

# **For God's Sake!**

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Bible quotations are mostly from the New International Version (NIV). I find the writings of Ellen White show great insight and I have often quoted her. The abbreviations used are standard for her works:

BC - *Quotes in SDA Bible Commentary*

COL - *Christ's Object Lessons*

DA - *Desire of the Ages*

Ed - *Education*

MH - *Ministry of Healing*

PP - *Patriarchs and Prophets*

RH - *Review and Herald*

SC - *Steps to Christ*

ST - *Signs of the Times*

T - *Testimonies for the Church*

## Introduction

**A**s a child I vividly remember being told Jesus was crucified because He disappointed the expectations of the Jewish nation. They wanted a political-military leader who would give them back the prestige and power they had enjoyed during king Solomon's reign and Jesus did not fulfil these hopes and ambitions. Even in my early years I wondered if history would repeat itself? Could it be that when Jesus comes the Second Time He will again be rejected by many because their false expectations are not met?

In the following pages I attempt to be honest with what Jesus told us of God and my expectations of why Jesus comes back to earth. The change in my thinking has been painful, as all change is. However, in the end I believe this pain is worth the joy of knowing God as He really is.

One is in a bit of a "catch 22" situation since there is also pain in trying to admire or serve a God who is often portrayed as inconsistent, arbitrary and vindictive. I am distressed when I find God described as a harsh, power hungry demagogue, even though it is done in all sincerity. Perhaps you have experienced the same discomfort and will welcome some of these thoughts.

Because I know God is unselfish and cares deeply or loves us He must be very different to selfish sinners (Ps 50:21). Some of these differences are described in the following pages. What I think I have discovered has inspired my admiration and adoration of Him whom my heart has come to love. Even so, I recognize that my journey, as every man's journey, stops short of the truth of God. Our finiteness and fear discontinues the search, far too soon, our selfishness limits the search, and our practise weakens the search. I need you to help me press on with this journey, for God's glory and our corporate joy.

Jesus told a parable about the treasure hidden in a field. (**Matthew 13:44**) A farmer, hired land, found treasure and sold all he had to buy the field. The treasure was worth more than anything else in the world to him. Compelled by desire for the treasure, selling all was not a sacrifice but a joy. For the sheer joy of gaining the treasure he gladly swapped his comforts and securities in life.

What was Jesus teaching through this parable? The treasure is the gospel, the good news about God's kindness and grace. The field represents both the person of Jesus, who is the Word, and the Scriptures. How then is the gospel hidden in Jesus and the Bible? Who hid the gospel? If Jesus came to share the good news about the Father, and the Bible is a revelation of God's mind to us, how could the gospel be hidden?

The selfishness of the religious leaders of Jesus' day prevented many of them from admitting what they realized to be true: Jesus of Nazareth was of such purity and kindness that he had to be Messiah. Our selfishness today results in a similar blindness. Problems in business, church, marriage, and society are largely the result of this selfishness or unwillingness to forgive and accept, to focus on the

best and forget the rest. One of the worst consequences of our selfishness is that we blame our problems on someone else, the government, the computer, the police, or people of different colour or culture. The list goes on forever. Finally we end up blaming God.

So, in a way, this book is about taking responsibility for ourselves, more especially our relationship with God. It is the opposite to fatalism, determinism, or predestination, call it what we will. These essays are an attempt to take responsibility for what we have done to each other and to the planet. It is a plea for taking responsibility for our troubles, traumas and tragedies instead of blaming God and others for them. Yes, there is a supernatural devil who influences and afflicts us, there are evil thoughts and actions perpetrated by other people but it is our consenting to evil with which I am concerned.

One way of taking this responsibility is to recognize that we impose our ways, our views and our opinions on what is written in the Scriptures. Jesus, for instance, speaks of not taking revenge and encourages us to recognize the hatred in our hearts and the prejudice in our persons. Yet revenge, prejudice and hatred continue in many Christian communities. It is as if the Sermon on the Mountain was never spoken and never reported. Tragically, we pretend the teachings of Jesus mean something quite different. The commandment says "Thou shalt not kill." We have interpreted this to mean "Thou shalt not kill unless ordered to do so by government or society." We seem to have almost no qualms about abortion, war or capital punishment. The real God escapes us because of our traditional views, many or most of which are rooted in selfishness. But more about this later.

This book is a collection of mostly free standing essays. There is very little documentation and often some repetition. The titles are arranged alphabetically. I have written out of my deep concern for the misconceptions that surround God's character. What we think of God has the potential of profoundly changing our ways, thinking and living. We must then come to the best understanding we can of who God is and what His thoughts and attitudes are towards us because this knowledge will, in turn, influence the way we relate to God, others and ourselves.

If my picture of God turns out to be wrong, and we shall soon know, for the end of all things is upon us, it does not really matter since my reason for writing was because I had to speak well of God. One other thing I do know; I am a better man for having met the God of these essays. I can listen to you, because God has heard me. I can forgive you, because God has forgiven me. I can give you the freedom to be what you choose to be, without trying to force you by logic or ridicule to change, because of the freedom I have in God.

It is, after all, the truth about God that sets us free from cruelty, impatience, and all those horrible inheritances we have as sinners. Truth is not tested by what it does for others but what it does in our own lives. This is the the acid test. Do the ideas presented in these essays inspire you to be more patient,

more kind, and easier to live with? This is where the rubber meets the road. On that criteria I would like them judged. Not all the interesting passages in the Scriptures that portray God in the traditional way can be dealt with. The principles of God's character are dealt with in the hope that the reader will continue on the greatest journey that can ever be taken: To attempt to understand some of the depth of God's grace.

Thank you Irma, Lenore, Liz and Marilyn for the trouble you have gone to in editing this book. Thank you also Ginn, Hennie, Mark, Ron, Cobus, Joan and Mike for talking about many of the topics mentioned and reading drafts of these essays. Without your encouragement they might never have been.

I want you to know, and know it well, that I have written for God's sake. Although writing about God is arrogant and inadequate, I have tried to write in the best way I can. I want Him to be known for what He really is, as far as I can tell it. I believe that when the picture is painted, as it is, it is life changing for those who see it and want something more than what is "human!"

Don't believe anything about God that would make you think less of His for it could not be true. You cannot believe Him to be better than He really is." Hugh Williams



## The Apparently Angry, Arbitrary God

**G**od in the Old Testament often appears harsh, angry and arbitrary. Marcion, a second century Christian, felt that the Old Testament portrayed God as a bumbling, cruel, Creator God. One who was impossible to reconcile with the attractive Saviour God of the New Testament. He produced his own Bible by deleting the Old Testament and editing the New Testament of "Judaisms."

Before you write Marcion off, there are difficult questions that can still be asked in our day and age. Are you tempted, like Marcion, to do some editing when you read the following passages:

**Genesis 6:7** He said, "This race of men whom I have created, I will wipe them off the face of the earth—man and beast, reptiles and birds. I am sorry that I ever made them."

Is this statement in direct conflict with the **Genesis 1** which states that God was happy, no, very happy, with His creation? Is it true that God had to drown the opposition in Noah's flood when they threatened to take over the world? Was righteousness only preserved by God's wiping out the other side? Does this mean that truth and goodness can only be preserved by force and violence?

Is it true that when the Israelites grumbled once too often, God created desert adders to bring them to their senses?

**Numbers 21:6** Then the Lord sent fiery serpents (venomous snakes) among them . . . .

Does God still send snakes to discipline His people? If not, why did He need snakes then?

**Numbers 20:12** . . . Because you (Moses) did not trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them.

Can it be that a merciful, compassionate God would abort the purpose of Moses' life work for one rash act?

**1 Samuel 16:14** The spirit of the Lord had forsaken Saul, and at times an evil spirit from the Lord would seize him suddenly.

Does God have a working relationship with evil spirits? Do they also do His will? Does this mean that God wills evil at times?

**2 Samuel 12:11** This is what the Lord says: . . . Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.

What would we conclude about a church leader or church board suggesting this kind of experience for the wife of an immoral husband?

**Psalm 2:8-9** . . . rule them with a rod of iron, . . . dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Does God really believe in freedom? Is He God because He simply crushes the opposition?

**Psalm 2:12** Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way . . . for His wrath can flare up in a moment.

From this passage it would appear that God is petulant and petty and does not have much patience.

**Psalm 3:7** Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you have struck all my enemies on the jaw, You have broken the teeth of the wicked.

Is this not unadulterated, night club bouncer mentality?

**Psalm 58:10** The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.

What would one conclude about a modern person wanting to bathe their feet in the blood of their enemies?

**Exodus 4:11** (NIV) The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"

Does God really cause the afflictions on the earth? Sounds like it from this passage and the following passages.

**Deuteronomy 32:39** (NIV) See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.

**1Samuel 1:5,6** (NIV) But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he

loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.

**1Samuel 2:6** (NIV) The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

The next passages appear to suggest that God sends evil and evil spirits to hurt people.

**1Samuel 18:10** (NIV) The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand

**1Samuel 19:9** (NIV) But an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp

**1Kings 17:20** (NIV) Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"

**Job 9:22-24** (NIV) It is all the same; that is why I say, "He (God) destroys both the blameless and the wicked." When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent. When a land falls into the hands of the wicked, he blindfolds its judges. If it is not he, then who is it?

**Isaiah 45:7** I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster I the Lord do all these things.

**Lamentations 3:38** (NIV) Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?

**Amos 3:6** (NIV) When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

These passages, taken at face value, present God as harsh, arbitrary and severe, and tend to alienate those who feel strongly about justice and kindness. One writer describes the kind of reaction that can occur as follows.

The errors of popular theology have driven many a soul to scepticism who might have otherwise been a believer in the Scriptures. **It is impossible for him to accept doctrines which outrage his sense of justice, mercy**

**and benevolence**; and since these are represented as the teachings of the Bible, he refuses to receive it as the Word of God. (GC525)

The above quote is not an isolated one in this author's works. Here is another.

