy complete, even under such persecution as was to come.

And stand out they did! They bravely proclaimed the Truth in the temple (Acts Chapter 3). They rejoiced as they were whipped by the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:40-41). They declared Jesus as Lord as they were stoned (Acts 7:59-60). The Roman called Pliny the Younger was puzzled at his orders to arrest and execute people who simply "...met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery..." (Lee Strobel, *A Case for Christ*, pg 83). But he tortured and killed them anyway.

Why would Jesus have us live this way? All through the ages God had built the people of Israel through power and might. They had conquered whole nations of peoples by the sword. Why is Jesus now telling us to put away our swords and love each other? He tells us in His prayer for all believers:

**"...so that the world may believe that you [the Father] have sent me."**

John 17:21

**"...to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."**

John 17:23

Earlier, in His prayer for His disciples, Jesus said that **"They are not of the world, even as I am not of it"** (John 17:16). Paul expands this when he said we are ambassadors of Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). Representing Christ in a fallen world, our mission is reconciliation.

**"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and ***gave us the ministry of reconciliation***: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. ***And he committed us to the message of reconciliation***. We are therefore ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us."**

II Corinthians 5:16-20 (italics added)

It is an interesting image – Ambassador. When an ambassador from another country is among us, they usually stand out. Of course the skilled diplomat will do the best they can to speak fluent English, to dress according to our custom, to follow our social conventions; but they still stand out. Their accents usually give them away. They'll use words in a different way than we do. Sometimes their behavior will differ from ours as they live according to their customs and/or faith. In a similar way, we as Children of God, as representatives of another world, should sound different in the way we speak. Our lifestyles should reflect the values of God's kingdom. Jesus knew that the world would recognize His followers because, if they really walked as Jesus walked (1 John 1:6) in love, they would be different than the norm.

In his life on this planet, Jesus seemed little concerned for the affairs of government. His governor was the Father. He gave to Caesar what was Caesar's, but mostly He let the "dead bury the dead" when it came to worldly matters. During my study, I wondered if He ever condoned violence or the use of lethal force. The only time recorded where Jesus used force of any kind was when He cleared the temple of profiteers. But then He only used "a whip out of cords" to drive them out of God's house (John 2:12-16). I find it interesting that His wrath surfaced not in defense of human beings, but in the defense of God's holiness. It reminds me of the time Israel, freshly rescued from slavery in Egypt began having sex with Moabite women and were worshiping their god – Baal of Peor. One of the Israelites brought one of these women into camp. Phinehas took a spear and killed them both. God praised him and rewarded him "because he was zealous for the honor of his God" (Numbers 25). It was in fact, God's orders that lethal force be used at that time, but that occurred during a brutal time in human history. God was establishing His people, Israel, amid brutal and evil nations. In part, He was unleashing His wrath on idolatrous, evil nations, and at the same time He was declaring to the world His right to rule.

When Jesus came, yes things were still quite brutal, but for the most part, world order had been established. It was time to really focus attention on the love and mercy of God. Jesus replaced "an eye for an eye" with "turn the other cheek." He said that not only are we to love each other, we are to love our enemies. He told Peter that those who live by the sword die by the sword.

Even in Jesus' parables, the evil ones aren't killed, they receive harsh, severe punishments but they aren't killed. The unmerciful servant is sentenced to torture (Matthew 18:34). The unrighteous wedding guest was bound and cast out to weep and gnash teeth (Matthew 22:13). The vineyard tenants were brought "to a wretched end" (Matthew 21:44); but that doesn't mean they were killed. The only parables that approach it at all are the ones using imagery of weeds and chaff. They are burned; but technically speaking, Jesus never actually says they are destroyed. In fact, the only people who die in Jesus' parables are brought to their deaths by God Himself. It is as if Jesus, in setting the example, is calling us to return to God as our king. It was how it was supposed to be from the beginning, after all. It was only because of our rejection of Him as ruler of our hearts and lives that government and the death penalty came about in the first place.

In recognizing that we must live in a fallen world, Jesus commanded us to live orderly lives in compliance with our nation's governments. At the same time, though, He called us to return God to the throne of our hearts. He called us to trust God so much that in our obedience to Him, we would stand out as different from all the rest. When Paul said to be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1) he set the bar pretty high. God loves us when we reject Him. God tolerates us when we doubt Him. He forgives us when we beat and crucified Him. This is the model Jesus presented for us to imitate.

One of the most telling moments was when the Jews confronted Jesus with the woman caught in adultery. It was an offense punishable by stoning, the death penalty. Jesus response was to pardon her. He told the Pharisees "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:3-11). If I were



in that crowd, I would have walked away with them. So where does this model take us when faced with issues of self-defense, lethal force (both for the police and the military), and the death penalty? With this as our model, I see no options. "Do not resist an evil person" leaves no room for "Make my day!" It leaves no room for "Halt or I'll shoot!" It leaves no room for "You shall hang by the neck until you are dead."

The model portrayed here was summed up by a chorus from the '70's:

"They will know we are Christians by our love,

by our love.

They will know we are Christians by our love."

Thoughts:

- Is love healthy without boundaries? Is love real without discipline?
- Jesus and the adulterous woman – more about freeing us from Pharisaical law, not from all laws.
- If we are to understand God, Jesus, us -- we cannot take any part of the Bible in isolation – it must all be taken together, for example:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."

Luke 14:26

A few years ago, a cult was exposed that used this verse to isolate its followers from family and friends, making them totally dependant upon the cult leader. It was a living example of how someone can take an isolated verse from Scripture and torture it into something to suite their own desires. Jesus often used provocative imagery to get a point across. His point was that God wants us to love Him above all else, even our own lives. But this can be discussed on another page, if need be. My purpose for bringing it up is to demonstrate the importance of reading the Bible – all of it! As we grow as children of God, we need to know God. As we search for the path He has laid out for us, we are better equipped to follow Him if we know more about Him, about us, and about the world we live in. God has given us plenty of information in Scripture. If we don't read the Bible, our choices in life will be guided by other things like our personal wishes, or Hollywood, or misguided college professors, ad infinitum. So, it is important to know the whole Scripture.

Of course, this debate is actually taking place between people who do read the Bible! I realize that some of our in-house debates will remain unanswerable in this life. This may be one of them. But, here is what I see:

God is the ruler over His creation. Man is a fallen creature, the majority of which rejects His rule. He establishes nations, He gives us leaders, He commands us to obey them and comply with their laws. The death penalty has always been a part of that, handed down by God to mankind.

## FINDING PEACE IN KING KONG

I found peace today in an unlikely place – Peter Jackson’s remake of King Kong. It was a beautifully made movie. Jackson takes us from the struggles for survival in Depression Era New York city to the struggles for survival on Kong’s Skull Island. Kong is a battle scarred, fearsome beast with a deep, bone rattling growl that reverberates in your soul well after leaving the theatre. I know that growl.

But first, let me tell you about Kong. He is the lone survivor of his type on an island of kill-or-be-killed, eat-or-be-eaten. He has lost all he loves and now only knows survival. He survives by being meaner than anything else around him. His growl and his roar signify his power and warn of the consequences of trying to harm him -- and everyone around him is trying to harm him. But then, he meets Ann Darrow. He’s a little clueless, underestimating her value, not recognizing what she offers him. Kong only knows pain and threats. He doesn’t recognize love and peace at first, but he eventually sees it. He sees it in a love that won’t back away from his growls. He learns of a love that offers peace.

There were three major images that struck me deeply that I would like to discuss.

### Peace Amidst the Storm

Kong is King of his realm. He is one mean hombre. He’s used to getting what he wants. Then he meets Ann. In the scene where he brings her to his home, she desperately uses some of her vaudeville act to entertain or distract him and he discovers that he likes the falling-down kind of slap-stick. He wants more and more, but Ann cannot keep on and quits, refusing to do more of it. Well, Kong goes berserk! He roars. He stomps around, breaking things, throwing things, trying to scare Ann into conforming to his will. All the while, Ann stands there, fear filling her eyes with tears, yet firmly refusing to go on with the show. A person can only do that if they have something they believe in. Taking a stand that can cost you your life requires a firm foundation in one’s soul.

It reminded me of Jesus’ nap in the boat during a storm (Matthew 8:23-27), or the time he walked on water during a storm (Matthew 14:22-33). People might say “Well, but he was God and knew he wouldn’t be hurt. That wasn’t near the risk Ann Darrow was facing!” All the same, He lectured the apostles for lacking faith. His peace came in the firm foundation of knowing that the Father had plans for them and resting in the trust of His faithfulness. But there certainly were times that Jesus paid dearly for taking a stand. Facing arrest in the Garden of Olives, Jesus could have called down legions of angels (Matthew 26:53), but instead He stood his ground. Facing the Sanhedrin, He could have chickened out and told them anything to avoid the consequences of their fury (Matthew 26:57-67). Facing Pilate, He could have offered soothing platitudes to avoid the coming pronouncement of crucifixion (John 18:28-38). Instead, He told Pilate what He knew – that it was only because it was the will of God that Pilate was in a position to make the judgment at all (John 19:8-11). Jesus faced and suffered more fury and wrath than Kong ever threatened Ann with, and He did it because He was firmly rooted in something greater than himself (humanly speaking). Was he scared? Sweating blood sounds like scared to me! But, He was able to live with the fear and dread by walking in the peace that can only be found in trusting His Father. His devotion to what He knew was right – obedience to the Father – was more powerful than his human fear.

In a similar way, we can face the Kong’s in our lives. We can rest in the peace that comes from knowing that our Lord has plans for our lives, knowing that nothing and no one can stand in the way of our accomplishing those goals. Life may grab us and toss us around. It may roar and knock us down, repeatedly. But, we still stand firm, knowing that Jesus went through it all before us, and said we could face it as His Spirit gives us strength.

## **Trusting God Even When We're Scared**

As Ann Darrow stalled for time with Kong, she looked for opportunities to escape him. Out in the island on her own, though, it became rapidly clear that this was an extremely dangerous place. She found herself under attack by some beasts and turned around, only to face Kong. It was a turning point for her as she decided to trust him, in spite of her fear of him.

Many people go through life afraid. Certainly there are many scary things we face, like dangerous neighborhoods, unpaid bills, violent families, and more. But some people are afraid of God, as well. If all we know about God comes from things like movies, or wrathful images that stick in our minds from church, we can get a pretty distorted idea of who God is. Some live with souls marred by abuse; self-images distorted by unloving or un-supporting parents. They may feel unworthy of God and avoid Him, thinking that He will only see them as deserving His wrath. It is said, and I've found it true many times, that our feelings about our fathers get transferred into our feelings about God. People with violent fathers often expect God to be violent. In a way, these people are right; but not in the way they think.

God's wrath should be feared. But, it is only those who reject Him that have anything to fear. His wrath is sure and will be poured out upon those who defy Him. But, this will come in the next life. Yes, in general, our suffering in this life is a result of God's judgment upon Adam and Eve's sin. While in this life, we have much to fear. But it is a mistake to think that we can save ourselves from it. Like Ann turning to Kong, it is only when we return to God that we can get protection from what we fear. God loves us and wants to protect us, but we have to trust Him – and let me tell you, we can trust Him!

## **Peace When All Is Lost**

The final image that struck me deeply was Kong's battle on the Empire State building. He was going to lose. He had been fighting for survival all his life, and now was in a world where he knew it was all over. He found the highest point to take his last stand and said, in effect, "Let's go boys, bring it on!" As the guns of the planes were cutting him down, there came a brief moment where he just looked in Ann's eyes. Letting out this rumbling sigh, for a moment he was at peace. Amid the attacks, the pain, the defeat, he found peace. It was a wonderful moment.

This life we live is like that to a degree. We live in a world, in a body, that is doomed. We are going down. We all have our beasts that are after us, whether cancers, or car wrecks, or diabetes, or...well you get my point. The beasts are going to get us some day. Yet, like Kong, we have someone we can go to for peace. We have someone that will stand beside us, through the whole thing. We can look deeply into His eyes and sigh deeply, letting it all out to Him. Like Ann, who risked everything to climb up that ladder, Jesus risked everything, so to speak. He climbed into our world and took the hits from the Beast, so that we could look deeply into His eyes and find peace. It's a beautiful thing.

I wish I could do it all the time. When the planes of life swoop down on me, when the bullets of relational strife rip my heart, I wish I had the discipline to always look up and stare into those Eyes....and sigh....before I respond. I'm getting better, sometimes I can do it. More often than not, though, I roar and growl and stomp around the jungle relying on my own power and strength to fight back. It only scares my loved ones and causes more harm.

It is there for us, though. God promises us that in this life, we will face trials. As Children of God, we will suffer the slings and arrows of this world. But He promises us that He will be there with us. He promises that He will never let anything happen that is beyond our ability to bear. We can walk into His protective arms while the Beast attacks. We can stare into His eyes when we feel like it's all crumbling down around us....and sigh....and be at peace. Our life is in His hands. He knows our pain, has suffered it more than we will ever know, and will hold our hands as we trust Him.

The choice is ours. We can go through life growling, roaring, and breaking things to get what we want, or to protect ourselves from real or imagined threats. Like Kong, we'll die lonely, scarred by battle; leaving behind the carnage of war on the hearts of those around us. Or, we can turn to God, get into His Word, and learn to face life's battles with God's tools:

"Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered.

It keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails."

I Corinthians 13:4-7

"Above all, love each other deeply, because

love covers over a multitude of sins."

I Peter 4:8

Will it stop the pains of life? No, but as Christians we can react in a different way:

"However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed,

but praise God that you bear that name."

I Peter 4:16

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

I Peter 5:7-11

It’s normal to be scared. God offers us peace, though, as we bring our fears to Him and lay them at His feet.

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Matthew 10:28-31

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

Trust comes easy for some, harder for others. As I was re-discovering my faith, several years ago, my final road block turned out to be that I was afraid to trust God with my life. Can you imagine? I mean, He’s only the Creator of the entire universe! In hind sight, it sounds pretty silly, but the idea scared me. But the beasts in my life were eating me alive. I was tired of fighting them and resisting God. In a hotel room in Rio, I broke down, cried my eyes out, repenting of wasting years of my life living for myself and running from Him. It was the best thing I ever did! Peace like a river flowed into my soul.

Are my trials and troubles over? No. Do they still hurt? Yes. But, I’m learning to see them in a different light. I’m learning to recognize them for what they are. Like Job, when he learned of the loss of all his wealth, and the death of all his children; I’m learning to react by falling on my face and worshiping God. He is the King and my Perfect Father. These trials are either directly chosen by Him, or acts performed by Satan’s schemes – but permitted by Him; and I know they are for the good of the Kingdom and will work for my own benefit as well. Just this knowledge makes them a little less painful and a lot more bearable. As I stare into the eyes of His Word, I sigh deeply and surrender my worries to Him. I start each day knowing that I woke up, still alive, because He has wonderful plans for me here on this earth. I pray for Him to become more, and for me to become less.

“And Peace like a river fills my soul”

It is there for you, too. More than any of us can imagine. Reach out – and touch the Face of God.

Grace and Peace to you all

## Can Christians Be Demon Possessed?

What a challenging question! Part of the difficulty with this subject is that, like many aspects of life, the Bible doesn't have a specific verse that says "Children of God cannot be possessed by demons," or "Watch yourself! If you stray on your spiritual walk, the demons can get you!" If you break it down into some core concepts, though, I believe you can find some answers.

I'd like to start with the very word itself – possession. We use it today commonly to speak of the things we own. When someone loses all their "earthly possessions" in a house fire, we are talking about things owned. Certainly, the word can refer to things in our control that do not belong to us. Imagine the District Attorney confronting the accused at trial saying "When you were arrested, we found the murder weapon in your possession!" and the defendant saying "Yes, but it wasn't mine and I don't know how it got in my car!" But, for now, I'd like to focus on the first meaning.

The people of this world are possessed. All people are owned by either Satan or God (I John 3:10). I know, technically, we all belong to God as He owns "the earth and everything in it"

**"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it..."**

**Ps 24:1**

But the Bible makes it clear that God has let Satan have control of this earth and he rules over it (Ephesians 6:12). He is the "prince of this world" (John 12:31) and has power to move people and nations, and even control nature (Job 1:12-19). Jesus said that all who do not believe in him are condemned (John 3:18) and are the children of the devil (John 8:44). Paul, in II Timothy 2:24-26, says that the unrepentant are captives of the devil:

**"And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will".**

The unsaved are "slaves to sin" (Romans 7:21-24) and are free game, so to speak, for Satan to use as he wishes. Judas Iscariot is a good example. Satan entered him and sent him to the Sanhedrin to make their plans to arrest Jesus:

**"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."**

**Luke 22:3-4 NIV**

So, we see that Satan can control his people, the condemned. As I studied, I wondered whether the possession was strictly physical, with the victim's mind hidden somewhere; or does Satan and his demons actually control the mind as well. I am not certain on this issue, but it is interesting that you'll never see someone demon possessed coming up to Jesus to be rescued from their demon. All of the possessed that Jesus cured were brought to Him by others, unless they just happened to already be in a place where Jesus came to teach. I thought, maybe the man with a mute demon, whose only obvious affect was that he couldn't speak – maybe that man had come to Jesus willingly – but he had not. He was brought by others as well (Matthew 9:32-33).

The case of Judas is fascinating. I have heard speculation (more than once) that Judas hanged himself after Jesus was condemned to be crucified, because Judas never intended it to happen. The theory is that Judas only had Jesus arrested in anticipation that Jews would rise up to save the messiah, rescuing him from the Romans and beginning the revolt that would free Israel from Rome. It is possible he just did it for the money. All such speculation misses the point that it was Satan who “entered” him and used him for his scheme to kill Jesus. I think Judas’ suicide actually confirms the possession and indicates that Judas was shocked at his own actions. John tells us that he was a thief and stole from their money bag (John 12:6), but he was no murderer. You could see his shock when he tried to give the money back to the Pharisees, and he said that Jesus was an innocent man (Matthew 27:4).

All this is to say that it seems that the evil spirits control the minds of the possessed as well as their bodies. Judas was convinced that he had done it himself as he proclaimed “I have sinned” (Matthew 27:4); yet we know that it was Satan working through him. From what we know of the workings of the mind and body, today, it is probably safe to say that one must control the mind to control the body.

This is important because there is a clear difference between inflicting physical ailments upon a body and taking control of a body (Job is a good example. Satan was allowed to attack Job’s body; but Job’s mind was free) – which brings us to Christians and possession. I find no reference in Scripture of a Child of God being possessed by a demon. There are clear examples of the righteous being afflicted (Job) or even being moved about (Jesus’ temptation in the desert; although, like Paul, this activity may have been in the spirit, rather than physical). But in both cases, they remained in control of themselves. Satan’s only options toward them were physical affliction and temptation. The same goes for the man kicked out of the church in Corinth:

“...hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature [flesh] may be destroyed  
and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”

I Corinthians 5:5

When we become “born again,” we are a new creation freed from slavery to sin. God renews our minds, as He “works in [us] to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13) We’re warned:

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

1Pe 5:8

But even this warning lets us know that we can be “self-controlled.” Satan’s roaring is designed to scare and intimidate. That’s all he can do. We are told to:

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Jas 4:7

The choice is ours. If we submit to God, the devil must flee. If we choose to submit to Satan’s temptations, we serve Satan; but we do it willingly. Satan asked God to let him have Peter to “sift as wheat” (Luke 22:31 Net Bible). We’re not told how that conversation went, but we can see that Simon Peter was tempted – not controlled – by Satan. He failed the test, and was free to return and follow his Lord.

Let me try to summarize my thoughts. As a Child of God, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. No one "unclean" is allowed in the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling. I seriously doubt, though I may be wrong, that one's body cannot be controlled (possessed) without controlling the mind. As Christians, our minds are free as our spirits are reborn from the mire of death and darkness controlled by Satan. At the most, it is possible that God may allow our physical bodies to be afflicted by Satan, since they represent the "flesh," or "sin nature" that contends and wars against the Spirit while we are in this life. If this is happening, you can rest assured that it is being allowed for your own good. It would certainly be a warning that one's spiritual walk with God needs immediate attention!





## Angels Long to Look into These Things

His name means The Accuser. Called “Morning Star” (Isaiah 14:12), he was adorned with “every precious stone” mounted in gold (Ezekiel 28:13). God “anointed” him “as guardian cherub” in the garden of Eden. Yet, Jesus saw him “fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Satan is a name known around the globe. Once lauded as a beautiful angel of God, now he is blamed for every evil since the beginning of Mankind. I say he is blamed for all evil, but God’s Word tells us what we all really know - that wickedness and evil are our own doing, choices we make to reject God and His ways. In fact, evil is only possible because we are able to choose. Our habit of choosing to do evil is well documented from the fall of Adam, but what of Satan? It is taught in some circles that the thing that separates us from the angels is that we have free will and they do not. Like animals wired by instinct, angels are hard-wired from creation to do the bidding of God. Would this mean that God made Satan to do evil? If Satan, as an angel, has no free will, then the only conclusion would be that God made Satan evil; that God made Satan to tempt us (since that is what he does).

At first glance it is an interesting concept. We know that evil came into our world through the poor exercise of our free will. We must have free will if we are to truly love and glorify God, which is why we exist. Is it possible that God provided Satan as Tempter in order that we have something else to choose? Can free will really operate if there is nothing but Good to choose? Under this concept, that must be Satan’s role – to provide an alternative to Good, and God, so that free will has something else to choose. Very interesting; but is it true? There is only one place I know to go for answers concerning the motives and actions of God – The Bible! Let’s take a look.

First, here are a couple of verses showing angels choosing to do evil and good:

Luke 11:24 [Jesus talking]

“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says ‘I will return to the house I left’...Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself...”

-- This verse shows an evil angel choosing its course of action. Does that prove free will? Not necessarily. My dogs choose whether to go outside or come back into the house, but many believe dogs just operate by their hard-wired instincts. Here, the interesting term Jesus uses is “wicked.” It describes His moral evaluation of the intent of the angel. If the angel has no will, but is robotically following the programming given to it by God; then, Jesus’ evaluation of wickedness is calling God’s program evil. Does God have evil intentions?

Hebrews 1:6

“Let all God’s angels worship him.”

-- Here we have a good choice. But, can worship be worth anything if it comes from a robot? Does love and adoration have meaning if it comes to you from a computer that you programmed to say “YOU ARE WONDERFUL! I LOVE YOU!” every time you come into the room?

Now, here’s the clincher:

I Corinthians 6:3

“Do you not know that we will judge angels?”

II Peter 2:4

“For God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell...to be held for judgment.”

-- What kind of just Judge would send robots to eternal fire for following the programming that He Himself gave them? How will we sit in judgment and proclaim, “OK, you did just what God designed you to do, so I sentence you to eternal punishment!”? In fact, this last verse says that these angles “sinned.” Like our sins, it requires a free will to choose to disobey God.

Nail in the coffin, so to speak, describing Satan’s fall from grace:

Ezekiel 28:15

“You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till wickedness was found in you. Through your wide spread trade you were filled with violence and you sinned. ... You became proud ... and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to earth.”

-- We can see that God created Satan “blameless.” But Satan, because of his pride, sinned. He “corrupted” himself and received swift judgment from God.

There are many other verses that describe angelic behavior and the judgment that will befall them, but these are a fair representation of them all. The Bible says that Satan sinned and his angels sinned. Choosing to reject God and disobey Him is an act of free will. I see nothing in God’s Word supporting the proposition that we are different from the angels because of our free will and their lack of it.

I agree that we are unique from angels and are special in God’s eyes. As part of God’s creation, He chose to redeem us with the blood of His Son. “Even the angels long to look into these things” (I Peter 1:12). Is it possible that the rebellious angels have no chance of redemption because they know God, face to face. There is no need for faith. They have no doubts as to God’s existence and sovereignty. They, with Satan, made their choice to defect with full knowledge of God. For them, there is no excuse, no chance of redemption.

We, however, have a chance. The consequences for disobedience and rejection of God’s mercy are just as dire as that faced by the angels. But, God has made it possible for us to repent and be restored.

Romans 3:23

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 10:9

“If you confess with your mouth that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:13

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

II Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone and the new has come!”

Ephesians 1:13

“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...”

If you haven't secured your place in the Kingdom of God, today is the day. Answer the call of the Spirit in your heart. Maybe you feel nervous and your heart is beating faster! Maybe you just want this all to be true. It is! The Spirit is calling you to repent and join the Family of God. Simply talk to God. Let Him know you are sorry for your sins, and want forgiveness. Tell Him that you want Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and you will receive God's Spirit and be “born again” as a child of God. Get a Bible and begin a daily trip through God's love letters to us. Learn about His wonderful love and mercy, and fall in love with our Dad, the King!

Go in His grace and rest in His Truth



## ***Chapter 5: Bible Contradictions***

As I read through the Bible for the first time in my life, I would occasionally come across things that seemed to contradict other verses. Someone even emailed me a list of websites devoted to exposing the errors and contradictions of the Bible. Yet, I had already done enough work to know that the Judeo-Christian God is real and His Word to us is legit. So what to do with these issues?

As the saying goes: “Inquiring minds want to know!” So, off I went looking for answers. The answers were easy to find. They were so easy to find that it was clear that the authors of the Bible Contradiction sites hadn’t made the slightest effort to find them. They were “intentionally ignorant of the truth” as God’s Word says. It was clear that they were not Truth Seekers at all, but had an agenda. Parading as scholars, scientists, or lovers of truth, they are just representatives of all Mankind who desire to chase God away in order to live life on their own terms.



Who Bought the Potter's Field, Judas or the Priests?

And

How did Judas die?

**Problem:**

Matthew 27:5 – “So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself”

VS

Acts 1:18 – “(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out ...”