The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the pulpit have made thousands, yes millions of sceptics and infidels. The theory of eternal torment is one of the doctrines that constitutes the wine of the abomination of Babylon. (GC536)

There are also passages in the New Testament which give the same harsh, arbitrary picture of God. Here are some of them.

**Matthew 13:40-42** In this parable the weeds are burnt!

**Luke 14:26** If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, . . . , he cannot be a disciple of mine.

**Romans 9:10-13** . . . she was told, even before they were born, when they had as yet done nothing, good or ill, . . . “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated.”

**Romans 9:18-20** Thus He not only shows mercy as He chooses, but also makes men stubborn as He chooses. You will say, “Then why does God blame a man? For who can resist His will?” Who are you, sir, to answer God back? Can the pot speak to the potter and say, “Why did you make me like this?”?

**Revelation 14:9-11** Yet a third angel followed, crying out loud, “Who ever worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on his forehead or hand, he shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured undiluted into the cup of His vengeance. He shall be tormented in sulphurous flames before the holy angels and before the Lamb. The smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever, and there will be no respite day or night for those who worship the beast and its image or receive the mark of its name.”

What shall we say about these passages? Shall we ignore them? Shall we say that because God is God we must accept them at face value and be submissive as **Romans 9:18-20** suggests? Does it mean that when statements fly in the face of what we inherently know about justice that we should be content to let them stand? Are there solutions that make enough sense so as to attract the agnostic and the atheistic to their Maker and Redeemer? Here is a newspaper columnists view:

Bloodthirsty, authoritarian theology threatens Canada as much as tobacco, obesity and booze put together. It endangers our planet more than global warming, nuclear winter or rogue asteroids.

(Spider Robinson in the Globe and Mail, May 6, 2002)

These questions beg answers and where shall we find them? Journey with me in the search.



## The Blaming of God

The Hebrews have, from their inception as a nation, worshipped an all powerful, monotheistic God. In their zeal to defend the only true God against the polytheism of the surrounding pagan nations they would admit no other supernatural beings. Allowing any other supernatural being, good or bad, would fly in the face of

Our God is one God. (**Deuteronomy 6:4**)

and this was unthinkable. As a consequence, in their world view, evil could only occur if God sent it.

Most Jewish people at the present time do not believe in a supernatural devil. They attribute the belief in the devil to the Christian's need to blame someone else for their own wickedness. The Old Testament and many parts of the New Testament are written from the Hebrew world view. Every author, inspired or otherwise, describes events through their own world view. No Eskimo author could write about "the lamb of God," since there are no lambs in the white, world of the Arctic. Eskimo writers might use "the pup seal of God" or some other metaphor out of their world with which they are familiar.

The importance of the writer's world view is illustrated by an example William Barclay, a well known Bible student, gives of the different perceptions of the same event described in **2 Kings 19:35**

"And that night the angel of the Lord went forth, and slew 185 000 in the camp of the Assyrians . . ." Herodotus (a Greek historian) gives the Egyptian version: "One night a multitude of field mice swarmed over the Assyrians encampment and devoured their quivers, bowstrings and the handles of their spears. The enemy fled unarmed and many perished." Josephus (a Hebrew historian) gives a version attributed to Berosus, a Chaldean historian: "A pestilential distemper came upon the army of the Assyrian king, who in great dread at this terrible calamity fled back to his kingdom with the survivors." Which one is right? Maybe all three. The Bible writer attributes all to the honour of God. He is not concerned with the mechanics of the situation. His world view tells him, "God did it!" Rats are notorious carriers of bubonic plague. The rats over-ran the camp, ate the weapons and left the plague. Different writers see it in different ways.  
(**The Mind of Jesus**. SCM paperback p85)

In addition to the world view of the author, consider the further complication of language usage. We speak about "the kettle boiling" when we mean the water in the kettle is boiling. A mother loves her baby so much she can "eat it up." She is not

a cannibal. To be "so hungry I could eat a horse," has nothing to do with eating horsemeat. This is an accepted way of speaking, at least in English. This phrase would be very misleading to someone not familiar with English idiom. What about going to pick blackberries and finding they are green because they are red! We must attempt to understand both the world view and the language usage of the writer to do justice to the meaning of any passage. Consider this statement:

Go and serve your idols, everyone of you! (**Ezekiel 20:39**)

This statement means exactly the opposite of what it says. It is one of the best examples of full blown irony in the Scriptures.

As another example of the need to correctly understand language, consider the Old Testament story of **Job**. According to **1:16**

The fire of God fell from the sky.

We know from reading the rest of the story that this fire came from Satan himself. God allowed Satan access to Job and the author describes the lightning caused by the evil one as "the fire of God."

But then we still speak of "acts of God" in insurance documents, so this usage should not trouble us too much. We must not get caught up interpreting metaphors or word pictures literally when they are idiomatic in nature. Loving someone "to bits" does not mean the object of my love will end up in a thousand pieces. We must find the meaning the author intended in the first place. We do it with Chaucer and Shakespeare, why not with the Bible?

Take the larger context of **Isaiah 45:7**:

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and disaster. I the Lord do all these things.

Shall we conclude that God is the source of both good and evil from this one verse? Verse one of this chapter identifies the message as being addressed to Cyrus. Cyrus would have believed in the Yin Yang philosophy of Persia where light and darkness, good and evil are kept in balance by Ahura Mazda the supreme god. Thus Cyrus, reading verse seven would understand this message to be coming from the great God. Without understanding this context our picture of God could be seriously distorted by this one verse.

But we must come back to what this chapter is about, blaming God for what might not be His work or actions. According to **Numbers 21:6**,

Then the Lord sent fiery serpents (venomous snakes) among them . . .

A parallel passage which must have a bearing on deciding if God actually produced these adders to sober up his rebellious people is in **Deuteronomy 8:15**:

Who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water?  
(Compare also **Isaiah 30:6**)

According to this writer the snakes were there in the desert all the time. They did not have to be sent, rather they had to be protected from them and the scorpions and the thirst.

One Bible student comments as follows:

To punish them for their ingratitude and complaining against God, the Lord permitted fiery serpents to bite them. . . The Israelites, up to this time, had been preserved from these serpents in the wilderness, by a continual miracle; for the wilderness through which they travelled was infested with poisonous serpents. (1BC1116; PP429)

Knowing what we do about the devil, we could say that he waited until the Israelites forfeited the protection of God by choosing to actively join forces with him in direct rebellion against God. Why does changing sides forfeit God's protection? In a free universe there must be consequences for every choice we make. If God protects us from all consequence then the universe is no longer a predictable place. Choices become irrelevant, and we are puppets and nothing more. When we choose the other side God must allow the consequences of our choices. Once the Israelites chose his side Satan encouraged the snakes, already in the desert, to do their devilish work. To crown his deception he has the people believing that this is God's punishment. Pretty good deception don't you think?

After King David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah the Hittite, the prophet Nathan speaks as follows:

This is what the Lord says: . . . Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. (**2 Samuel 12:11**)

The language of this verse, at face value, implies that God is capable of thinking up this kind of action, and further more that the welfare of the women concerned is of not much consequence to God. These conclusions fly in the face of a holy, righteous God. The holiness of God means that He will respect and regard women with the same dignity He accords men. After all, He made women as much as He made men. It is appropriate to read the following at this point.

They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, **nor did it enter my mind.** (Jeremiah 19:5)

The New Testament writer, who came to know God best, having changed from “a son of thunder,” to “the beloved,” describes God as follows:

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5 NIV)

Darkness, in this context, refers to evil. Is it really possible that God would stoop to immoral acts to punish David? Hardly. Consider this explanation:

Not that God prompted these acts of wickedness, but because of David's sin He did not exercise His power to prevent them. (PP739)

**If we keep in mind that the Hebrew writers, because of their monotheistic world view, repeatedly attribute to God that which He does not prevent we will be saved from the traditional distorted picture of God.**

Some argue that since God had the power to prevent these evil consequences of David's sin and chose not to do so, He, God, is responsible for them. The point that is missed in this line of thought is that if God were to step in and prevent the consequences of our bad choices there would be no real freedom. In order to be free we must be able to experience the consequences of our choices. I will never know if I can fly an aircraft on my own until I fly solo. But when I fly solo, I must face the consequences of my flying skills or lack thereof.

Some further examples which apparently support the idea of God punishing evil are as follows:

And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:14)

This passage is very definite that God actively killed King Saul and yet in verse four of the same chapter the mechanics of Saul's death are described.

So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. (vs 4)

We would call this suicide. Did God cause Saul to commit suicide? It is possible but hardly plausible considering what we know about God.

Two parallel accounts of the same census in Israel are as follows:

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he

moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. (2 **Samuel 24:1**)

Compare this with

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. (1 **Chronicles 21:1**)

Do God and Satan work hand in hand to tempt God's children? The author of Samuel is clearly a hard line monotheist to the point where all influences, good or bad, come from God. The writer of Chronicles, one of the last books written in the Old Testament, seems to understand both the existence and the work of Satan.

And to the others He (God) said in mine hearing, "Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old [and] young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom [is] the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which [were] before the house." (Ezekiel 9:5,6)

Reading this passage might suggest that God was directly and actively responsible for the killing, but it was the wicked, cruel Babylonians who did the slaying. We must ask how was the way prepared for the Babylonians?

He said furthermore unto me, "Son of man, seest thou what they do? [even] the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, [and] thou shalt see greater abominations." (Ezekiel 8:6)

The New International Version (NIV) is even clearer:

And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing--the utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see things that are even more detestable."

What forced God out of His sanctuary so that both it and the city were destroyed? According to **Ezekiel 12:19** it is specifically because of the violence in the land.

Say to the people of the land: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says about those living in Jerusalem and in the land of Israel: They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair, for their land will be

stripped of everything in it because of the **violence** of all who live there.”

Today, considering our world view, we would describe what happened as follows: because of the violence in the land, God's protecting presence was forced away and as a consequence the Babylonians came and captured God's apostate people. But that is a very different perspective from the Hebrew writer's view of the matter.