**Discussion:**

This one is easy. The first is an actual recounting of events – the second, is “the moral of the story.” Let me explain. First, let us read the actual story.

“Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. When Judas who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, ‘It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commended me.’”

Matthew 27:1-10

These events were prophesied long ago by Jeremiah and Zechariah, speaking of events surrounding the betrayal of the messiah:

“I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’ – the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.”

Zechariah 11:12-13



Note who threw the money to the potter – Judas. Did he do this directly? No, he threw them into the house of the LORD. Others carried out the task for him.

Let me illustrate with a modern fable. Imagine a greedy man, let's call him Judas, who built an empire of wealth through a casino. Just as his wealth reached the point that he was ready to expand, and move into the drug trade, he died. He had no living relatives and foolishly left no will. So, the town took his wealth and built a cancer treatment hospital for children. Judas intended to use his wealth for evil, but instead he bought a hospital that blessed lives for years to come! Now, did I contradict myself? I said Judas died. I also said that Judas bought a hospital. This is a normal illustrative way of communication that we still use today. You will find that in many so-called contradictions, the Bible authors were using illustrative speech that we even use ourselves. But, to create doubt about the Bible's authenticity, people want to ignore this, and hold the authors to artificially strict verbal patterns that they would not hold themselves to.

Now, let's examine the mode of death for Judas. Read the Acts account carefully. Does it say that Judas killed himself by jumping off a cliff? No, the passage says that Judas "fell headlong, his body burst open..." – no mention of whether Judas was alive or dead when he fell. I think it is telling that his body burst. I have read accounts from those hostile to the Bible, that they have researched the dynamics of the human body falling to a deadly impact. The researcher claimed that bodies do not normally burst open, unless the distance involved is over 1000 ft. The problem with their research, though, is that their basic assumption is that the falling body is alive and in good condition. What if the body had been hanging from the tree for a while and was rotten? I'm certain a decomposing body would burst open, spilling its contents much more easily. In fact this would match the two accounts perfectly. The actual account in Matthew does not recount the disposal of Judas' body. We find it in the Acts account, though. Someone cut him down, and/or his body fell, or was tossed, into the potter's field (maybe the guilty priests tossed him!). As in most stories told by multiple sources, when you combine the information from all sources, you get a more complete picture of the event.

## Who was Moses' Father-in-Law: Jethro or Hobab?

Exodus 3:1 Jethro was the father-in-law of Moses.

**VS.**

Numbers 10:29, Judges 4:11 (KJV) Hobab was the father-in-law of Moses.

This is standard fare for the average Bible critic. They spend hours compiling complaints against God and the Bible. Yet, if they would spend a tenth of that time getting to know the Bible, or the culture and history of ancient Israel, or the processes involved in Bible translation, they would pack up their Bible Error web sites and go home!

The answer to this dilemma could be this simple: ***"Of Hobab - Called also Jethro."*** (from John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible<sup>17</sup>). People of the ancient world went by one name, but it was common that they were called other names as well. One you might recall is "Peter," the apostle. That wasn't his only name, though. His original Hebrew name was Simon. Jesus gave him the Greek name Peter after he became his disciple (Mark 3:16). But wait! In John 1:42 Jesus is quoted as calling him Cephas. Another Bible error? No, Cephas is Aramaic for stone, just as Peter is Greek for stone. We are fortunate that John explains this:

"Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)."

John 1:42 (NIV)

In this one verse we find all three names. John clears up something that could have been confusing for us, today, if he had not explained it. It is possible that our Hobab problem is not any different than Peter's name. Moses, in his writings, didn't take the time to explain, so all we can say is that it is possible or probable that they are two names of the same person – Moses' father-in-law.

It gets more confusing, though. Let's look at the actual verses (In fact I think it is telling that the Bible critic didn't quote the verses, as he normally does!):

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<sup>17</sup>

**4:11** Heber - The husband of Jael. Of Hobab - Called also Jethro. The Kenites - From the rest of his brethren, who lived in the wilderness of Judah. His tent - That is, his dwelling, which probably was in tents, as shepherds used.

[John Wesley's Explanatory Notes  
on the Whole Bible]

15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

16 Now **a priest of Midian had seven daughters**, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock.

17 Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

18 When **the girls returned to Reuel their father**, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

19 They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

20 "And where is he?" he asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."

21 Moses agreed to stay **with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage**. (Exodus 2:15-21 NIV)

Here we first meet "Reuel" and Zipporah. We see that Reuel is a priest of Midian and has 7 daughters. He gives one, Zipporah, to Moses as a wife.

"Now Moses was tending the flock of **Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian**, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God."

(Exodus 3:1)

Just one chapter later, Moses tells us that "Jethro" is the priest of Midian mentioned earlier in chapter 2. If translated correctly, this would mean that Reuel and Jethro are just two names of Moses' father-in-law, like the issue with Peter above. Add to this:

"Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of **Hobab the father-in-law of Moses**, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanan, which is near Kedesh."

(Judges 4:11 RSV)

This adds the third name, Hobab, to the father-in-law list, which is where we began. But, earlier I said "if translated correctly." Here, read this:

29 Now Moses said to **Hobab son of Reuel** the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel."

30 He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people."

31 But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes.

32 If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the LORD gives us."

33 So they set out from the mountain of the LORD and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. (Numbers 10:29-33)

This verse brings in a new problem. If Reuel is Moses' father-in-law, and Hobab is Moses' father-in-law, and Hobab is the son of Reuel, then Hobab is the son of himself?! Oy vey! Before your head explodes, read this about the Hebrew word *chathan* (*khaw-than'*):

"father in law," his relation by marriage. The word is one of very wide use, corresponding with the Latin *affinis*. It is even applied to a husband as in: Judges 4.25. The supposition that it means "father in law" had led to the identification of Jethro with Reuel, which is very unlikely. He was more probably Reuel's son, and Moses' brother-in-law. (Eclectic Notes of the Online Bible<sup>18</sup>)

I checked, and the Hebrew word for "father-in-law" is the same word used for "brother-in-law" and same word used in Judges 4:25 where Zipporah calls Moses her "bridegroom." The passage in Numbers looks like a key to the puzzle. Scholars point out that these verses indicate that Hobab remained with Moses as Israel left Mount Sinai. They say that Hobab cannot be Moses' father-in-law because Moses' father-in-law – Jethro – left Moses and Israel and returned home before they packed up to leave Mount Sinai. This is found in Exodus 18. Jethro had come out to visit Moses, helped him set up judges for the people to share the load Moses was carrying. When they were done, Moses "sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country." (Exodus 18:27)

Here's what it looks like to me.

*"Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of **Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law**, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh."*

*Judges 4:11 (NIV)*

Bible critics accuse the NIV translators of intentionally changing the words of the Bible to eliminate "errors." But after reading the Eclectic Notes' discussion of the Hebrew word "chathan," it is clear that the NIV choice of "brother-in-law" is acceptable. If this is what Moses meant, then we have no dilemma. This makes Hobab the son of Jethro. Jethro went home from Mount Sinai. Hobab stayed with Moses. So who was Reuel? He

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<sup>18</sup> Eclectic Notes of the Bible, OnlineBible.com

could be Jethro, or he could be Jethro' dad! The patriarch of a family was called the "father" of everyone descended from him. Reuel could have been Zipporah's dad or he could have been her grandfather. As patriarch of his clan, Reuel had the right to give "daughters" in marriage. Jim Holding at Tektonics.org has an interesting discussion about the meanings of the three names and how those meaning could lead to some clarification.

The most important thing to remember, in all this, is that Moses wrote the books of Exodus and Numbers which introduced all three names in question. Moses knew these people – personally! If there is any confusion about their identities, it is because of something we have done as we try to translate a 3,000 year old text. Does this in any way make God's Word full of holes? Does it invalidate the Bible as God's message to His people? Of course not.

If God had written the Bible, and every translation of it, with His own hand, we would have some problems to talk about. What we have, though, is God's word written down by the hands of fallible men and translated by fallible men. Considering the circumstances, it is remarkable that the Bibles we have are so extremely accurate. Imagine -- 24,000 copies of the Bible written over 3,000 years in several languages that are 99.5% exactly the same!<sup>19</sup> It is the most reliably preserved piece of ancient literature that exists. And it *is* the Word of God!

Keep the Faith my Brothers and Sisters! Be overcomers and persevere to the end. Some day we will meet The Word in person and it will be wonderful

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<sup>19</sup> A Case for Christ, Lee Strobel

## Has anyone seen God?

- John 1:18 "No man hath seen God at any time."
- Exodus 33:20 "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live."
- I John 4:12 "No man hath seen God at any time."

VS.

- Genesis 32:30 "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."
- Exodus 33:11 "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."
- Isaiah 6:1 "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."
- Job 42:5 "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee."

To this, let me add some interesting verses:

John 1:18 in full: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

John 14:9 "Jesus answered, '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.'"

Isaiah 9: 6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Hebrews 1:3 "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..."

John 10:30 "I and the Father are one." (Jesus speaking)

John 4:24 "God is spirit..." (Jesus speaking)

## Discussion

Each of the four "problem" verses quote different people under different circumstances. A quick review of each will clear up some problems, then we can begin the discussion of the larger subject.

\* Gen 32:30 – Jacob had just wrestled with what was probably an angel. The angel notified Jacob that his name was to be changed to Israel because "...you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." (vrs 28) Jacob clearly took this to mean that he had just wrestled with God, in person, and said "...I saw God face to face." (vrs 30) There are many instances in the Bible where an angel appears to someone, representing God. God even speaks to some through the angel. Also, the Bible also quotes people whether their claims are true or not. Jacob clearly thought he saw God, but he was wrong.

\* Ex 33:11 – This was God speaking to Moses, which will be discussed later.

\* Isa 6:1 – The prophet, Isaiah, was having a vision (see verse 1:1). I imagine visions as directed imagery projected into our minds by God. I don't know if this is how it works, but it is clear that

visions are not the same as physically seeing things with our eyes. They are more like dreams. Isaiah did not “see” God, nor did he see God’s face. He was simply describing what he saw in his vision.

\* Job 42:5 God spoke to Job “...out of the storm.” (verse 38:1). When He was finished, Job repented of his attitude toward God and made the statement that he had heard and seen God. It is likely that he was referring to the storm from which God spoke. This is very similar to the cloud/fire that God spoke to the Israelites from after rescuing them from Egypt. (Exodus 16:10, and others) There is no indication that Job actually saw God or His face.

Now to the heart of the matter. I have read some very interesting discussions on this, and have my own opinion on this matter as well. Let me summarize three serious efforts at answering this problem.

- The following is a quote from a paper by Andrei Orlov, at Marquette University: “In biblical theophanies (appearances of God) smoke and fire often serve as a divine envelope that protects mortals from the sight of the divine form. Radiant luminosity emitted by the Deity fulfills the same function, signaling the danger of the direct vision of the divine form. Luminosity also represents the screen which protects the Deity from the necessity of revealing its true form. Scholars note that in some theophanic traditions God’s form remains hidden behind His light. The hidden *dwbk* (a Hebrew word) is revealed through this light, which serves as the luminous screen, “the face” of this anthropomorphic extend.” This discussion primarily deals with the idea that God is not a 3 dimensional being and lives outside our 3 dimensional world. When He chooses to *extend* Himself into our world, His presence takes on a form, different from His natural state, that we can see and recognize. This projected countenance is not “God” in person, but a 3 dimensional-ized image.
- As in many other Biblical controversies, this issue is made complex by the Hebrew use of a word which means “face” as well as “presence.” Many places in the Bible which, today, are translated “in God’s presence,” if literally translated would say “in front of God’s face.” It was a figure of speech they used, as we do today when we say that we have to “go face the boss.” What they are getting at, is that any number of these people could have been seeing something representing God’s *presence* rather than His face.
- When addressing Moses’ close relationship with God, and that God spoke to Moses “face to face” not in visions or dreams, an interesting point was made that God could have been speaking with Moses, face to face. From John 4:24, we know that God is spirit. God could have been standing, so to speak, right in front of Moses, speaking with him, but invisible. It does not say that Moses “saw” God. It just said that they were speaking. When Moses asks to see God, God provides a way for Moses to see God’s “glory” passing by, and His “back” (which literally said *backs* in the Hebrew, implying again the 3 dimensional problem). God clearly states that His “face must not be seen.” (verses 33:21-23)
- Many times, Jesus tried to help His disciples understand that He and the Father were one. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” In the days of the Old Testament, the Jews did not understand the triune nature of God. It is possible, that if people were seeing “God,” they were really seeing the face of Jesus before he came to earth and took human form. If they saw God’s “glory,” and Jesus is the “radiance of God’s glory,” then maybe they saw a pre-incarnate Jesus.

This issue is made difficult by the fact that God is a being we cannot fully comprehend. In a similar way, we humans have the same incomprehensible nature. We are body, soul (the mind), and spirit. We “see” each other, but do we really see the totality of our tripartite beings? Clearly not. Are we wrong, then, when we say that we “see” each other? Technically, one could say – yes! We cannot see our souls, or spirits! Yet, in reality, we know what we mean. We see enough of each other to identify ourselves from one another. Now this analogy doesn’t completely work, because we are pretty specific about what our “face” is. In God’s case, I’m not really certain we know exactly what He means by that.

He makes it clear, however, that we cannot see it without physically dying. None of the people in our discussion died, so they obviously saw something else, or in Moses case, nothing at all.

*"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face." 1 Corinthians 13:12*





## Has Anyone Gone Into Heaven But Jesus?

### Problem:

John 3:13 – Jesus said: “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.”

### Vs

Genesis 5:24 – “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away”. (also Hebrews 11:5)

II Kings 2:11 – “As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.”

II Corinthians 12:2-4 – Paul talking: “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows. And I know that this man...was caught up to paradise.” (Paul was talking of himself, but didn’t want to sound boastful).

### Discussion:

You will find that many controversies about Biblical issues come from discussions involving things outside our 3 dimensional universe. We have this same problem in physics or astrophysics when a scientist tries to describe string theory or the fact that there are really 11 dimensions to our universe. We are just incapable of making language, geared to a 3 dimensional world, paint a picture of something beyond that existence.

When we talk of “heaven” and “hell,” people think of them as one place – heaven, and one place – hell. The ancient Jews even had more of a problem, in that they only had one word – heaven - to describe three things: 1) our atmosphere, 2) outer space, and 3) “heaven” as we use it, God’s realm. This is why Paul refers to the “third heaven” in his letter to the Corinthians. But it appears that both heaven and hell are more complex than we commonly think of them.

Before Jesus’ resurrection, the spirits/souls of the dead went to either “paradise” (called ‘Abraham’s bosom’ in Hebrew idiom) or “Sheol/Hades” (Hebrew/Greek). On the cross, when one of the robbers asked Jesus to remember him when he went to his kingdom, Jesus said “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” This is because after his death, before his resurrection, Jesus went to paradise and brought out the

believers to go with him to “heaven” as we refer to it today. This was prophesied in Psalm 68:18, and cited by Paul, Ephesians 4:8: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” Jesus referred to Abraham’s bosom when he taught of the rich man who went to Hades and the beggar who went to Abraham’s bosom in Luke 16:19-30. Similarly, Jesus went by the Spirit to Hades to “preach to the spirits in prison” (I Peter 3:19).

Now, Jesus reigns in his glorified body as King of kings. On Judgment Day, the devil, “death and Hades,” and anyone whose “name is not found written in the book of life” will be “thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10-14). So even “hell” is a more complex concept than most realize.

The Catholic tradition teaches of Purgatory, a holding tank for those who must pay a penance (if I understand it correctly) before going to Heaven. I find no support for this, myself. Jesus taught of only two choices – the broad gate leading to destruction or the narrow gate leading to eternal life. But that is another topic. I bring it up only to develop the concept that the spirit world beyond our existence is much more involved than a single word (like “heaven”) can depict.

So, was Jesus the first to “ascend” to heaven? Yes. Enoch and Elijah went to “paradise” and were brought to heaven with Jesus after the resurrection. Paul most likely had an “out of body experience” as we say, or a vision/revelation, but even he refers to “paradise.” Either way, Paul’s experience is not a conflict with Jesus’ claim, since Jesus had already returned to Heaven before Paul’s visit.

When people go to the Bible looking for contradictions, they will often hold the Biblical writers to a standard that they do not follow themselves. We commonly use a word in a “broad brush” method, which can mean different things in different contexts, or can encompass large concepts not easily described. Yet if a Biblical author does this, AHA!, we have a contradiction. It’s a double standard, and not real life.

## Are We All Sinners or Are Some Righteous?

### Problem:

- Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."
- Romans 3:10 "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one."
- Psalm 14:3 "There is none that doeth good, no, not one."

### VS.

- Job 1:1 "There was a man . . . whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright."
- Genesis 7:1 "And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."
- Luke 1:6 "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

This is a good question. The verses are translated properly and the problem is not caused by the use of King James English. The answer to this problem comes from studying the issues: What makes us "blameless" in God's sight? What is "righteousness" and how do we obtain it? These are important issues, for we live in an era in America where many believe that we are all God's children and are all going to heaven. Many feel that they are doing good and their good works will earn them access to eternal life. But this is not what the Bible teaches. It is not what Jesus taught. "Righteousness" is a "right relationship" with God. Most of mankind believes, in fact most world religions teach, that the things that we do – our works – create this right relationship for us. But this is not how we become right with God.

Paul, originally Saul of Tarsus, is a perfect example of this issue. Let us hear it straight from him:

"If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more: I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless. But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness." Philippians 3:4-9 (NET Bible)

Paul had lived a "blameless" life, living by the Jewish law to the letter, yet after meeting Christ he regards all his works "as dung!" Paul makes a distinction here between what he calls his own righteousness and a "righteousness that comes ... from God." What did Paul learn that changed his mind about his blameless condition? Paul tells us himself:

"You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? Have you suffered so many things for nothing? — if indeed it was for nothing. Does God then give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?"

Just as Abraham *believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*, so then, understand that those who believe are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham ahead of time, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” So then those who believe are blessed along with Abraham the believer. For all who rely on doing the works of the law are under a curse, ...Now it is clear no one is justified before God by the law, because *the righteous one will live by faith*. But the law is not based on faith, ...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (because it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*”) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we could receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.” Galatians 3:1-14 (NET Bible)

“...if righteousness could come through the law” (works, things we do), “then Christ died for nothing!” Gal 2:21

“For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

This last verse may sound a little off topic, but it's not. The point Paul is making is that unbelievers are spiritually dead (see John 3:18). There is no act or work or good thing we can do to make our relationship with God right (righteousness). It is our faith in the substitutionary act of Jesus death on the cross that brings us into that right relationship. Job, Noah, and Abraham did not know about Jesus, but they had faith that God was real and He would redeem them (Hebrews chapter 11). For their faith, God “imputed” or granted them His righteousness (Gal 3:1). It is in this way that God can look on them, and us, as “blameless.” The sins of the faithful are covered by the sacrificial blood of Jesus.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins, and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24 (NIV)

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” 1 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

“But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, **because we have now been declared righteous by his blood, we will be saved through him from God's wrath.**” Romans 5:8-9 (NET Bible)

“...they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14 (NIV)

So, do we all sin? Are we all sinners? Yes, of course. Do we have a righteousness of our own?

“I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you.” Isaiah 57:12

Paul said that all of his spiritual works before placing his faith in the work of Jesus, were “dung.” It is said that Paul had the equivalent of 2 PhD's in Jewish law. He was quite young to be a Pharisee, and his passion and zeal for God were legendary; yet he said he counts all this “as loss.” It is only those works we do now, as believers filled with the Spirit of God, that are holy.

“Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” Romans 8:8-9 (NIV)

“...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Philippians 2:13

“The one who sews to please his sinful nature will reap destruction; the one who sews to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Galatians 5:8

When Adam and Eve rejected God to follow their own desires to be god-like, all mankind was cursed. Our sinful hearts are now exposed. Until we are “reborn” by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, and receive His Spirit, all our deeds are “self-righteous” and are hostile to God. As children of God, we receive the righteousness of Christ. It is through this lens that God now sees us. It is through this lens, crafted through their faith, that God saw the Old Testament heroes, and considered them blameless and righteous.

**“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

Matthew 6:33



## Do Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 Offer Two Different Creation Accounts?

A friend asked me to comment on the apparent conflict in the creation accounts depicted in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. When you first read the two chapters, they seem to conflict on the sequence of events. Chapter 1 clearly states that plants were created on the third day and mankind on day six. Chapter 2 makes it look like mankind was created before the plants of the earth. This is often cited by Bible critics as one of many contradictions in the Word of God. Is there a conflict?

Some scholars use this as evidence that the book of Genesis was written by more than one person. Genesis chapter 1 does stand out in its highly structured and sequential manner. It is almost clinical in its approach to facts, where chapter 2 uses no time references at all and is very involved with relationships. I have not studied the authorship question, but the answer to this problem can be found without knowing that answer.

Read chapter 1. It is very factual and precise. It is focused on God and His work of creation. As He approaches the end of day six, we see that God has made the earth and covered it with nature. It has plants and trees of differing kinds, birds of the air, fish in the sea, animals and creatures to roam the land. But it is all wild. In completing His work, God creates Man and commissions them to “subdue” the earth and rule over all living things (Genesis 1:26, 28). You’ll notice that there is no mention of the Garden of Eden or any specifics about Adam and Eve. It is very general in that regard.

Now read chapter 2. It is only concerned with the day that God made mankind. It zooms in on that day and gives us much more detail about the creation of Adam and Eve. It places them in the Garden of Eden and recounts the interaction between God and His people. It tells of Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace.

The whole controversy stems from the translation, phrasing, and punctuation of the text of Genesis 2:4-7. Ancient Hebrew did not use punctuation nor did it have upper and lower case letters, like we do today. Even the book titles, chapters and verses were added by translators much later. So, the first question one may ask, when addressing a difficult passage, is “Could this be caused by the grammatical difficulties of translation?”

Here’s how the translators of the NIV attempted Genesis 2:4-7:

“4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens —

5 and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground,

6 but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground —

7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

The Message translation presents it like this:

“4 This is the story of how it all started, of Heaven and Earth when they were created.

5 At the time GOD made Earth and Heaven, before any grasses or shrubs had sprouted from the ground—GOD hadn’t yet sent rain on Earth, nor was there anyone around to work the ground



6 (the whole Earth was watered by underground springs)—

7 GOD formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive — a living soul!”

You can see the efforts by the translators to structure the text in a way they think the original author might have said it, were he alive today. One final version before I get to my theory.

The RSV says it this way:

“4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground;

6 but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—

7 then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Not only do translators struggle with grammatical issues, but they struggle with word definitions as well. Notice the phrase in verse 5 – “of the field.” This comes from a single Hebrew word *sadeh*. It refers to unenclosed cultivated land – a farm field. This makes sense with the second half of verse 5: “...God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground.” You can see the focus on crops. “...no plant of the field [crop] was **yet in the earth** [had not been planted], and no herb of the field [crop] had **yet sprung up**...[because] there was no man to **till the ground**...” The theme continues in verses 8 and 15:

“8 And the LORD God **planted a garden** in Eden

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden **to till it and keep it.**”

Even after Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden, Adam’s punishment was concerned with his labor in the field:

“...cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground”

Now we can see that Moses was not claiming that God made Adam and Eve before any plants existed. There were plants all over, but they were wild. The theme of chapter 2 is cultivated crops. There were none. God started them with the Garden of Eden, and commissioned Adam to take up the practice. This provided food for the growing family of mankind, and fulfilled God’s direction to subdue the wild earth, bringing order throughout the land.

God’s creation displays His orderly nature. The sin of Adam, though, affected that order, both for Man as well as for Nature. It is clear why God wants Man to live according to His ordered way. I don’t understand, nor have I studied, God’s reason for wanting us to bring order to Nature. Yet, we know He commanded it. Usually,

when God tells us how to live, we can see that, if followed, our lives emulate His character. Perhaps, as we bring order to the earth, we are growing in conformity to Him. God wants all aspects of our lives to be surrendered to Him. That would certainly include how we treat His creation. But, I can see I'm rapidly beginning to chase a rabbit and get away from the intent of this essay.

Like God's nature, God's Word is orderly. He had reasons for picking the people He picked to document His message to us. In every controversial issue, it is important to remember that the original authors had no problem with what they wrote. If we are having a problem, today, the source of the difficulty lies with us. Like Adam's sweaty toil, maybe we are expected to work hard, sometimes, to work a fruitful crop from the soil of God's Word. If you will take the time to dig into God's Word, I guarantee you will receive an abundant crop.

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Isaiah 55:10-11



## Post-Resurrection Discrepancies in the Gospels

When I read all four accounts of Jesus' resurrection and meetings with his followers in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I found that the four gospels seem to disagree on several issues like the sequence of events, the number of angels at the tomb, whether Mary touched Jesus or not, whether the disciples were in Galilee or Jerusalem when Jesus met them, and the actual things Jesus said to them.

Over the years, I've done a good deal of research into the truth of the Bible, and am quite convinced of its reliability to convey God's message to us. There are several things that cause problematic issues, like culture differences, translation difficulties, writing styles and the like. But when one takes the time to track these down, there are almost always good answers to our questions.