In some instances God is directly blamed for instigating untruth and evil:

And the LORD said unto him, “Wherewith?” And he said, “I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” And he said, “Thou shalt persuade [him], and prevail also: go forth, and do so.” Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. (**1 Kings 22:22,23**)

The message is similar in **2 Chronicles 18:21**:

I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,” he said. “You will succeed in enticing him,” said the Lord. “Go and do it.”

Does God send “lying spirits” to do His work? How do we harmonise these accounts with

. . . in Him there is no darkness at all. (**1 John 1:5**)

There are similar examples in the New Testament. Here is one:

But when the king heard (thereof), he was wroth: and he sent forth this armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. (**Matthew 22:7**)

In this parable Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem. Who then are the armies of the Lord? From history we know the city was destroyed by the Roman soldiers under Titus. Are these wicked, corrupt men really the soldiers of the Lord? Here is an illuminating comment from a student of the Scriptures.

The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance. . . . Says the prophet: “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;” “for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” (**Hosea 13:9; 14:1**) Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. (GC35)

The same author presents the larger picture as follows:

. . . It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God's mercy and long-suffering in holding in check the cruel malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. . . . The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty. (GC36)

What shall we make of these examples? Evidently not all that is attributed to God is God's work. Often when the prophets say "God is going to do this . . .," they simply mean, "This is what is going to happen . . ." In their minds it is the same thing because if the omnipotent God does not prevent a particular event then He is responsible for that event.

But what about instances like the flood? Did God send the flood or did He predict the flood to Noah? How shall we decide if the Bible does not tell us? Shall we say that we only accept that God was allowing or predicting the event when we can prove it and that in all other instances God was actively causing the punishment? This is the option some have chosen. But is that the truth about the matter? The question really boils down to: "What is God like?"

Does God cause evil? Has sin so affected God that He will change the way in which He relates to the created universe? Will He now use means that He would not have used prior to the origin of sin in the universe. God is not under pressure to use the means of sin. He is right in every way. So, it seems that if we are to follow the revelation that Jesus gave us, that God will never cause any evil.

Does God permit evil? Could God prevent all, much of, some of the evil on the planet? To answer these questions we need to consider what we mean by freedom. Freedom and control are opposites. When I give you freedom I loose control over you. If we are really free, then God cannot control us or prevent the consequences of sin on the planet. He can work to counteract many of these consequences but He is also forced to accept many of them in order to guarantee the freedom He gave us.

There are situations, illustrated by the story of Job, where what happens

is not the result of natural consequence but the machinations of the devil. In this instance God can exercise some control over the situation. These concepts are discussed further in the chapter "Who Done It? By Job."

In our search for understanding, there is one source that we can go to with the greatest confidence; the witness of Jesus Christ. The four gospels should be our starting point if we wish to know what God is really like. Here we have an account of someone who is more intimately familiar with the invisible God than anyone else. (**John 1:18; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:12**) He came to earth with the express purpose of revealing what God is like:

**John 3:34** (NIV) For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.

He is referred to as the "Word." (**John 1:1**) He is the express image of God according to more than one New Testament writer. (**John 3:32; Hebrews 1:3**) In the end we shall have to admit that all our questions are answered by Him, who is "the truth." (**John 14:6**) Our most pressing problem may yet turn out to be that we simply do not believe what Jesus came to tell us about God, and this would explain Jesus' statement in **John 6:29**:

The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.

Finally, to be a blameless person like Job, Noah, and the saved in the book of **Revelation (14:5)** may mean that we have stopped blaming others for what happens in our lives. We have decided to take responsibility for ourselves, and we no longer need to blame God, the devil or anyone else. Reminds me of someone bigger and better than me who came and died rather than blame anyone else for the mess on the planet. Instead of blaming us, He forgave us. Forgave us in our ignorance and wickedness. Now that is blamelessness at its best.



## God and Consistency

**G**ood theory is consistent with itself. Good practice is consistent with good theory. The physical laws of the universe are reliable and consistent and can be depended on at all times. In the same way Christians believe that God's character can be depended on to be reliable and consistent with love and goodness. They also believe that He has always been this way and thus there will be consistency in the story of God's interaction with people. The prophets record that God declares that He does not change. (**Malachi 3:6**) However, there seem to be inconsistencies in the Biblical record. A few of these are as follows.

The flood story suggests that God did change. During Noah's time He became sorry (**Genesis 6:6**) that He had created men and women and decided to wipe them all out. It seems that either God had "forgotten" that He had originally pronounced all creation "good" (**Genesis 1:31**) as He viewed the world or we must concede that God had changed His mind about the "goodness" of His creation.

At the time of the giving of the law at Sinai God apparently decided to wipe the Israelites out and start over with Moses' family. (**Exodus 32:9,10**) This appears a very different attitude to that which God displayed in the invitations and promises made to Abraham.

Ezekiel assures us that God will not punish the son for the father's crimes.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. (**Ezekiel 18:20**)

The prophet Samuel is, however, quite clear that the Lord "struck" Bathsheba's child and it died as a consequence of David's sin:

Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also [that is] born unto thee shall surely die. And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. (**2 Samuel 12:14,15**)

Has the prophet Ezekiel not read what Samuel has written? Are they referring to different situations? On the surface these two writers seem to differ markedly.

At Mt Sinai the people are warned not to come near the mountain and yet those who do go up the mountain were greatly blessed. (**Exodus 24:9,10**) The parable of the sheep and the goats (**Matthew 25:31-46**) seems to indicate a fearful, judging God. In the metaphor of the vine (**John 15:6; Rm 11:21**), the unfruitful branches are cut off. In the parable of the wheat and weeds, the weeds are thrown

into the fire. (**Matthew 13:30**)

But how can God judge and condemn the world in the light of

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. (**John 3:17**)

Is Jesus different from God? But then God is the source of the grace and forgiveness we received through Christ. (**2 Corinthians 5:18**) Is the cross a different and temporary revelation of God to prove a point, to make a legal loophole to save sinners? Is God gracious and forgiving or a strict disciplinarian and legalist at heart?

When Miriam rebelled against Moses' leadership she was punished with temporary leprosy. When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled they were executed together with their total families. When Achan stole clothes from Jericho he was stoned together with his family and animals. When the Israelites stole God's tithes and offerings (**Malachi 3**) there were no executions as far as we know.

Moses is clear that the Lord will never leave or forsake His children. (**Deuteronomy 31:6,8**) From the context it is clear that Moses was referring to physical protection. yet the Israelites were plundered and carried off into captivity. So how shall we explain this apparent contradiction?

The traditional approach by Christian commentators on these stories is that God's promises through Moses were conditional on Israelite obedience and when Israel rebelled God's protection left them. Success is then the result of God's promise and my contribution of obedience or loyalty or faith. This is a risky option to take. The human response can never be an adequate foundation on which to build salvation. The response is never good enough and we are never fully aware of the larger picture of what is happening in the universe. Surely John the Baptist was a hero of faith and yet he lost his life at Herod's cowardly hand. The bigger picture can result in passages like:

**Isaiah 57:1** (NIV) The righteous perish, and no-one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no-one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. 2 Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.

Another possibility is to concede that while the Israelites were in rebellion and apostasy they did not want God in their society, yet God did not leave them any more than He left Adam and Eve when they sinned. God was there, possibly unperceived and definitely unwanted. It was the Israelites that left God, not vice versa. He followed, but at a distance, so as not to encroach on their freedom. Paul is clear on the matter.

I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means. (**Romans 11:1**)

The Jewish people are still God's people, loved and wanted by God. God is still with them as much as they will allow.

It is also helpful to recognize that "unrighteousness" means, among other things, that sin is unpredictable. In Heaven and on the New Earth we will reap what we have sown, i.e. life will be predictable and fair. On this planet we will often not reap what we sowed and we will often reap what we did not sow. Job, John the Baptist and Jesus are examples of suffering as a result of unrighteousness. We must not allow unrighteousness to cloud our thinking about God. We leave and desert God. He pleads with us to return. We hate God (**Romans 8:7**) but He loves us. (**Romans 5:8**) If there is a separation between us and God it is we who have erected these barriers.

The apparent inconsistencies in the Scriptures are often the result of man's faulty perceptions. Because God warns Noah about the coming flood the writer assumes that God caused the flood. Because God comes to Sinai in His might and power the writer of Exodus assumes that God is angry. Because God predicts the consequences of David's immorality the writer assumes that God destroyed Bathsheba's child and caused Absalom to have sex with David's wives during the rebellion. These are the consequences of sin from which God cannot always protect David, especially when he steps outside the boundaries of the Decalogue.

One could take almost any of the stories in the Bible and re-interpret them in the light of God's goodness and kindness, if one is so inclined. However, if one is not so inclined, the apparent inconsistencies remain to trouble those who search for consistency. While we have not addressed all the questions raised in this essay, the principle of a morally good God has been addressed. If God is morally good then it is our responsibility to speak well of God from a moral point of view. It also means that we will often come to different conclusions than those suggested by the writers and commentators of many Scriptural passages and stories.

Parables are parables and nothing else. While some parables seem to portray God as a judge, the point is that our choices and actions determine our destinies. The judgement at the end of the world, so common in Christian thinking, may not be what it has been taken and taught to be. To be honest, it is hard to decide when the final judgement actually takes place. At the end of the world, Jesus comes to save all those who are willing. Some are unwilling and call for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them (**Revelation 6:19**) rather than be with the Saviour of the World. It seems they have judged God unworthy!

We do have a consistent God. He has always worked for the salvation of sinners (**1 Timothy 2:4**) and always will.

Psalm 106:<sup>43</sup> Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. <sup>44</sup> But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; <sup>45</sup> for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented. <sup>46</sup> He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.

Many, if not all, inconsistencies are a result of misconceptions about God. Why are the misconceptions so popular and so entrenched? Perhaps because we prefer a “tame” God, a God who is more like we are because the presence of the real God is problematic for sinners. When He comes, in private or in public, there are not many who respond:

Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. (**Isaiah 25:9**)

His presence has always disturbed us, but for those who will take the risk, His very presence inspires hope for the future and courage to face the present.