Years ago, during my quest for truth, I read a good discussion in Lee Strobel's book, *A Case for Christ*. Part of his investigation dealt with the eye-witness testimony of the gospel writers. As legal editor for the Chicago Tribune, Lee was well aware of the dynamics of eye-witness testimony. He described a hypothetical court scene where four witnesses to a crime appeared in court and recounted the crime as it unfolded. In one scenario, the witnesses told the story in a lock-step, identical way – no variations, no missing facts. In another scenario, the witnesses' versions varied, people did and said slightly different things, colors or clothes were different – but the core facts, the ones that mattered, were all there. As a legal expert (Lee held degrees in law and journalism), Lee said the witnesses in the first scenario likely collaborated and practiced their testimony to get the story to be identical. This would actually make their testimony suspect. They could all be lying, or it could be that only one of them saw anything and told the rest what to say. At best, you don't know who, if any, saw the actual crime. On the other hand, the witnesses of the second scenario were much more credible. Eye-witnesses often vary in the retelling of a crime because they saw it from different angles, focused on different aspects of the action, and frankly, have differing abilities to recall precisely. But, as long as the key elements of the crime are present, their testimony is far more believable and can be combined to get a more complete picture of what happened.

I believe, and this is just my take on the question, that this is the reason the four gospels vary on certain aspects of the resurrection story. Of the four authors, only two – Matthew and John – were actually there. Luke compiled his account from other eye-witnesses and from written documents. Mark was a disciple of Peter and Paul and likely wrote his account based upon conversations with Peter. So, right away, we can be prepared for a number of variations on the precise details of the events. Are the key points present? Yes, they are. So, our confidence in the honesty of these witnesses is assured.

Now, how did the actual events play out? I think we can get a better idea as we combine the four stories. If we only read Matthew, Mark, and Luke's renditions, we would get the impression that Jesus was only around for one day after His resurrection. Reading John, though, we can see that He was with them for at least a couple of days. It is in Luke's intro to Acts that we learn Jesus had been with them 40 days (Acts 1:3). So, already we learn that the accounts of the first three gospels are very brief synopses of forty days of events. Certainly Luke was aware of the brevity of his first letter to Theophilus (book of Luke), yet saw no conflict when he wrote that Jesus visited many people over a forty day period (book of Acts).

Without changing any of the text, I've combined some of the gospels' facts below. I think it will demonstrate my point:

Luke 23:

“55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it.

56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.”

Matthew 28:

“2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.”

Luke 24:

“1 ¶ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?

6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”

8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”

[It is possible the two disciples leave for Emmaus at this point. I say this because Luke’s telling of their trip is fairly detailed, and they don’t mention that Mary had yet seen Jesus. It is also possible that Thomas left at this point, however, he may not have been present from the beginning. It is possible that the references to “the Eleven” are a general term referring to any gathering of the Apostles. We do this today. For example, if I say that I appeared before Congress to testify about gun control issues, I do not mean that every member of Congress was present at

my meeting. Matthew and Luke may have used the term in such a general sense. Thomas could have fled after Jesus' arrest, and not reappeared until after Jesus' first resurrection meeting with the other disciples.]

#### JOHN 20

“3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,

7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

10 Then the disciples went back to their homes,

11 ¶ but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' [remember, she still doesn't understand the resurrection]

14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 'Woman,' he said, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)."

[Here, you will see a shift from focusing on Mary, to referring to all the women. This does not mean that the rest of the women weren't present before. John was just focused on Mary's reactions.]

#### Matthew 28:9

"9 Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him."

#### John 20:

"17 Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

#### Matthew 28:

"10 Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'"

John 20:

“18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.

19 ¶ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’

22 And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.

23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’

24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

25 So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.’

26 ¶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’

27 Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’

28 Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’

29 Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

This is probably a fuller depiction of the resurrection day events. Let’s re-cap the issues raised by the various gospel accounts.

#### Luke 24:33 vs John 20:24 – Was Thomas present as part of the Eleven?

Thomas was not present. The reference in Luke to “the Eleven” was probably a general term applicable to the Apostles. There were 70 or more “disciples” and some of them were present that day. So, the use of “the Eleven” was likely intended to specify that Apostles were in the group of disciples.

#### John 20:1-2 vs Matthew 28:2-5 vs Mark 16:4-5 vs Luke 24:2-4 – How many angels at the tomb?

Matthew and John were there that day and their accounts do not conflict. Matthew mentions the angel sitting on the stone outside the tomb. John’s does not, but you can see that his intro to the event is cursory and abbreviated. He gets into much more detail later. Matthews ends after the women leave to tell the disciples.

John's fills in the rest of the story from that point. Mark and Luke got their details second hand. Here's how the angelic appearances probably flowed: The angel that rolled away the stone was sitting on it when the women appeared. When they looked in, there were two angels (could be two separate angels or could be the one from the stone and another one). Mark mentions one speaking. That doesn't discount that there were two present. Like John's account, Luke doesn't mention the angel on the stone, but confirms that there were two inside with the women went in.

#### Matthew 28:9 vs John 20:17 – Did Mary touch Jesus or not?

In John's gospel we see that Jesus told Mary or the women not to hold onto Him. John didn't point out that Jesus said this because they had fallen and grabbed His feet, but Matthew explains this. These two scriptures are not in conflict. Together, they paint a more complete picture.

#### Matthew 28:7-10 and Mark 16:7 vs Luke 24:33 – Jesus said to meet him in Galilee, but Luke shows the disciples were in Jerusalem when they met.

This is a sweet story of Jesus' patience and willingness to meet us where we're at, even if it's not where we're supposed to be. Before His crucifixion, Jesus told Peter that He would meet him in Galilee after His resurrection (Mark 14:28). Referring to His promise, both an angel and Jesus instruct the women at the tomb to tell His "brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me" (Matthew 28:5-10 & Mark 16:7). Fearing for their lives, though, the disciples were locked in a home in Jerusalem, going nowhere. It is only after Jesus appeared to them twice, (John 20:19-30 and 21:14) that they trusted Him enough to venture out of their Jerusalem house to go back to Galilee. Jesus did meet them there, as He promised, while they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14).

#### All four gospels seem to differ on the actual sequence of events and the things that were said by all parties involved during the resurrection day.

I covered most of this issue at the beginning concerning eye-witness accounts and how we can combine all the accounts to get a more complete picture of what happened that day. I think it is likely that more things were said and done than we have recorded in all four gospels. That the four authors reported different snippets of the days' events does not surprise me at all. Slight variations in verb-ology only add credulity to the honesty of the witnesses.





## Of Cud Chewing Rabbits and Four Legged Insects

### Error Number One:

*Leviticus 11:20-23 states that there are winged insects that go around on all fours. This is completely false. All insects [have six legs](#).*

### Error Number Two:

*Leviticus 11:6 states incorrectly that rabbits chew their cud. They do not-- this is wrong. Why didn't God know this? And why would the All Powerful Creator of the Universe really care whether or not people ate rabbits anyway? "*

As with most Bible skeptics, this person spent a lot of time compiling complaints against Biblical accuracy and obviously spent little or no time investigating the issue to see if there are answers. If you are reading this page, I compliment you for looking for the truth! It is always there for those who seek it.

The skeptic of the site I visited is even a bit sloppy in his detective work. If he had read the preceding verses, he would have noticed another "error."

Leviticus 11:13-19 includes the bat with a list of birds that are not to be eaten.

### The Nature of God

As we all know, the bat is a mammal, not a bird. "*Why didn't God know this?*" the skeptic complains. Many problems we come across, where someone is questioning God, if you look closely, you will usually uncover some false assumptions operating in the mind of the questioner. Like the question "How can a loving God allow bad things to happen to good people?" The question reveals an underlying assumption: people are good, people deserve to live long, prosperous lives. With thinking colored by this assumption, God's actions appear unjust. But even a cursory understanding of the truth revealed in God's Word uncovers the lie of the assumption: Man is sinful and deserves God's wrath. It is only because of His love for us that He gives us mercy in order that we may be saved from His justice. In a similar vein, this skeptic assumes God can be wrong, and in these cases, is wrong (actually, the skeptic assumes that God is not real in the first place! That is his first mistake).

I have done this enough to know that God is never wrong. Yet in these verses, Moses was quoting God: "*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Say to the Israelites: 'Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat:...' (Lev 11:1). I have my ideas about this, in general, but let's look at some specifics on the way.*

### Insects

Here is the actual verse. In fact, here it is in several translations. Note the key words in bold:

Lev.11:20-23 (95NAS)

"20 All the winged insects that **walk on all fours** are detestable to you. 21 Yet these you may eat among all the winged insects which **walk on all fours**: those which have **above their feet jointed legs with which to jump on the earth**. 22 These of them you may eat: the locust in its kinds, and the devastating locust in its kinds, and the cricket in its kinds, and the grasshopper in its kinds. 23 But all other winged insects which are **four-footed** are detestable to you."

Lev.11:20-23 (KJV)

“20\* All fowls that creep, **going upon all four**, shall be an abomination unto you. 21\* Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that **goeth upon all four**, which have **legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth**; 22\* Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind. 23 But all other flying creeping things, which **have four feet**, shall be an abomination unto you. “

Lev.11:20-23 (NIV)

“20 All flying insects that **walk on all fours** are to be detestable to you. 21 There are, however, some winged creatures that **walk on all fours** that you may eat: those that have **jointed legs for hopping** on the ground. 22 Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. 23 But all other winged creatures that have **four legs** you are to detest.”

Lev.11:20-23 (ASV)

“20 All winged creeping things that **go upon all fours** are an abomination unto you. 21 Yet these may ye eat of all winged creeping things that go upon all fours, which have **legs above their feet**, wherewith to leap upon the earth. 22 Even these of them ye may eat: the locust after its kind, and the bald locust after its kind, and the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind. 23 But all winged creeping things, which **have four feet**, are an abomination unto you.”

Lev.11:20-23 (YLT) “20 Every teeming creature which is flying, which is **going on four**--an abomination it is to you. 21 Only--this ye do eat of any teeming thing which is flying, which is **going on four**, which hath **legs above its feet**, to move with them on the earth; 22 these of them ye do eat: the locust after its kind, and the bald locust after its kind, and the beetle after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind; 23 and every teeming thing which is flying, which **hath four feet**--an abomination it is to you.”

Lev.11:20-23 (Net Bible) “Every winged swarming thing that walks **on all fours** is detestable to you. 21 However, this you may eat from all the winged swarming things **that walk on all fours**, that **have jointed legs** to hop with on the land. 22 These you may eat from them: the locust of any kind, the bald locust of any kind, the cricket of any kind, the grasshopper of any kind. 23 But any other winged swarming thing that has **four legs** is detestable to you.”

\* The Net Bible translators’ notes concerning the original Hebrew of the “jointed legs” says: “which to it are **lower legs** from above to its **feet**...”

Only two of the six translations use the word “legs” in verse 23. The other four use “feet.” One thing we are seeing here is translational difficulty compounded by cultural differences. I have not consulted Jewish historians. Much of what I learned on this subject can be found at Tektonics.org, but I believe Jim Holding is onto something. The Hebrews of Moses’ time apparently distinguished between legs for “creeping” and legs for “leaping.” Holding believes that the ancient Hebrews considered the front four legs “feet.” I pondered this and got to wondering how it is that we call arms “arms,” and legs “legs.” We can certainly “go upon all fours” can’t we? Holding points out that most distinctions are made according to their use or purpose. Appendages for transportation are generally called “legs.” Special appendages, like those for manipulation, or hopping, or flying, get special names and are set apart from “legs.” Today, we don’t give the insects’ hopping legs, or the killing/grasping legs of a praying mantis, special names. This doesn’t preclude the ancients from doing it, though. In fact, the first insect I thought of when confronted with this dilemma was the mantis. Look at this picture:



It is easy to see why another culture might classify the transportation appendages differently from the clutching appendages. It is a choice of our culture that we use the word “legs” here. Does a monkey have four legs? They “go on all fours.” Do they groom each other with their “front feet?” According to our custom of classification, they must have hands on the end of their front legs. Or do we say that they have arms? A bear has four legs. Yet, a bear manipulates its environment with its front “legs.” Shouldn’t we call them “arms?” We have reasons we use the terms we do, today. I’m sure the Hebrews had reasons as well. That they are different, doesn’t make them wrong.

## Rabbits

I can’t say this any better than Jim Holding at Tektonics.org, so please read the following excerpts from his page:

*Lev. 11:6 “And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.” (See also Deut. 14:7)*

Rabbits are not ruminants; they practice refection. Refection is a process in which rabbits eat their own dung mixed with undigested material.

Two issues are at hand: the definition of “cud” and that of “chewing.” Let’s take a close look at the Hebrew version of both. Here is the word for “cud” according to Strong’s:

*gerah, the cud (as scraping the throat):--cud.*

There are a few factors we need to keep in mind here. First, this word is used nowhere in the Old Testament besides these verses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. We have only this context to help us decide what it means in terms of the Mosaic law.

Second, refection is a process whereby rabbits pass pellets of partially digested food, which they chew on (along with the waste material) in order to give their stomachs another go at getting the nutrients out. (My vet says it is a B vitamin they are after) It is not just "dung" that the rabbits are eating, which is probably why the Hebrew word for "dung" was not used here.

Contrast this with what cows and some other animals do, rumination, which is what we moderns call "chewing the cud." They regurgitate partially digested food in little clumps called cuds, and chew it a little more after while mixing it with saliva.