## God and Control

**W**hen we speak of God “being in control” we need to define what is meant by the term “control.” Control gives the idea of being in command of the situation: by expertise, as when flying an aircraft; by leadership, as when chairing a meeting or ordering an activity; or by fear, as when an armed person orders others around.

Then there is control by manipulation. Hopefully, by God being in control we do not mean that He manipulates affairs to suit Himself. This understanding is contrary to freedom of choice which we postulate God gave to His creation. One cannot claim freedom of choice and at the same time manipulate those who are making the choices.

The government of God is not, as Satan would make it appear, founded upon a blind submission, an unreasoning control. (SC43)

Why this essay? Firstly, because being “in control” is terribly important to human beings. It surfaces in our positional posturing, in the name games we play, and in the hierarchical authority structures we invent. Jesus addresses the issue so simply when He says

whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant . . . just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. (**Matthew 20:26:28**)

Secondly, because an unrealistic concept of God's control asks questions like: “Where was God in the genocide in Rwanda? Where was God on September 11, 2001 with the attacks on the New York Trade Towers?” These questions assume God can control or manipulate the feelings of hate which inspire acts like these. Hatred carries its own consequences of violent feelings and destructive actions. That is the truth of the matter. When we hate, we destroy ourselves, even

in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. (**Revelation 14:10**)

When will we take responsibility for our thoughts and feelings? When? That is the question we often evade by glibly stating: “God is in control.”

God is the Creator and sustains all life. He is in control in the sense that He could turn off any or all life support at any time in the same way that the Managing Director of a power company can stop supplying power to the grid. It is unlikely that this would happen because the function of the company is to provide power at all times. So, to say that God could end all life is quite different to saying that He would. That God could terminate all life is then probably one of the

meanings of stating, "God is in control."

When I am in control of my car I can make it go where I want, when I want, and at the speed I want. In this usage "control" is used as a synonym for total and complete manipulation.

We use the term "control" to indicate that an individual is balanced in their behaviour. In a negative sense, being "out of control" is associated with discouragement, depression, temper tantrums and even suicide. It may also result in violence directed towards others, or a loss of interest in the normal affairs of life. Being "in control" means mental health. It is associated with hope for the future and an acceptance of present circumstances.

It seems what is meant when we speak of God "being in control" is that God has not given up hope, He has not left us totally to the consequences of our choices but has provided the "Band Aids" and the "antiseptics" for our wounds (**John 3:16**) and given us the inspiration and the opportunity to choose a different alternative. He still believes in us and believes there is a solution to our present desperate situation.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (**2 Corinthians 5:18**)

God believes that eventually His working by love and freedom will triumph over evil.

"Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (**1 Corinthians 13:13**)

The downfall of Communism in Eastern Europe provides an interesting analogy. Communism's fall was a consequence of the system imploding on itself. The system was not destroyed by an outside power. It ended up being bankrupt, socially, morally and financially. The system had done its best and failed. The hearts of the Soviets are highly unlikely to ever be tempted again by Marxism in the future.

When the West offers food and capital to help rebuild the Soviet economy, the Soviets have a powerful incentive to adopt the Capitalist system which has survived for centuries and would seem to be a superior system.

In this sense, capitalism is in control now. This is what I suspect, or hope, we mean when we say that God is in control. We mean that His system of love and unselfishness will still be there when all other alternatives have collapsed. God's form of government will show itself to be the only system that works in the long run. This knowledge and experience is what will insulate the universe against any further rebellion.

Every parent with a teenager knows the time will come when the parent will have to choose between retaining control of the car or providing the motoring

freedom the teenager desires. One thing is sure: as the teenager drives away from home for the first time the parent is no longer in control! Most parents spend the evening concerned for their safe return. That about sums it up. Adam took the "car." He had to, if he was really free. There was a terrible catastrophe and we are still picking up the pieces or consequences today. We are really free. The mess the planet is in proves that once and for all.

I am sure that God, in His kindness, would like to counteract every consequence of evil, but then we would not experience our freedom. We would be on a leash. The universe would be manipulated and we would not know the truth about choice, freedom and love. We would be God's pets. Well cared for and happy as pets but never knowing the mind of God.

God is true to His desire for us to be free moral beings in every sense of the word. He will therefore, not over-ride the consequences of our choices and actions. There are abused children and God has to watch the abuse happening. When we speak of God "permitting" evil, we mean that because He values our freedom He actually has to watch this evil taking place.

It is frightening but responsible to think these thoughts. There are no simple answers as some Christians would like to believe. We cannot pray our way to health and wealth. We must eat right and work hard, and even then we might be poor and sickly because of the unrighteousness that prevails on the planet.

A final point that needs to be considered is that there is an alien power at work:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. **(1 John 5:19)**

The devil's work must not be left out of the picture. Yes, sinners are responsible for much of the evil on the planet, but so are the devil and his evil angels. They work tirelessly to destroy all that is good and healthy out of their hatred for God.

So what shall we conclude? Is God in control? The answer depends on what aspect of control one has in mind. If it is God's sovereign power which He could use to manipulate the universe or people, the answer would be, No! On the other hand, if one is concentrating on God's desire and enthusiasm for saving the race, the answer is, Yes!

Well, it won't be over until the choir sings:

Hallelujah! for our Lord God Almighty reigns. **(Revelation 19:6)**

Is God reigning at present? The answer is "yes" and "no."

Yes! He reigns physically all over the universe, except here. Yes! He reigns in all His friend's hearts, but not in every heart.

No! because He cannot physically reign on this rebellious planet at

present. For the present there is an evil prince who reigns. (**John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11**)

As a consequence there is trouble, trauma and tragedy for God's friends. While God would like to protect His friends from all of these experiences the evil prince gets at them from time to time. But it will not always be so, and the choir will sing when the reign of evil is over and God reigns. His reign is re-established forever by the choice of His friends and the demise of His enemies. The song of God reigning sovereign is sung often in the book of Revelation. (**11:15,17; 12:10; 15:4**)

Hallelujah! It is going to happen. It will happen eventually. I am a prisoner of hope and very glad for this hope.



## God and the Devil.

The devil's best trick is to persuade you that he doesn't exist!"  
Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) French poet, critic and translator.

**T**he devil has wonderfully disguised himself on this planet. In the Old Testament Satan is mentioned by name in only three instances. From our vantage point in time we clearly identify the work of the devil in many places in the Old Testament, but this is because Jesus taught us so much about the origin and the existence of this supernatural, evil being. This chapter is all about unmasking this sinister, evil being who has disguised himself in a myriad masterful ways. First we will examine the overt Old Testament passages, then we will do the same for the New Testament and finally we will draw some conclusions on the matter.

### Satan in the Old Testament

The word "Satan" comes from the Hebrew word, "Shattan" or "accuser." This word does not carry the pejorative connotation in Hebrew that it does in English. An equivalent term for Shattan in our understanding would be the public prosecutor. A public prosecutor is not necessarily an evil person but someone who is employed to make sure that evil is identified and exposed. So, when Satan is mentioned in the Old Testament it is rather with the "public prosecutor" concept in mind, someone who will expose the other side in the story.

In **Job (1, 2)** Satan accuses God of protecting Job from the harsh realities of life, insinuating that by so doing God is buying Job's allegiance. Satan also accuses Job of worshipping God for the advantage or benefit he gets from this worship. These accusations are truly diabolical for their malice.

In **1 Chronicles (21:1)** Satan motivates King David to take the census which would result in great glory for the King.

In **Zechariah (3)** Satan is reminding Joshua, the High Priest, of his sins before the Lord. He is the accuser.

**Psalms 109:6**, in the KJV, reads : "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand."

In the newer translations the word "Satan" is replaced with "accuser" which may be interpreted as "an evil man" from this verse.

### Satan or the devil in the New Testament

The term, Satan, occurs in at least thirty five instances in the New Testament and

is the name of a supernatural, evil being who is viewed as the origin of blame, condemnation, and destruction. This name is used interchangeably with devil or demon in the New Testament. (**Revelation 12:9**) Devil or demon is used over 40 times in the New Testament. Here are the many references to this being in the New Testament. We examine these passages and their implications to determine the nature of the devil.

### 1. He is the great tempter to evil

**Matthew 4:1** (NIV) Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

**Luke 4:2** (NIV) where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

**Matthew 4:5** (NIV) Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. (Cp. **Luke 4:9**)

**Matthew 4:8** (NIV) Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. (Cp. **Luke 4:5,6**)

**Matthew 4:10** (NIV) Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Cp **Luke 4:8**)

**Mark 1:13** (NIV) and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

**Matthew 16:23** (NIV) Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Cp. **Mark 8:33**)

Clearly Jesus sees no value in having Satan around to tempt and harass Him.

**Luke 22:3** (NIV) Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. (Cp **John 13:27**)

**1 Corinthians 7:5** (NIV) Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack

of self-control.

**Matthew 4:11** (NIV) Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Cp. **Luke 4:13**)

## 2. Jesus has no alliance with the devil.

**Matthew 12:26** (NIV) If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? (Cp. **Mark 3:23,26; Luke 11:18**)

**Luke 7:33** (NIV) For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'

**John 8:48** (NIV) The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" 49 "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honour my Father and you dishonour me."

**James 4:7** (NIV) Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

## 3. He opposes the work of God.

**Mark 4:15** (NIV) Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. (Cp. **Luke 8:12**)

**Luke 8:12** (NIV) Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

**Matthew 13:28** (NIV) 'An enemy (the devil) did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them (weeds) up?'

**Matthew 13:39** (NIV) and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

**John 6:70** (NIV) Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"

**Acts 13:10** (NIV) "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never

stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

**1 Thessalonians 2:18** (NIV) For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us.

**1 John 3:10** (NIV) This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

**Revelation 2:9** (NIV) I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

**1 Timothy 5:15** (NIV) Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

#### 4. His origins are in heaven.

**Luke 10:18** (NIV) He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

**Revelation 12:9** (NIV) The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

#### 5. He causes suffering in human beings but Jesus can drive him out.

**Matthew 9:32** (NIV) While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. 33 And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

**Matthew 12:22** (NIV) Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.

**Matthew 15:22** (NIV) A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

**Matthew 17:18** (NIV) Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

**Mark 5:15** (NIV) When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man--and told about the pigs as well.

**Mark 7:26** (NIV) The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

**Luke 4:33** (NIV) In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice,

**Luke 8:29** (NIV) For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

**Luke 9:42** (NIV) Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

**Luke 11:14** (NIV) Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed.

**Luke 13:16** (NIV) "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

**2 Corinthians 12:7** (NIV) To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

**1 Timothy 1:20** (NIV) Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

**Revelation 2:10** (NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and

I will give you the crown of life.

## 6. He wants to embarrass those who follow God.

**Luke 22:31** (NIV) Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.

**John 13:2** (NIV) The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.

**2 Timothy 2:26** (NIV) 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.

## 7. He fills human hearts with lies.

**John 8:44** (NIV) You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

**Acts 5:3** (NIV) Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

**Revelation 2:24** (NIV) Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

**Revelation 3:9** (NIV) I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

## 8. He is identified with darkness, in opposition to forgiveness, faith and sanctification.

**John 8:52** (NIV) At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death."

**John 10:20** (NIV) Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" 21 But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

**Ephesians 4:26** (NIV) "In your anger do not sin:" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

**Ephesians 6:11** (NIV) Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

**Acts 26:18** (NIV) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

**2 Corinthians 6:15** (NIV) What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

**James 3:15** (NIV) Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

## 9. He is doomed to destruction.

**Matthew 25:41** (NIV) Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

**Romans 16:20** (NIV) The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

**1 Timothy 3:6** (NIV) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

**1 John 3:8** (NIV) He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

**Hebrews 2:14** (NIV) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--

**Revelation 20:2** (NIV) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

**Jude 1:9** (NIV) But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

**Revelation 12:12** (NIV) Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

**Revelation 20:10** (NIV) And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

## 10. He is the destroyer.

**John 8:44** (NIV) You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

**1 Corinthians 5:5** (NIV) hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

**Hebrews 2:14** (NIV) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil.

**1 Peter 5:8** (NIV) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

**Revelation 2:13** (NIV) I know where you live--where Satan has his throne.

Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.

### 11. He is the great deceiver.

**2 Corinthians 2:11** (NIV) in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

**2 Corinthians 11:14** (NIV) And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

**2 Thessalonians 2:9** (NIV) The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders

**Revelation 20:7** (NIV) When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison. 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.

**Revelation 12:9** (NIV) The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

**Revelation 20:2** (NIV) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

**Revelation 20:10** (NIV) And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Another description used of the supernatural enemy of God is:

**John 12:31** (NIV) Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the **prince of this world** will be driven out.

A further description of this enemy of all good is the "evil one."

**Matthew 6:13** (NIV) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

There are more passages about this "evil one:" **Matthew 5:37; 13:19,38; John 17:15; Ephesians 6:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18,19.**

## The Conclusion

Once Jesus has unmasked the evil one we can recognize him in many passages in the Old Testament. He is the deceiving serpent in **Genesis 3**. He is the king of Babylon referred to in **Isaiah 14**, and he is the king of Tyre referred to in **Ezekiel 28:12** onwards.

The devil is a genius at hiding himself in disguise and deception. In many Old Testament passages he has hidden himself so well that God is blamed for his mischief. It is the work of a master con artist. The criminal, in this instance, has placed the blame for his crimes on the judge and most of the jury seems to have believed this deception.

So, for instance, in **1 Samuel 16:14** where the evil spirit is said to "come from the Lord" we can now understand that this evil spirit was from Satan himself.

The existence of Satan as a supernatural evil being is not just a theoretical idea. This being is attempting to destroy us spiritually, emotionally and physically. We are engaged in total warfare (**Ephesians 6:12**). Our only hope is to be vigilant in prayer. We must pray for ourselves and each other.

Christians attribute the origins and continuance of evil in the world to Satan and sin. This is because of the information given by the New Testament and more especially by Jesus who had unique insights on the enemy of truth and goodness.

Satan is the prince of demons. The evil angels over whom he rules do his bidding. Through them he multiplies his agencies throughout the world. **He instigates all the evil that exists in our world.** (EGW 6BC 1119)

So, when Jesus tells about the Good Shepherd and says,

**John 10:10** (NIV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

He is contrasting His work with that of the devil. The devil steals away our hope, he kills our joy, and destroys our physical, psychological and spiritual life. Jesus seeks to more than undo all this evil for us. He comes to restore hope, to bring joy and life in super abundance.

Our Jewish friends, without these insights, believe we, Christians, have invented the devil to avoid having to take responsibility for our own contribution to the evil in this world. They are partially right. Christians often blame the devil for too much. If the devil was killed today, the evil in the world would hardly abate because we are by nature evil. We have been schooled in its ways for so long that

we cannot help ourselves. We may chose to be good but we cannot. We need a saviour. We have a Saviour. Because of our Saviour a better day is coming. We know it will not always be this way. We long for liberation from our condition. "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

It is a revelation of the grace of God which gives us the desire for good and then also the passion for reflecting God to those we meet on life's journey. It is the grace of God which reveals the devil and then protects us from this awful evil. Thank you God!



## Is God Responsible for Evil?

**T**he Ancient Greeks loved paradoxes. The one about God runs like this: Because of the evil in the world, if God is omnipotent then He cannot be good, or if He is good then He cannot be omnipotent. So, God can only be omnipotent if He is also evil, and only be good if He is not omnipotent. The two concepts are mutually exclusive. The result was the many different gods of Greece, some good and some not so good. Some powerful and some not so powerful. But the Ancient Greeks had their problems with logic. It prevented them discovering what we call calculus and eventually ran their mathematics into a dead end street.

The Hebrews did not have this philosophical problem. Their God certainly was omnipotent, He made everything and He was also the source of some evil according to the following passages in Scripture:

**Judges 9:23** Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

**1 Samuel 16:14** But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him. **15** And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. **16** Let our lord now command thy servants, [which are] before thee, to seek out a man, [who is] a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.

**1 Samuel 16:23** And it came to pass, when the [evil] spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

**1 Samuel 18:10** And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and [there was] a javelin in Saul's hand.

**1 Samuel 19:9** And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with [his] hand.

**2 Samuel 12:11** Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give [them] unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the

sight of this sun. 12 For thou didst [it] secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

**2 Samuel 24:1** And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

**1 Kings 22:22** And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade [him], and prevail also: go forth, and do so. 23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

**1 Chronicles 10:14** (NIV) and did not enquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him (Saul) to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.

**2 Chronicles 18:21** And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And [the LORD] said, Thou shalt entice [him], and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do [even] so. 22 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee.

**Ezekiel 20:25,26** Wherefore I also gave them statutes that were not good, and judgements whereby they should live;

**Isaiah 45:7** I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these [things].

**2 Thessalonians 2:11** And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: (read also Deuteronomy 32:24 and Jeremiah 8:17)

The Hebrews would have argued as follows,

God's power is constantly exercised to counteract the agencies of evil; He is ever at work among men, not for their destruction, but for their correction and preservation. (PP694)

They would make analogies such as, "a surgeon must cut to heal" to defend the position that God must sometimes destroy and punish.

What these analogies do not address, however, are the moral issues at

stake. If "cutting" is the answer, why does God not "cut" on a consistent basis. Why are only some sinners "cut out" in this scheme of things. There are also other questions that need to be addressed such as: Is it fair for God to demand that we avoid evil if He authors at least some of the evil in this world? Was the devil right in telling Eve that God did not want them to eat of the tree of good and evil because then they would be like God; knowing both good and evil? Is the evil that God originates not evil because God causes it? Do we actually have a double standard? Do we have one standard for God and another for creatures? Is the standard for God lower than that for the creatures?

**According to the following passages is it impossible for God to bring evil?**

**Habakkuk 1:13** (NIV) Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; . . .

**Matthew 5:43** Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

**John 1:5** And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (Darkness is equated with evil in the New Testament.)

**John 8:12** Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

**John 17:15** I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

**Romans 13:12** The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

**1 John 1:5** This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

**James 1:13** Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

Shall we say that God is never the author of evil in any situation, or is it safer to say that occasionally He does cause the evil and bring the calamities that the Bible writers attribute to Him? If we go the latter route how do we explain the passages that repudiate any evil act or motive for God? If we go the first route, how shall we explain the passages that attribute, at least, some evil acts to God.

Firstly, it is helpful to recognize the role the monotheism of the Hebrew mind plays in the apparent contradiction of a good God causing or originating evil. If there is only one supernatural being then all supernatural events, good or bad, must originate with that one being. For this reason God, in the Hebrew world view, is also blamed for evil, violence and most calamities.

**Deuteronomy 32:27** makes this interesting comment:

But I dreaded the taunt of the enemy, lest the adversary misunderstand and say "Our hand has triumphed; the Lord has not done this."

What the writer is sure of is that if the Lord had protected them no evil could have come their way. He wants the enemy to know that they have triumphed only because the Lord has allowed or sent the evil. It has not come because the enemy is stronger than the Lord.

The Old Testament writers would prefer to blame the true God for evil rather than allow any other god or any demon get the credit for any power that might supersede that of their God.

If we conclude that often when the Bible claims "God did this" or "God did that," it actually means that God allowed it rather than sent it, how shall we then determine which interpretation is to be used in any given situation?

We must interpret matters consistently. We cannot have the same God righteous and just at times and then arbitrary and harsh at other times. We cannot have a God who sends bears to eat up irreverent children in one chapter and then in the next breath have Eli's sons behaving in a far more despicable way with God apparently ignoring the matter completely! We can't have a God who kills Annanias and Sapphira for breach of personal promise and then allows church leaders live in mansions purchased with funds embezzled from the faithful.