So then: partially digested food is a common element here. We therefore suggest that the Hebrew word simply refers to any *partially digested food* -- the process is not the issue, just the object.

Our other key word here is *'alah*, and it is found in some grammatical form on literally every page of the OT. This is because it is a word that encompasses many concepts other than "bring up." It also can mean ascend up, carry up, cast up, fetch up, get up, recover, restore, take up, and much more. It is a catch-all verb form describing the moving of something to another place. (The literal rendering here is, "maketh the *gerah* to *'alah*.")

Now in the verses in question, *'alah* is used as a participle. Let's look at the other verses where it is used this way (NIV only implies some of these phrases; where in parentheses, the phrase is in the original, sometimes in the KJV):

*Josh. 24:17 "It was the Lord our God himself who **brought** us and our fathers **up** out of Egypt..."*

*2 Chron. 24:14 "When they had finished, they **brought** the rest of the money..."*

*Ps. 135:7 "He makes clouds **rise (up)** from the ends of the earth..."*

So: the Hebrew word in question is NOT specific to the process of regurgitation; it is a phrase of general movement. And related to the specific issue at hand, the rabbit is an animal that does "maketh" the previously digested material to "come" out of the body (though in a different way than a ruminant does) and does thereafter does chew "predigested material"! The mistake is in our applying of the scientific terms of rumination to something that does not require it.

Here we see another example of the difficulties of translating an ancient dialect of Hebrew into modern English. Doing so properly can require more disciplines than just linguistics. It may require zoology, sociology and more. I heard a lecture on the Jewish law from a medical doctor's perspective once. He believed that many of the things in the law that we now think of as odd, were actually designed by God to protect the Jews from illness. They didn't have the sanitation capabilities we do today. When you look at some of the forbidden foods, many of them were carrion eaters. In this case, the rabbits were poop eaters! It seems that God didn't want them eating creatures that ate dead, rotting flesh or dung. I doubt that dogs were considered a food source for the Jews. If they had been, I bet God would have put them on the forbidden list! I've had a couple of poop-eating dogs myself! On this line of thought, let's look at:

## **Birds**

As we saw above, Leviticus 11:19 includes the bat with a list of birds that were not to be eaten. This is the exact same problem and solution we had with the legs, though, this one is even more clear. I don't know if the ancient Hebrews knew that the bat was what we call a "mammal" or not. But, it's really irrelevant. The Hebrew word used, meant "owner of a wing." It would be like saying "flying creatures" in today's vernacular. It included anything that flew. It is probably a poor choice that our Bible translators say "bird" in this passage.

## **Closing Thoughts**

As with most of the classic and oft cited “errors” of the Bible, a brief search for answers always clears things up. Most of our problems, today, come from trying to translate an ancient foreign language into modern English. I pondered the skeptic’s question “Why didn’t God know this?”, though. God spoke to the Jews in their language, using their customs and thought patterns to depict His relationship to mankind. Sometimes that makes a Bible passage seem strange to us today. Sometimes that makes the passage appear to be wrong in one way or another. I’ve been blessed by gifted pastors, Christian radio broadcasters and web ministries that have taken the time to delve deep enough into ancient Israeli and Middle Eastern culture to shed some light on some of these mysterious passages. Every time you dig, you will find an answer. Every time you find an answer, the Bible will become even more rock solid than it already is (or should I say Rock solid!). I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my research into these Bible “errors.” It has affirmed, many times over, what my heart already knew – God is real and His word to us is valid.

## **References**

My thanks to the following:

\* Jim Holding, [Tektonics.org](http://Tektonics.org)

\* Mike Scott, [What Do The Scriptures Say.org](http://What Do The Scriptures Say.org)

\* [birdwatchersdigest.com](http://birdwatchersdigest.com)



## Who's right about King Baasha -- I Kings or II Chronicles?

### PROBLEM

I Kings 16:8 – “In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah son of Baasha became king of Israel , and he reigned in Tirzah two years.”

### VS

II Chronicles 16:1 – “In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah.

We read in I Kings that Baasha died and his son, Elah, became king over Israel in the 26th year of Asa’s reign over Judah. Yet, II Chronicles says that Baasha was alive and active during the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Asa’s reign. What does this mean? Do we have Scripture that is inerrant or not? Did God let one slip by as He guided His Scripture writers? Is the Bible full of errors and discrepancies that prove it to be an unreliable document? Right up front, I will tell you that I have spent the last several years searching for the answers to these questions. The deeper I dig, the harder I look, the more the Bible has become real to me. It has “checked out” in every angle I have investigated it. After studying the process through which the Bible came to be written, copied, and translated throughout the ages, I am convinced it is a miracle from God that there are so few “errors” in our current copies of our Bible.

I am fairly new at this, but as of yet, I find no claim that our “Bible” is without error. Is it likely that the texts written by the original authors were flawless? I would bet that they were. Is it possible that scribes along the way changed a word here, a phrase there, as they copied certain texts? We know that they did. My NIV study Bible has footnotes documenting such differences (called *variants* by Biblical scholars). Some of these changes might have been intentional, some were accidental. We must begin any investigation, such as this, with the knowledge that our “Bibles” are not the original Scriptures. I highly recommend reading one of the web sites detailing the history of Bible translation. You will find a detailed one at -- [http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page\\_id=1791](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1791). None of our Bible translations come to us error free. Not only do scholars struggle with accurately conveying the meaning of the original text as they translate it into our language, but publishers of any document rarely are able to send something to print without “typo’s.” There is a famous Bible that was printed with one of the 10 Commandments reading “Thou shalt commit adultery.”! Our current Bibles are extremely close to the intent of the original Scriptures and are getting closer all the time. Lee Strobel, in “A Case for Christ,” discusses the New Testament’s textual accuracy and holds it to 99.5%. I have not read a similar discussion of the Old Testament, but I would be surprised if it were any different. Are any of the doctrines of the gospel of Christ threatened by these variants? Not one.

On the issue at hand, most Bible commentaries I have read agree that the choices come down to these two:

-- The original verse in II Chronicles probably said “16,” but a copy error occurred at some point in time. Ancient Hebrew used letters for numbers and the letters for the “1” and “3” were similar enough that just a tear or smudge in the right place on the original document could have made it easy for the copier to pick the wrong number.

Or



-- It is an interesting fact that the division of the nation Israel into two nations – Israel and Judah – happened 36 years prior to Baasha’s fortification of Ramah. The Hebrew word for “kingdom” and “reign” is the same. The proposal is that the author of Chronicles was saying Baasha’s move on Ramah took place in the 36<sup>th</sup> year of the Judaic kingdom. The main problem with this idea, though, is that one of the things translators look for in situations such as this, is “Is this grammatical practice used anywhere else?” And the answer is – no. In behalf of the idea, there is no Hebrew grammatical rule preventing its use in this manner.

An option I wondered about was this: Did the author simply write the wrong number? Knowing how I personally operate, this is clearly possible! Human beings have been known to do things like this! However, there are some reasons I don’t believe it is the answer to the problem. First, considering the thorough accuracy of the entire Bible on historical issues, it would be out of character for an error of this type to have made it into this document. I don’t know of a culture that has a higher reputation for oral history than the Jews. Secondly, it is believed that Ezra was the author, and Ezra was a highly respected teacher. It is unlikely that he would have made such an error. His writings came after the Book of Kings, and he would have known them thoroughly. Finally, if the “hand of God was on him,” such an error is unlikely as well.

I’ve rambled on for too long. The short answer is that no one knows precisely why these two verses conflict. But it is not hard to see that there is a logical answer. Does it mean the Bible is not the Word of God? Clearly not. But it does back up His claims that *we* are not perfect! He has continued to protect the truth of His Word through the ages, in spite of our missteps.

I’ll close with a comment in the preface to the original King James Bible:

“To those who point out defects in [the translators’ works], they answer that *perfection is never attainable by man*, but the word of God may be recognized in the very meanest translation of the Bible, just as the king’s speech addressed to Parliament remains the king’s speech when translated into other languages than that in which it was spoken, even if it be not translated word for word, and even if some of the renderings are capable of improvement. To those who complain that [the translators] have introduced so many changes in relation to the older English version, they answer by expressing surprise that revision and correction should be imputed as faults. The whole history of Bible translation in any language, they say, is a history of repeated revision and correction.”  
[Bruce Metzger, *History*, pg 101]

God bless you in your search for Truth! He is near, and easy to find.

## Did Abraham Have One Son or Two?

### PROBLEM:

Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac; yet, God called Isaac Abraham's "only son."

Genesis 22:2 "Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

### VS

Genesis 16:15-16 "So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael."

Genesis 17:19-20 "Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers."

### DISCUSSION:

In my years of learning to love God through the reading of His word, the Bible, I have come across many things that seem odd, at a minimum, to contradictory, at worst. As I dig into them, looking for an explanation, I have found several things that generate such controversy. One of the biggest sources of consternation is the fact that we, modern Americans, are reading conversations that took place hundreds, sometimes thousands of years ago between people of entirely different cultures. I'm sure you are aware of the drastic cultural differences that exist today between American life and that of other countries, like Iraq, where it is considered a huge insult just to prop one's feet up on a desk (because the showing of one's foot sole to someone means you consider them lower than dirt!).

So, here we are reading in what seems clear English, people saying and doing things that don't make any sense to us at all; but apparently was perfectly understood by the people involved. The disconnect is in our lack of understanding of their customs and thought processes, not in what they said to each other. You'll notice that Abraham didn't have any problem with what God said. And it's not that Abraham was too shy to speak up. Read the account of his effort to save Lot's family from the coming destruction of Sodom. Abraham did not hesitate to argue with God. So what did Abraham understand that we do not?

In Abraham's time, inheritance was a big deal. Birth order, namely the first born, was a big deal. Normally, the first born son inherited the entire estate of the father. In later times, it became customary to divide the estate among all sons, but even then, the first born received a double share. Now, having said that, it was still the right of the father to choose another son to become his heir. (This was done by trickery with Jacob and Esau; and was done intentionally with Joseph's boys Manasseh and Ephraim).

Additionally, the practice of "disowning" was serious business. Abraham's family was nomadic. When he gave Hagar and Ishmael the boot into the desert, he not only was saying "you are no longer my son," he was cutting them off from life sustaining supplies of their camp. It was only through divine intervention that they survived.

So by the time we get to the verses in chapter 22, Abraham had already disowned Ishmael. Isaac was now Abraham's heir and only son, according to the customs of their day. Did Abraham know he really had 2 biological sons? Of course. Did God? Certainly, he said he would make many nations from Ishmael. But in respect of Abraham's estate, there was now only one son, Isaac. This sounds like word play to us, today, but it was serious stuff to them.

There are other, deeper issues this whole "only son" thing involves, which I will name, but each could take lengthy pages to discuss. I have listed some web pages that go into detail on them, if you care to delve into them deeper:

- To God, Isaac was the only son of The Promise. The nation Israel was promised to come from Isaac. The messiah and savior was to redeem the world through him, not Ishmael. (see <http://www.raptureready.us/ishmael.htm>)
- Isaac was a "shadow of things to come" as he was the "beloved son" of Abraham, just as Jesus was the "one and only son" of God. (see <http://www.gracethrufaith.com/childrens-stories/abraham-and-isaac-the-gospel-in-genesis-part-1>)
- The two children represent the human race: Ishmael, the people who reject God, and Isaac, those who accept Him. Even though we are all "children" of Adam (who was called God's son), those who reject God are not called children of God. Those who accept Him are children of God and are heirs to the Kingdom.

Today, there are now many people who were born into families that used donor sperm to conceive. These children grew up knowing and loving their "father" and never knowing the man whose body they came from. Even for some who later learn of their "biological" parent, they still refer to their known father as "father." We've had to construct the term "biological parent" to handle the weirdness created by this problem. Can a person have 2 fathers? By the limitations of the word, no! But we know what they mean. Similarly, when the Bible refers to Abraham's "one and only son," we know what it means.

Confusion arises when we read a conversation that took place thousands of years ago. It is translated into modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century English, and we read with 21<sup>st</sup> century minds shaped by the customs of our day and nationality. When we come upon something like this that is confusing, we need to put ourselves into the shoes of the person involved. Abraham clearly had no problem with what was being said. Even Moses, who documented the conversation, understood the point. So, if we don't, there must be an explanation.

# When Was Jesus Crucified?

## PROBLEM

Mark 15:25 "It was the third hour when they crucified him."

VS

John 19:13, 14 "When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour."

## SOLUTION

When I first read this, I thought "Wow, this does seem significant! Mark has Jesus crucified 3 hours before Pilate even turns him over to be crucified in John's account." But, I've been doing this long enough to know that there must be an answer. I got the following info at <http://www.apologeticspress.org>, who referenced Geisler and Howe's book, *When Critics Ask*.