Secondly, we must not ignore the plain teaching of the Old Testament that the consequences of evil are death and disaster.

**2 Chronicles 22:4** He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for after his father's death they became his advisers, to his undoing.

**Deuteronomy 31:29** For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made."

**Psalm 55:15** Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them.

**Proverbs 11:19** The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death.

**Jeremiah 8:3** Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declares the LORD Almighty.'

**Ezekiel 33:11** Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Obedience to God's law brings prosperity while evil, the rebellion against God's ways brings trouble and eventually death. As the apostle Paul will say a millennium later:

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

Thirdly, the answer lies in the most obvious and yet most neglected source of truth, Jesus, the Christ. In His attitudes and transparent motives we have the answers to the real questions of being and meaning. It is inconceivable to think that Jesus went around bashing disobedient, rebellious people, even for their own good. The death of God on a cross was foolishness to most minds of Jesus' day.

That the omnipotent God could actually be murdered (**Acts 7:52**) is a paradox that plagues our deepest philosophical ponderings. The cross of Calvary confirms forever, for all who hear about the event, that God would rather die for sinners than execute them.

While the cross was a natural response for the King of Love, it is a stumbling block for the minds of those who believe in violence and force as the ultimate solutions to life's most pressing problems. It was foolishness to the Greeks, the intelligentsia of the day according to Paul (**1 Corinthians 1:18,23**). It was foolishness to the Hebrews, the religious leaders of the day, but more importantly, it still is foolishness to modern man even though he is familiar with the story of the death of God at Calvary.

The cross reveals to us the willingness of God to accept responsibility for evil because His great interest is to remove this curse from His free universe. He is a good father who accepts responsibility for the foolish actions of his children who disobeyed him but are never-the-less his children and he pays the “fines” for their wrong doing. He is not responsible for evil because He takes responsibility for His children’s evil. He is the most responsible “parent” who has ever lived!



## Fear and God

**A**fter eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve feared God to the point where they hid from Him. The Hebrews developed and cultivated a terrible fear of God. At Sinai God had to say to them “do not be afraid.” (**Exodus 20:20**) At the same time Moses cannot see God's face and live. (**Exodus 33:20**) When Manoah sees God, he is sure he is going to die.

“We are doomed to die!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” (**Judges 13:22**)

The New Testament has similar examples:

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don't you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?” (**Luke 23:40**)

In this sense “fear” means just what we mean when we use the term to convey a terrible insecurity.

The end time angel call,

He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory. . . .” (**Revelation 14:7**)

suggests that it is important to understand the meaning of “fear” when associated with God.

The Scriptures also use the term “fear” in a positive way when referring to man's relationship with God. In most of these situations “fear” is equated with obedience and trust. Here are some examples.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” (**Genesis 22:12**)

Clearly “fear” in this context means trust or obedience. When,

On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God:” (**Genesis 42:18**)

he is making a statement about his trust in and obedience to God.

“Fear” can also mean integrity.

But select capable men from all the people – men who fear God,

trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. (**Exodus 18:21**)

“Fear” can also be used as a synonym for worship or service.

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. (**Job 1:9**)

Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. (**Psalm 66:16**)

It seems clear “fear” means worship, trust or obey here. In **Acts 13:16** the newer translations use the term “worship” rather than “fear” as it is translated in the King James Version.

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship (“fear” KJV) God, listen to me!”

**Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13** Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

Here the parallelism of Hebrew literature makes the meaning clear. “Fear” is equated with reverence, a sense of humility in the presence of, or a trusting attitude in, God.

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

“Fear” here means obedience.

**Luke 18:4** For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, . . .”

The context means that this man lives only for himself. He has no place for God or others in his thinking and doing.

**1 Peter 2:17** Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.

In this instance "fear" is included under the umbrella of "respect." To respect God is to "fear" Him.

So, is it necessary to feel afraid in the presence of God? There is a story that might help to answer this question. It is the story of the woman taken in adultery, and dragged before Jesus (**John 7:53-8:11**). The New English Bible has an interesting note on this incident.

This passage, which in the most widely received editions of the New Testament is printed in the text of **John 7.53-8.11** has no fixed place in our witnesses. Some of them do not contain it at all. Some place it after **Luke 21.38**, others after **John 7.36**, or **7.52** or **21.24**.

It seems the implications of the story are so revolutionary it was difficult for those who copied the manuscripts to believe it was actually an authentic story and so it was sometime just left out. We can be sure the woman was distraught, but the attitude and words of Jesus, "neither do I condemn you" probably gave her the inspiration to live a future life of dignity and purity.

Jesus makes this statement in **John 14:9**:

If you have seen me, you have seen the Father!

Now the people who met Jesus were, for the most part, not afraid of Him. Yes, those who feared the truth or were envious of His influence, or wished to murder Him were afraid of Him, but then they had reason to be. Perhaps their feelings are similar to that of a bank robber seeing a policeman while collecting the loot from the bank. The robber would certainly experience some anxiety.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for reconsidering our understanding of the meaning of "fear" is found in **1 John 4:18**,

**There is no fear in love.** But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

This is because once we have understood God's sovereign love for us we cannot fear Him with that knowledge.

A respected religious writer has put it this way.

From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. **The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,--as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,-- that He might be feared, shunned, and**

**even hated by men.** Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. Then he would obliterate the divine image in man and impress his own likeness upon the soul; he would imbue men with his own spirit and make them captives according to his will.

It was by falsifying the character of God and exciting distrust of Him that Satan tempted Eve to transgress. By sin the minds of our first parents were darkened, their natures were degraded, and their conceptions of God were moulded by their own narrowness and selfishness. And as men became bolder in sin, the knowledge and the love of God faded from their minds and hearts. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God," they "became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." (5T737)

What shall we conclude? When "fear" is associated with God, it can mean insecurity and anxiety but it can also mean obedience (**Deuteronomy 6:2**) or admiration. (**Revelation 15:4**) Perhaps, like Elijah, it is helpful to understand that God is not in the awful catastrophes of wind, earthquake and fire but in the still small voice of persuasion and love (**1 Kings 19**).

Manoah's wife, fortunately, was more perceptive than her husband as **Judges 13:23** demonstrates.

But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this."

Because she has understood the love of God she can overcome the fables and traditions of her time and press on to receive the good that God had in mind for her.

There is a relevant prophecy in the New Testament. The aged Zachariah speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit on seeing the Christ child in **Luke 1**:

<sup>68</sup> "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.

<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

<sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

<sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

<sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,

<sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

<sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and **to enable us to serve him without fear**

<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

<sup>76</sup> And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will

go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
<sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of  
their sins,  
<sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will  
come to us from heaven  
<sup>79</sup> to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide  
our feet into the path of peace.”

Jesus, according to this prophecy, came to deliver us from serving God out of fear. This truth is confirmed by John's understanding that “perfect love casts out fear.” It is in the light of the love of God shining through the face of Jesus that we come to serve God for who He is and not because of what He might do to us if we did not serve Him. We end where we began, in **Revelation 14:7**:

He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory . . .”

Can we now say “Trust God, obey God and thus give Him glory?” I think so. Can we strip away the superstitions of the centuries that painted God as an ogre? Not only do I think so, it must be done!



## God, Forgiveness and Guilt.

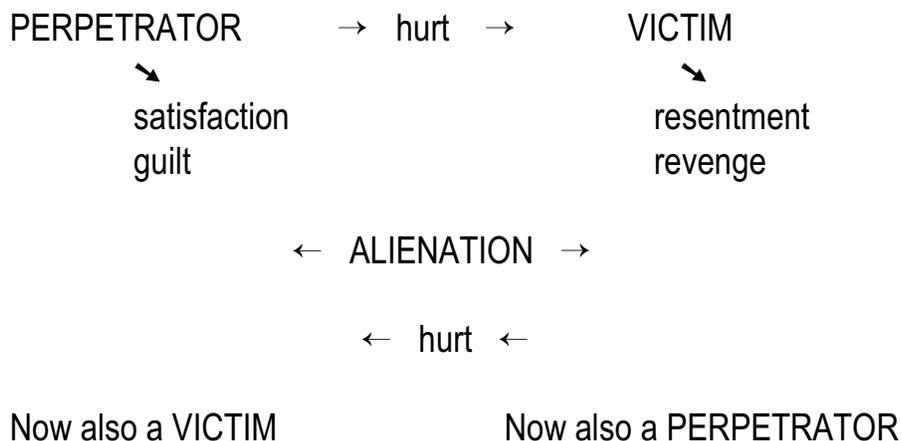
There are many concepts which are connected with forgiveness and guilt. Here are a few of them: acceptance, confession, justification, pardon, reconciliation, reformation, repentance, restitution and restoration. Then there are also related terms or phrases which have negative overtones: alienation, condemnation, guilt, hatred, bearing grudges, keeping score of wrongs, rejection and revenge. This chapter will attempt to define both forgiveness and guilt, how forgiveness is arrived at and how to achieve release from guilt. The chapter will also consider some of the terms listed above before addressing the issue raised by the title of this chapter.

### Forgiveness

Forgiveness is dealing with the resentment that may arise from physical or emotional hurt. When the victim is ignorant of the hurt, impervious to it, strong enough to ignore it, or wise enough to understand it, there are no feelings of resentment, and so forgiveness is either automatic or unnecessary. Resentment normally leads to anger and a desire for revenge. The desire for revenge is justifiable if a hurt has been inflicted. As a result of these feelings or desires, alienation between the victim and the perpetrator takes place. When the victim does take revenge they now also become a perpetrator. So, the original perpetrator is now also a victim. This cycle of hurt - revenge - hurt - revenge increases alienation endlessly.

### Guilt

Perpetrators experience guilt, since every human being knows intuitively it is wrong to hurt someone else. For this reason perpetrators, in order to live with themselves, must be able to justify their right to hurt others. Abusers of the weak are very good at doing this. A mother who burns her child with a cigarette butt will have elaborate reasons for doing so, e.g. the child cried all night when it was clean, fed and warm. "It is a naughty child who needs some discipline."



To end this cycle either the victim must forgive and stop taking revenge or the perpetrator must reform his abusive ways. In either case the desire to hurt is eliminated and the cycle is broken.

### Reaching Forgiveness

Taking revenge is apparently very satisfying for human beings judging by its popularity in history and literature. The Bosnian Serbian conflict was a settling of aggravations that are centuries old. It is the same with the more recently genocide in Rwanda between Hutu's and Tutsi's. The movie "Kill Bill" and classic stories like "Moby Dick" and the "Count of Monte Cristo," all center on the theme of taking revenge. Some have suggested that history is simply keeping tabs on how revenge is taken. So, why would anyone be attracted to forgiveness? Perhaps because someone significant in their lives has modelled forgiveness and there is some realization of the futility of taking revenge.

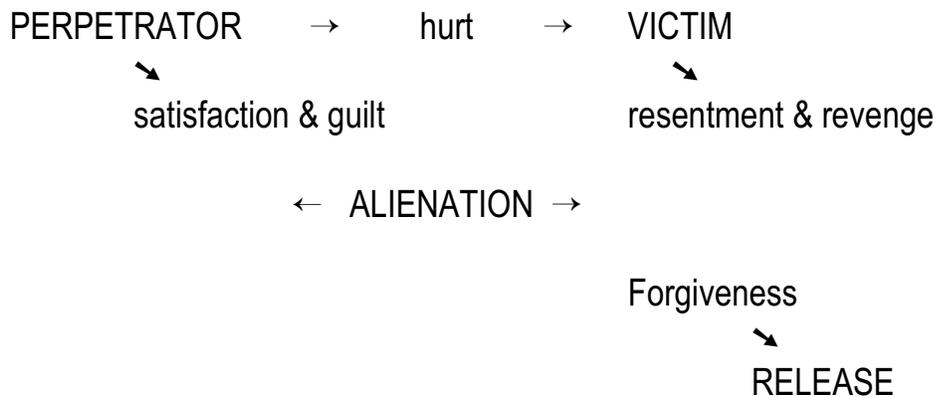
Susan Jacoby is of the opinion that we are too civilized to admit we want revenge and have created a Justice System in which these desires are legitimized. (Wild Justice) Is she correct? Having worked with hard core inmates she might have some insights which most of us do not have. Justice is as old as the history of the world. Ostensibly it is an attempt to make the world a safer place, but as with all human institutions, it has glaring failings. One of these is that most justice systems fail to rehabilitate even small percentages of criminals.

Forgiveness occurs when a victim makes a principled decision to give up **their justifiable right to revenge**. (JA Fourie, personal communication, 2002) Is forgiveness possible in all situations? Is it possible to forgive an incest perpetrator? Robert Enright documents this possibility in his book which is a 17 year study of the benefits of working through the process of forgiveness. When Nelson Mandela comes to power in South Africa after being unjustly incarcerated for 27 years many expected him to take revenge on the relatively small white community which had governed South Africa since its colonization in the seventeenth century. When this does not happen Mandela wins the admiration of the world and the Noble Peace Prize.

Forgiveness is the consequence of reframing (Berecz) by the victim, the coming to an understanding of why the perpetrator inflicted the hurt. It is to see the perpetrator with eyes of compassion and understanding. This means the perpetrator's guilt is reduced, which in turn makes it easier for the victim to give up the desire for revenge.

Forgiveness is an attitudinal shift in the victim and is independent of the perpetrator's attitudes or actions. The perpetrator may never know of this forgiveness since: they may have passed away; moved to an unknown location; the victim may not have the courage, the skill or the desire to communicate forgiveness; or communicating this forgiveness to the perpetrator might empower

and embolden them. Once forgiveness has been achieved the victim experiences release.



Enwright is of the opinion that, “Forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give yourself. . . Forgiveness is essential for human redemption, it is a moral quality which must be enlisted or exercised to deal with hate for others and for self. . . The process of pain often helps a person to come to grips with the necessity of forgiveness.”

He understand that forgiveness is a prerequisite for healing and that the good that comes from forgiveness cannot be overestimated in the long run. (Enwright)

We also need to think about how to deal with the guilt incurred by the perpetrator. If this guilt is not dealt with the abuse of others will continue as a consequence of the frustration caused by unresolved guilt.

**Release from Guilt**

In order to deal with the guilt incurred, the perpetrator needs to own or take responsibility for the hurt caused. This is accomplished with confession and the desire to make restitution. Restitution means restoring what has been taken from the victim. Direct restitution may be impossible. The mother of an aborted fetus may attempt restitution by adopting a child or joining a pro-life group or volunteering at a child agency but she cannot restore life.

Restitution was prominent in the Old Testament where the perpetrator had to take a valuable animal and sacrifice it. This act included both confession and indirect restitution. It appears that there can be no release from guilt without restitution. We will come back to this idea later. Every perpetrator who seeks release from guilt longs to know the victim has forgiven them. This will not always happen. There are some victims who are never able to forgive. Release from guilt, while aided by forgiveness from the victim, is the result of restitution having been made by the perpetrator or his agent

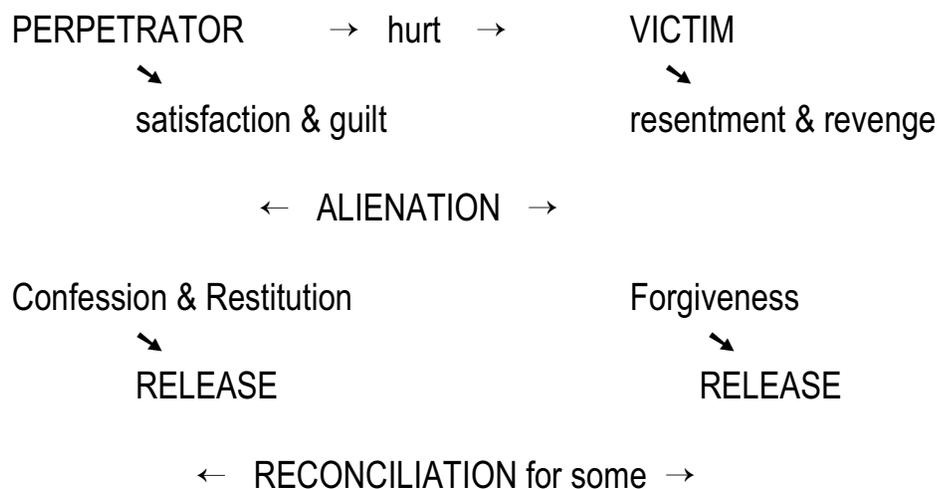
In common language the term “forgiveness” some times describes all the elements of the cycle we have discussed so far. It seems advisable, if we are to

think carefully, to separate the process of dealing with resentment or revenge and that of dealing with guilt. "Forgiveness" better describes the process of dealing with revenge by the victim and "Restitution" the process of dealing with guilt in the perpetrator.

### Release and Reconciliation

The most satisfactory outcome of both forgiveness by the victim and restitution by the perpetrator would be reconciliation between the two parties. However, reconciliation is not always possible since the perpetrator might have passed away, might have remarried, or might not be able to control the issues which result in the hurt. The spouse of an alcoholic can forgive the alcoholic and the alcoholic can deal with the guilt but it might not be wise for the two of them to live together. In this case we have release for both parties but limited if any reconciliation. There are very few divorced couples who can reconcile but some couples can forgive and release each other to new relationships.

Both perpetrator and victim can be released, but only some will reconcile (Berecz). We hope for reconciliation but on this planet it is not always possible. Forgiveness is possible for all who choose it. Guilt is more difficult to deal with. Later it will be suggested that all human beings experience unresolved guilt apart from accepting God's intervention.



In real life, everyone is both a victim and a perpetrator. We inflict hurt because we feel we have been victimized. Part of the hurt we inflict is that which we inflict on ourselves. Negative thinking about ourselves is one way we do this but the most extreme form of self-hurt is suicide. This cycle of hurt and revenge rolls inexorably onwards, sometimes unconsciously, unless there is a determined effort to forgive and make restitution where necessary.

We now consider some of the terms which are related to forgiveness and guilt.

**Acceptance**

It is normal, because of the desire for self-preservation - especially to escape the memory of the pain suffered, for a victim to avoid, reject or distance a perpetrator. The victim may not desire revenge but at the same time cannot face the perpetrator, or grant the perpetrator acceptance. This is not a lack of forgiveness but the inability to accept the perpetrator because of the pain from the past.. The victim's own insecurity, poor self-image, incorrect understanding may prevent acceptance even when forgiveness have been fully achieved. The cause could be fear created by differences in gender, culture, language, economic status or race.

Atheists, for instance, refuse to accept God into their world and yet do not consciously accuse God of any hurt inflicted on them. Since God is love He cannot do evil. When He is rejected, it is not because He needs forgiveness for a hurt He has caused, even though He is often accused of hurt or negligence. When a child is hanged during the holocaust and someone asks "Where is God?" it is as if they feel that God has wronged the child by not stepping in and preventing this execution. However, when it is realized that God was on the scaffold suffering with the child, then acceptance of God becomes a distinct possibility.

**Confession**

**Confession**, the acknowledgement of wrong doing by the perpetrator, will usually make forgiveness easier for the victim. However, sometimes confession actually makes forgiveness more difficult. The confession of a secret affair may make forgiveness very difficult for a spouse. If the parents of Amy Biel, a young Fulbright scholar killed in Guguletu, South Africa, had known who the perpetrators of their daughter's murder were they might have settled for justice in the court system. Since they never did find out who they were they finally had to decide if they could forgive them without any confession by them. When they created "The Amy Biel Foundation," which helps young people in South Africa and the United States of America deal with violence and its effects, they dealt with their loss and demonstrated their forgiveness even though there was no confession.