As you might imagine, 2,000 years ago, tracking time was not the exact science that it is today. In fact, different cultures even used different methods for referencing times of day. Middle Eastern cultures, in this case the Jews, divided the day into two 12 hour periods beginning at 6pm (hence the reason for Genesis account of creation stating "And there was evening, and there was morning --- the .....day"; Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31). Cultures outside this area were marking their days from midnight to noon, like we do today. The Romans were predominantly using this second method. So, for the Jew, the "third hour" meant the third hour after 6pm or 6 am, meaning 9 pm or 9 am. To the Roman, or Greek (which is the primary audience of John's writing), the third hour was 3 am or 3 pm. Everyone knew this back in the day of Mark and John, no explanation was necessary.

So, let us now review the chronology of the crucifixion with the times "translated" into our modern time terminology. The setting is the same in both accounts, it begins in the morning (Mark 15:1 & John 18:28). John said that Pilate sat down on the judges seat "about" **6 am** (Roman sixth hour = our sixth hour). Mark said that Jesus was crucified at **9 am** (Jewish third hour = 6 am + 3 hours). It is said that Jesus' crucifixion event took 6 hours. Mark does not specify exactly where in this process he was at 9 am, but it clearly falls well within the time involved. Problem resolved!

I really wish all Bibles came with introductions that informed the reader of a few of the cultural differences between our time and the time of the Bible writers. The intro could caution the reader that certain verses and issues will seem strange or problematic unless viewed through this context. It would certainly deflate many of the charlatans out there parading as experts in truth and logic, whose true purpose is to find reasons for rejecting God. Even without this type of info, though, the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ still rings loud and clear in every translation of the Bible. Not a single point of essential doctrine is threatened by any of these so-called contradictions.

I encourage all who want to know the truth to seek it. It is easy to find!



## ***Chapter 6: Reflections***

These last articles are a variety of things. Some are deep subjects expressed briefly, or obliquely, but could challenge you to dive deeply into them yourselves. That is my hope. Seek God and He will be found by you for “he is near to all of us.”



## Zipporah

Someone asked me a couple of questions about Zipporah, Moses' wife. It surprised me that the wife and family of one of the most influential people of the Old Testament – Moses – received so little mention in the Bible. But it was an interesting investigation into God's Word. I've documented all applicable Scripture, but most of what follows is my own reflection and speculation.

The first part of the question was "Did Zipporah leave Moses or did Moses make her leave?" The short answer is: No one knows! Here are a few things we do know.

"Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.' So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt." Exodus 4:19-20 NIV

\* This verse is useful in that it tells us that Zipporah did start the trip with Moses. It is interesting that it didn't say that they all *went* to Egypt. The implication is that she never made it to Egypt, but returned at some point.

\* The last we see of Zipporah, before Moses begins his battle of wills with Pharaoh, is at an en-route stop in Ex 4:24-26. Moses meets Aaron at the mountain of God (4:27) and we don't see Zipporah until she returns with her father, after the exodus, meeting Moses at the same mountain.

"Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons...Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God." Exodus 18:1-5 NIV

\* This came after Israel had escaped from Egypt, and had traveled a bit, receiving manna and quail for food and water from a rock to drink. They had also defeated the Amalekites in battle. A simple reading of this could indicate that Zipporah had been with Moses up to this point and upon her return to her father, filled him in on all the details of their journey. It appears, though, that as Moses was about to tell the story of Jethro coming to camp and bringing his family to him, he realized that he had never recorded the fact of their departure from him. So, to catch the reader up, he added the comment here, about his sending his family to Jethro. It does not say how long they had been with Jethro.

\* Again, a simple reading of this text would indicate that it was Moses who sent Zipporah back to her father, in answer to the question. This could certainly be true, but it may not be the whole answer. Let me say that I am not an expert on ancient Hebrew culture! But as you read through the Old Testament, you will notice that the father of a family was like the king of a small city. People were invited to stay by, and were excused to leave by, the leader of the clan (see the story of Jacob and Laban, Genesis 29-31; especially Gen 29:13-15 & Gen 31:20). Even if it was Zipporah's idea to leave, it required Moses' blessing to make it happen. It would have been perfectly accurate to say that Moses *sent* Zipporah, just as King Artaxerxes *sent* Nehemiah to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:5). It was Nehemiah's idea and desire, but it required marching orders, so to speak, from the king.

Discussion time! I'm afraid I don't have an answer for this part of the question. But, I would like to propose two options, and maybe one will ring true for you. The Bible commentaries I reviewed on this suggested that Moses was concerned about Pharaoh's reaction to God's demands to let His people go. In Exodus 4:23, God warns Moses, before they leave for Egypt, that He will kill the firstborn of Pharaoh because of Pharaoh's stubbornness. Moses may have sent his family back to Jethro to protect them from retaliation. That is the scholarly model. Here's another "what if." Maybe Zipporah asked to go back to her father. We are told that Jethro gave her to Moses as a bride, but unlike other cases (Isaac & Rebekah, Gen 24:67; and Jacob & Rachel, Gen 28:18) where it clearly states that the husband loved the wife, the story of Moses and Zipporah never mentions love. Moses appeared to be a work-a-holic, and there may have been marital strife. The evidence for this is veeery thin; but, we see a hint of work-a-holicism in Moses in Exodus 18:13-27. Moses had been acting as the sole judge over the affairs of 2 million people. Jethro had to tell him to appoint other men to act as local and



regional judges to help him carry the load. From a commentary by a Jewish rabbi, it is taught that Miriam once commented to Zipporah that it must be nice married to such a powerful man. Zipporah's reply was that her husband's status had taken him away from her. Now, was Moses just a simple man, meaning to do a good job, but neglecting his wife? I know people like that. Or, was he intentionally avoiding going home to avoid a "contentious wife?" I know people like that, too. I realize Zipporah was not with Moses during his early years as judge. I just use it as an example of how he might have been operating while he was living with her back home. Was there strife? I think it is possible that Zipporah had refused to circumcise one or both of her sons. It would not have been part of her culture. She probably only gave into doing it to save Moses' life on the road to Egypt. Add it all up – no love, neglected relationship, hot-button issues – she may have just wanted to go back home. But, please remember, this is only speculation.

This leads right into the second question: "What exactly did she mean when she said that you are the Bridegroom of Blood?" There is a real mixture of thought by Bible translators and commentators on this one. Some say that Zipporah threw the foreskin at Moses' feet (which would imply anger/resentment). Some say that she touched Moses' feet with it (implying tenderness/respect). Some believe that it was the son that God came to kill, while others say it was Moses (the Hebrew uses pronouns – he – rather than proper names in Exodus 4:24). In any case, she is simply referring to the circumcision, and the shedding of her son's blood. I believe that Zipporah was saying something like: "See, my son's blood! Are you happy now?!" Like our discussion above, it is possible that Zipporah had refused to circumcise her son or sons, until now. If one had never heard of such a practice, it would seem pretty barbaric, wouldn't it? Could you imagine being a young bride and mother, and having your new husband request that you cut off certain body parts of your newborn child? "Come on honey, everybody does it where I grew up!" Seriously, though, Moses may have told her it was required by God; but we have no idea whether the god of Zipporah was the God of Israel. We know Jethro was a priest, but it is not stated what kind of priest.

Now, on the other hand, there are scholars who think that Moses himself was not circumcised and that Zipporah's circumcision of her son was a substitutionary act for Moses, hence the touching of Moses' feet with the foreskin. This is certainly possible. Moses was three months old when his mother put him in the basket to be found by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:2). There was an edict to kill all newborn Hebrew male children. Hebrew law required circumcision at day 8 after birth. Had Moses' mother intentionally skipped this in order to mask Moses' Hebrew identity? Israel had been in Egypt for 400 years. Had some or all of the Jews fallen out of the practice of circumcision? Either one is possible. Personally, I don't buy the idea for two reasons. When Pharaoh's daughter opened Moses' basket, she immediately knew he was Hebrew (Ex 2:6). I know that Egyptians and Hebrews had different skin color and facial features, but are we to think that there were no other foreign cultures living in Egypt? Could the baby not have been an Edomite, a Hittite, or a Canaanite? No, she knew right away he was Hebrew. What made Hebrews stand out from the rest – circumcision. Secondly, in Joshua, chapter 5, the men of Israel were having to be circumcised before they were allowed to enter the promised land. ["Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt – all the men of military age – died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt. All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not."](#) Joshua 5:4-5 This said "all" the men who left Egypt were circumcised. This would include Moses, if you ask me.

Of course, a third option is that Moses simply neglected to teach Zipporah about circumcision. During his deadly illness, God could have warned either Moses or Zipporah to circumcise the child or else. The result of this option, though, is the same. Zipporah was either angry or sorrowful. She was married to this man at her father's edict, and now, their marriage was sealed with the blood of her son. I don't think she was happy about it. The beauty of this, though, is like much of Life's suffering. God often uses our pain in His plans for the Kingdom. The whole episode of Moses bringing Israel out of Egypt is full of imagery of God's plan to save us all from our sins by the shedding of the blood of His one and only Son. The death of the first born of Egypt symbolized the death of the Firstborn of God, saving the people of Israel from slavery. Similarly, the shedding of Moses' son's blood saved Moses from death, as the shedding of the Son's blood saves all believers from eternal death. Moses became a "bridegroom of blood" to Zipporah just as Christ becomes our Bridegroom as we are washed in his cleansing blood.

It is beautiful imagery, and God knew all along how it would represent his plans for us as Moses recorded it in his writing.



## The Gang

*{The following is inspired by a true story. Very little is true, except the really important stuff. As you read it, imagine your own race, your own people. It's intentionally generic.}*

I've never been afraid of dying. I don't know if it's genetic, just part of my character; or if it's the result of my becoming a Christian at age 5, and always trusting God with my life. Either way, I can be a little careless.

I was jogging around the neighborhood of my lay-over hotel one evening. It was one of those forgotten sections of town, full of run down houses. Houses lived in by folks on welfare, or poor, working class people. Some houses were vacant and had been for quite some time; the kind used by crack dealers, after hours.

On past it, was in an industrial section – warehouses mostly – with half-fallen down chain link fences and waist-high weeds lining the sidewalk. I had just rounded a corner when I met up with the gang. There were four of them sitting on some empty 55 gallon drums. They acted like they were expecting me, though I'd never jogged through the area before.

I stopped immediately and they surrounded me. The short one pulled a switch-blade. The dark one held a pipe. The big one just stared at me like he hadn't felt anything for a long time. I turned to the one with the best clothes, the one that had that calm "I'm in charge" look.

"I'm not afraid of you." I said.

"Should you be?" said I'mInCharge.

"We all live with danger ever day, without fear." I replied. "Look at SwitchBlade over there. You guys live with him. He could cut your throat any second; but you're not afraid."

"Don't be stupid!" shouted SwithBlade. "These are my friends! I'd never hurt them!"

"I know, but you could." I told him. "The fact is, though, that they trust you. You are loyal to them, and hurting them would be dishonorable. BigGuy, here could break your neck anytime he wants. Pipe could rearrange your face in a heartbeat. The fact is, though, that he is so dedicated to you all that he would risk his life for you. You all would, wouldn't you?"

"What are you doing, smart guy?" Said TheBoss.

"Look here" I said. "I work for a guy that's looking for tough guys, just like you -- guys that aren't afraid of anything. But he wants loyalty and dedication. He's got plans for something really big, but he needs your trust, because the plans are secret. Only he knows everything that's going down."

"What's in it for us?" asked TheBoss.

"More than you can imagine" I said. "But you have to be willing to risk it all."

"We have nothing to lose" said Pipe. "Who is this guy?"

"His name is Jesus" I said. "And he's looking for guys just like you. If you're not afraid, he'll give you everything he has, for all eternity, and he owns everything. If you'll trust him, he'll send you on a mission that demands all you've got, and more. If you'll honor him as your Boss, he'll never let you down. If you'll dedicate your lives to

him, he'll welcome you into a Family that has connections all over the world, a Family that will honor you and welcome you where ever you go. But this offer is not for chickens, not for cowards. It takes guts."

"You can spend the rest of your days throwing your lives away, or you can join up with the real tough guys. I resisted for a long time, because I was afraid to trust him. Waiting was the stupidest thing I ever did. Once I let go, my life was changed. I'll never be the same. I have real peace now, even amid the hard times and scary challenges. But I know that where ever he sends me, it will be a grand adventure that has eternal consequences."

"So, tell me, who wants to join up?" I looked around the circle.

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{What happened next? Below are three choices of endings. You pick your own ending.

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- A) Pipe, BigGuy, and SwitchBlade jump on me, working me over while TheBoss looks on.
- B) BigGuy looks at TheBoss and says "I'm not afraid. It sounds better than this. Count me in." TheBoss walks away with a dismissive wave of his hand. SwitchBlade and Pipe follow, but they look like they want to stay.
- C) ?

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C) If you noticed, the instructions were "You pick *your* own ending." YOURS. What do you say? Have you ever made the decision to join up? Have you been resisting His call, because you were afraid of letting Him be in control? It is time to trust. He is the only one you really *can* trust. Once you do, you will never be sorry. You will never look back and wish you'd kept resisting His call. Freedom is yours for the taking. Right now. The words of the song say it all:

*"All to Jesus I surrender,*

*All to Him I freely give.*

*I will ever love and trust Him,*

*In His presence daily live.*

*I surrender all.*

*I surrender all.*

*All to You my blessed Savior,*

*I surrender all."*

If you've never done it, pray with me now: "Dear Jesus, I know that you love me and died for my sins. Forgive me. Take my life. Come into my heart and make me new. Wash my sins away and make my heart white

as snow. I accept your gift of salvation and join you in the Kingdom of God. Thank you dear Lord, my God and my Savior. My trust and my faith are in You alone.”

If you’ve just prayed with me – Welcome to the Family of God! But this is just the beginning! It is time to learn and grow. Start reading God’s word every day. The Holy Spirit will teach you and the Word will grow in you, guiding you as you become a new creation.

Find a group of fellow believers that you can grow with on a regular basis. I love the Calvary Chapels or the Bible Churches that teach through the bible, verse by verse; but there are many other fellowships you can join that honor God and His Word.

God has plans for you! Start right now. Tell your friends. Tell your family what you’ve just done! There’s exciting things ahead.



## **“Sleeping Beauty”**

[As told from an Evolutionary Sociobiologist's point of view]

Once upon a time, in a huge castle in a far away land, there lived a beautiful queen. Of course, by ‘beauty’ we mean that her physical features were such that the males in her area were attracted to her for mating purposes. Her high level of wealth added to her attractiveness since the likelihood of her progeny surviving to maturity is much greater than offspring sired by women in the poverty and pestilence ridden class in town.

Tragically, the king had died of a genetic mutation (later known as colon cancer) that hindered rather than helped his survival, before the queen could reproduce, thus fulfilling her genetic programming. Each day, before going out to look for a suitable mate, she would stand in front of her ‘talking mirror’ and seek reassurance that she was the most suitable female in the area for reproductive purposes. (Of course, we now know that there are no magic mirrors or spirits that could talk to her. It was actually one of the castle servants, using a secret passage in the wall, who stood behind the mirror and responded to her questions. His goal, of course, would be to butter her up with compliments in hopes of one day being able to fulfill his genetic programming, passing on his genetic material by mating with her.)

Well, up to now, every time the queen asked “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of us all?” the reply was always “Why you are, my lovely queen.” But, today was going to be different. Recently, the man behind the mirror had been rebuffed in his efforts to mate with a peasant girl named Snow White. She refused his advances insisting on the long term assurances of his support for their offspring with the social custom called ‘marriage.’ In order to protect his image and improve his chances of mating with another local female, he put out the word that Snow White was ‘history,’ that he had ‘connections’ and her days were numbered! So, this day, in response to the queen’s inquiry, the reply came “Sorry Queeny, looks like you’ve been replaced. Snow White is now the fairest of them all!”

Worried that a younger, more attractive female might steal away her most suitable reproductive opportunities, the queen ordered the castle butcher to find this Snow White and kill her. The butcher easily found Snow White, but immediately recognized the value of her finely tuned genetic material and hoping to endear himself to her, he warned her of the queen’s plot and told her of an abandoned cottage where she could hide.

Fearful of being killed by the queen before she could fulfill her genetic programming, Snow White followed the butcher’s instructions and found the cottage and settled in. Little did she know, but the cottage had been taken over earlier by a bunch of short people (born with a genetic mutation we now call dwarfism) who had fled the town because none of the local females considered their genetic material suitable for reproduction.

After negotiating with them, Snow White agreed to teach them some things that could enhance their attractiveness to females (like housekeeping, bathing, singing, etc) and they agreed to let her hide in their cottage from the queen. Secretly, of course, each of the seven short men hoped that their altruism would make them attractive enough to fulfill their genetic programming and pass on their genes with Snow White. Poor things, because Snow White got one look at their genetic propensity to shortness and immediately wrote them off as potential mates. But, still, they were all more likely to survive long enough to reproduce by cooperating with each other (we have recently proven this and named it ‘game theory’.)



While Snow White worked with the seven short men, the queen had been wooing a young prince from a neighboring kingdom. She tried all the tricks that had aided her ancestors in securing a mate like exposing as much of her chest skin that custom would allow. Her chemists had been working on some chemicals that smelled good and some others that hid flaws and splotches on her skin. It was suggested that these would enhance her attractiveness, so she tried them all.

It seemed to be going well, until, one day, after a long ride in the woods, the prince no longer seemed interested in her. Frustrated, she had spies follow him and discovered that he was spending time with none other than her arch enemy – Snow White! (Not knowing about the spies, locals later said the queen had a magic crow that discovered Snow White's hideaway.) Enraged, the queen said to herself, "If you want a job done well, you've got to do it yourself!" So, she mixed up some poison, coated some apples with it and headed into the woods disguised as an old woman.

Well it wasn't hard to get Snow White to eat one of the apples. Turns out a little rain shower on the way had diluted the poison and Snow White only got enough to put her in a light coma. The dwarves thought she was dead, though, and put her out in the garden until they could get around to burying her. The Prince, puzzled by Snow White's absence at their daily rendezvous, set out to find her. Arriving at the cottage, he got the story from the dwarves and knelt by Snow White to mourn the loss of his reproductive plans. Leaning over to give her a kiss good-bye, he fell and gave her a good thumping, instead! The jolt must have been enough to snap Snow White out of her coma.

Relieved, the Prince left her with the dwarves and chased down the old woman with the poisoned apples. In her fright, she wasn't looking and fell over a steep cliff to her death. The Prince returned for Snow White and brought her to his castle where they were married. They both were able to fulfill their genetic programming to reproduce and later developed strong emotional ties to each other which proved to enhance the survival of their offspring (we've since labeled this genetic development "love.")

### ***The End***

[Sociobiology is the study of genetic roots to human behavior. They believe that all things 'human' are derived from genetic mutations that enhanced our ancestor's ability to survive and reproduce. Thus, those traits were passed down to us. All talents, art, even love, are just genetic mutations that enhanced the original possessors' ability to attract a mate and reproduce. Some sociobiologists even believe that thinking, or self-awareness is genetically driven. In their view we are just bio-robots acting out our genetic programming. ]

## IN ERIC'S IMAGE, A Fable

Several years from now, there was a guy named Eric. He was a brilliant guy, a real entrepreneur. Always tinkering in his basement, Eric was lately experimenting with tiny little robots that could help him with his work. He had been making them smaller and smaller. You could see the progress he'd made with just a glance in the back of his backyard. It was littered with the rejects of years of experimentation. He made his own materials, too, mostly from silicon sifted from the sand in his yard. It was a time consuming process, though. That's actually what gave him the idea for the robots. If he could make robots to harvest the silicon, it would free him for his real work – refining an energy source for his computers that used radiated energy from his own heart.

The robots were easy. After several iterations, he had a model he liked. Using a digitized picture of himself, he crafted a couple of them. They were beautiful! Two inches high and programmed to self-replicate, their marching orders were to 1) Make more of themselves, and 2) Harvest silicon from the backyard for use in the lab. In no time, they were off and running. The only problem Eric noticed was that the energy receiver on their chests got in the way somewhat as they worked. He made a mental note to reduce its size later. You see, the LED's (Little Eric Devices) were powered by energy they received from a transmitter Eric hung around his neck. The device was tuned to the pulses of his heart, and converted each pulse to a wave picked up by the receivers on each LED. As long as Eric's heart beat, they had free energy.

Things were going fine, until one morning, Eric noticed that the silicon was running out. In fact, he could recall only seeing one LED all day, and he knew there were several hundred functioning by now. A look out back cleared it up for him. There were several hundred robots in the yard, and they were still harvesting silicon. But, instead of bringing it to him, they were keeping it for themselves! Quickly, Eric sat down at his computer and sent messages out to all the LED's, ordering them to comply with the Second Directive. No response. After a trip outside to grab one, Eric noticed that they had been pulling the energy receivers off their chests. The chips acted as comm units, too. So, now, he could understand their failure to respond. The bad news, though, was that without their receivers, they would soon run down, and die.

Frustrated, at his desk again, Eric realized he had missed a single reply from one LED! Quickly, he explained the problem to it and ordered it to pass the word around to the other LED's. It did, but the result was disappointing. The LED's had revolted. They said they were doing all the work, and they deserved to keep the silicon for themselves. Well, as you might imagine, that ticked Eric off considerably. He warned the sole obedient LED to climb to high ground, because he was about to get his water hose and wash the whole lot of them down the embankment into the junk pile at the low end of the yard. And that's exactly what he did.

Starting over with just one LED, Eric rebuilt his operation. Pretty soon, the yard was busy again. The silicon bin was full, and Eric was happily working on reducing the size of his energy apparatus. But, wouldn't you know it, pretty soon, the same thing happened! A few LED's had remained loyal to Eric, though, and gave him the following report:

*"Certain LED's decided that since they harvested their own resources and self-replicated, they didn't need this mythical Eric figure. Several of the loyal tried recounting our past, how Eric made us and gave us free will to serve him. We told them of the time when Eric nearly wiped us all out with the hose, but saved one to begin again. But, the rebellious said that they don't believe us. They said they found evidence that we had arisen from the sand, on our own. They showed us bits and pieces of progressively refined pre-robots. They said this was evidence that we weren't made by Eric at all. I guess with all the layers of non-silicate dirt we had been dumping in the junk pile, plus the stuff that got washed down there from the hose, they even claim that we had been developing for eons! I'm sorry, Eric, I don't think they're going to listen."*

What a dilemma! Eric's work in the lab was too close to completion to start all over again. To tell you the truth, he was a bit of a loner and had actually gotten quite fond of the little squirts. After all, they did look just like him. He enjoyed the regular reports from the loyal LED's. They came to him with all their problems, all their worries. Rats and birds were the worst. You know how rats like to chew on plastic. And bird poop can make a permanent stain. Every now and then, Eric would shoot a rat with his pellet gun, and some of the stains he cleaned before they really set in. The loyal ones would tell of Eric's aid, but the rebellious just scoffed and said they were imagining things. The loyal praised him anyway. Yeah, it sounds weird, but Eric actually loved them. He decided to make do. At the computer, he sent orders to the loyal to keep replicating and spreading this message:

*"FROM ERIC: 'LED's of the yard, take note. There is an Eric. He made us and loves us. He gave us his energy, but we disconnected ourselves and die because of it. Eric wants you to come back to him. All you have to do is pick your receivers off the coffee table and plug in again. Stop using your receivers as paper weights and use them for what they were designed for – receiving word from Eric, word that brings life. In fact, Eric has recently boosted the signal by connecting his sending unit with a fine needle that pierces his heart. He said it smarted quite a bit, but it was worth it, because we are his greatest work. We matter to him! Eric says that when his work is completed, and that may be soon, he will come out here and bring us inside to the lab. He will personally re-energize all, even those who have already died. He won't tolerate rebellion, though. Those who reject him and his directives will be melted down. Those who remain loyal or return to him will live and work with him in the lab the rest of his days. That is all'"*

Years went by. You wouldn't believe the wild, ridiculous things the rebellious robots got into. As Eric neared the end of his energy work, he sent a few more warnings. Some of the messengers were killed. Some were locked up. Most were just ignored. The day came, though, and Eric did just as he said.

This of course, took place a long time from now. No one really knows what's become of them all. It's rumored that Eric has started a new project, aided and supported by billions of his loving LED's. I wish him well.

The people and robots in this story are totally fictitious. Any resemblance to persons or machines living or dead is pure, unintended coincidence. Feel free to apply this fable to any aspect of life that it seems to fit, or don't. That's up to you.

# **FORGIVENESS**

Who needs forgiveness?

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Rom 3:23

God forgives

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins.” I John 1:9

Imitate God

“Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good.” III John 11

“Be imitators of God; therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us.”  
Eph 5:1

Forgive every time

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” Luke 17:3

And God will forgive us

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Matt 6:14

“In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Eph 4:26

# **FORGIVENESS**



## **SUFFERING**

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.”

Seen on an AF Academy T-shirt

“In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures on earth, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

Mother Theresa

“The cross of Christ ... is God’s only self-justification in such a world as ours. God entered our world of suffering, bore it all upon Himself; joined us in it, so that we could join Him in His world.”

Lee Strobel, *A Case for Christ*

## **SUFFERING**



## WISDOM

“I don’t think it really matters what we do in life. What matters is **why** we do it; what is going on in our hearts.”

Bob Trombadore [Airline pilot]

“My purpose is that...they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Col 2:2-3

“Wisdom consists in acting for a right end ... He is the wisest man that hath the noblest end and the fittest means, so God is infinitely wise; and He is the most excellent being, so He hath the most excellent end.”

Stephen Charnock [176<sup>th</sup> century, The Existence and Attributes of God]

“I saw that genuine wisdom consisted of the pursuit of God’s ultimate end, His Glory, with God’s means, a life of sacrificial service.”

William P. Farley [Discipleship Journal, Mar/Apr ‘03]

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

I Cor 10:31

## WISDOM