**Justification**

To **justify** someone is to argue that the person is innocent of the wrong doing of which they are accused. Thus forgiveness and justification are not synonyms. It is the guilty who need forgiveness, the innocent need justice. When David Milgaard, imprisoned for 23 years in Canada for a crime he did not commit, is released from prison he does not need forgiveness, he needs a declaration of his innocence or justification by the Government of Canada to facilitate his acceptance back into society after his incarceration.

**Pardon**

Forgiveness and **pardon** are not synonyms. It is possible to pardon without

forgiving because one has other ends in view. One can write off a bad debt because the hopes of recovering the money are negligible and there are tax benefits from the write off. Kings and presidents often pardon a few criminals from the remainder of their prison sentences when they are installed. This does not mean they are forgiven, it simply means their sentence is reduced and they are excused from the remainder of the penalty.

### **Reformation**

**Reformation** implies a change in behaviour whereas **repentance** is the change in attitude. The most desirable situation is where repentance leads to reformation. Sometimes, there is reformation out of fear rather than because of a change in attitude. Forgiveness, while made easier by repentance and reformation, does not depend on these responses. It is a sovereign gift the victims give to perpetrators and also to themselves. The victim does not even have to tell the perpetrator of this forgiveness. Sometimes the perpetrator has passed away by the time the victim is able to forgive. At other times communicating forgiveness could enable an abuser.

### **Restitution**

Forgiveness and **restitution** are distinct in that restitution means that the perpetrator has repaid the hurt to the victim in some way. If I steal your bicycle, and then come to repentance and return the bicycle I have made restitution. You may or may not forgive me. Restitution is made by the perpetrator. The victim is the one who must forgive. Restitution, even when it has been made, does not guarantee forgiveness by the victim, although it does make it easier. It is not possible to restore a murder victim and yet it is possible for the family to forgive the murderer.

In Zimbabwe there was a practice, in at least one tribe, in which restitution was made in the following way: the daughter of a murderer's family was given to the victim's family so she could raise up life to replace the life taken. (Personal Communication with Damton Phiri, 2003)

### **Reconciliation**

Forgiveness and **reconciliation** are also distinct concepts. Reconciliation means a damaged relationship has been restored. Interestingly, reconciliation may be achieved without forgiveness taking place. In the case of a unfaithful spouse the relationship might continue because the victim is dependant on the security and the advantages the relationship offers. In this situation the aggrieved spouse is often waiting for an opportunity to take revenge. In such cases, the victim does not trust the perpetrator and raises the issue of unfaithfulness as often as possible to "get at" the other. On the other hand, a victim can forgive an abuser but refuse to have them in close proximity out of fear of the situation reoccurring.

**Disjunctive and Conjunctive Forgiveness**

Where we have forgiveness without reconciliation we have disjunctive forgiveness. An example of disjunctive forgiveness would be the relationship between Christ and His executors. Christ forgave them but there was no apparent response from them or change in relationship with them (Luke 23:34). Conjunctive forgiveness describes the situation where forgiveness and reconciliation have taken place. An example would be the thief on the cross who responded positively to Christ's suffering, he experienced the forgiveness of Christ and was reconciled to Him for all eternity (Luke 23:43).

There is no escaping the **guilt** experienced by the perpetrator, be the hurt against oneself or another. Many women who have an abortion indicate, in one way or another, their need of self-forgiveness. Men who go to war suffer from the guilt of the enormity of what happened during this time. The guilt they experience surfaces in many and varied ways often, simply called Post Traumatic Stress.

It is appropriate to quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu at this point:

Only forgiveness can set free both the victim of oppression and the perpetrator of oppression.

**Sin**, for the perpetrator, is not only the hurt caused but the refusal to own the hurt and to make no effort at restitution. Sin, for the victim, is to retain the right to revenge. Since we are all both victims and perpetrators we caught in the double bind of sin. It takes the miracle of God's grace to enable us to deal with our situation. It is out of the divine-human relationship, modelled so profoundly by Christ on the cross, that we find the inspiration and the power to deal with sin. We now examine this relationship.

**The Divine-human Relationship**

In the divine-human relationship, we humans are the perpetrators and God is the victim. Sin, after all is exercising the potential to hurt oneself and others (JA Fourie), including God. This amazing situation is clear from an understanding of the cross and forgiveness. At the cross, creatures murdered their Creator. The hurt we inflicted on God was physical and emotional. If anyone has a justifiable right to revenge it is God. We derived satisfaction in killing God because He showed us up for what we are, mean spirited, full of hatred, revenge and murder. His life and death demonstrated God's willingness to take responsibility for sin and by contrast showed our failure to take responsibility for hurting others and ourselves.

We all experience the guilt of mankind's actions at Calvary in that we are hostile to God (Romans 8:7) and thus also towards each other. Perhaps this is difficult to comprehend but when we are hostile towards any part of God's creation we are also hostile towards Him because all of His creation is precious in His eyes. Before there can be reconciliation with God we need to confess or acknowledge our

part in this tragedy and then make restitution where we can.

God has created us with freedom of choice. The best evidence that we actually have choice is what we did when He came to earth with the best intentions towards us "from His grace we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1). When we chose to murder Him we demonstrated that we are truly free to choose our actions. This choice of His, to let us have our way with Him, is a revelation of the pain that He has experienced all through history from sin. It is as if God was demonstrating to us that hurt has to be absorbed if there is ever to be a solution to the cycle of hurt, revenge, hurt.

### **God and Forgiveness**

It can be argued that God never has feelings of resentment or the desire for revenge. However this would mean that forgiveness cannot be linked with God since He no more feels resentment towards sinners than a good parent is resentful towards a baby who needs a diaper change in the middle of the night. What then shall we do with all the forgiveness language of the Scriptures? In one sense these statements are accommodations to our limited understanding of the nature of God. However, what can be said with certainty, is that God's attitude is one of loving acceptance for all perpetrators or people according to the Scriptures. Thus the problem in the cycle of hurt and revenge is never God's problem but our problem.

First, we cite some of the evidence we have that God has no resentment or desire for revenge against those who have caused His hurt.

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The reason why we are to be kind, compassionate and forgiving is because God has been kind and compassionate and forgiving. This is the spring from which right thoughts and right feelings flow. **God**, the creator of the universe, **has forgiven us all our sins**. This is true from the following passages.

Isaiah 44:22 (NIV) **I have swept away your offences like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist**. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.

The sun simply evaporates the morning mist. God can do this with our sin. We cannot do it for our sins. Our sins are as deadly as the worst virus on the planet. If we do not take our sin seriously we will die the eternal death.

Luke 23:34 (NIV) Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them**, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

This passage is usually thought of as a prayer. It might rather be the last teaching

of Jesus on the compassion and love of the Father's heart before He died.

John 3:17 (NIV) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but **to save the world through him.**

Some who met Jesus experienced condemnation to the point they wanted to execute Him. This was the consequence of their accumulated guilt rather than the attitude of Jesus. Jesus came to seek and to save all men and women.

John 8:10 (NIV) Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?" 11 "No-one, sir," she said. "Then **neither do I condemn you,**" Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Condemnation is the opposite of justification or declaring a person innocent. To condemn is to decide the perpetrator is guilty. So we have the situation where we are clearly guilty and God forgives us. But He does more, He justifies us, declares us innocent and so perhaps in the end we shall understand that divine forgiveness is declaring us innocent. This is a tribute to God's grace and not an excuse for us to remain the wicked beings we are.

Acts 10:43 (NIV) All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him **receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**"

The cause of our forgiveness is the name or the character of God. It is God's nature not to be resentful or revengeful. This is so different to our natures that we have difficulty comprehending God's gracious attitude towards us. As a consequence we have made all sorts of necessary conditions for receiving God's free forgiveness. This attitude of ours is perhaps best illustrated by the selling of indulgences (forgiveness) by the Mediaeval Church.

1 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV) Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--**as you really are.** For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

The Passover lamb was slain to give the Israelites protection against the death of the firstborn in Egypt. Jesus death ensures, in this metaphor, that we are safe from the wages of sin, eternal death. All is forgiven. If we remain in the house with lintels on which the blood of Jesus has been painted, we are safe.

2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV) that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, **not counting men's sins against them.** And he has committed

to us the message of reconciliation.

God, according to this passage, has never held men's sins against them. It is our guilty consciences which hold our sins and the sins of others as a threat.

Colossians 2:13 (NIV) When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. **He forgave us all our sins**, 14 having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Some translations are clearer than others on exactly what was "nailed to the cross." Here are some of them, "cancelled the bond" - New English Bible, "arrest warrant" - Message Bible, "charges proved against us" - Living Bible, "the record that contained the charges against us" - New Living Translation. The greek word translated in so many different ways is *choreographon*, and we now know this word means a promissory note hence the many translations which go this route. The previous verse ends with the statement, "He forgave us all our sins." Verse 14 is a direct continuation of this thought. For all these reasons it must be clear that our sins or our guilt was nailed to the cross.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**

Hebrews 10:14 (NIV) because **by one sacrifice he has made perfect** for ever those who are being made holy.

1 John 2:12 (NIV) I write to you, dear children, **because your sins have been forgiven** on account of his name.

This He has already done in Christ who came to the earth to demonstrate this attitude of God 2000 years ago. We are not forgiven because Jesus died. No! Jesus died because we were already forgiven. If God had not already forgiven us, Jesus would never have come because God knew what we would do to His Son. For Christians, our attitudes towards each other are premised on the kindness, compassion and forgiveness of God. I am not kind to you because you are kind to me. I am kind to you because God is kind to me.

The traditional Christian teaching on forgiveness is that forgiveness cannot occur without confession having taken place or in other words, confession earns forgiveness. There is a long tradition in Judaism which supports this view and reading Psalm 32 and 51 make it clear that David's claim on God's forgiveness is

his repentance. One New Testament passage which apparently supports the view that God's forgiveness is earned by confession is,

1 John 1:9 (NIV) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The interpretation which withholds God's forgiveness until we confess is probably our desire to withhold forgiveness from those who have hurt us until they are willing to confess. However, this interpretation cannot be held if the preceding and the succeeding verses are read.

1 John 1:8 (NIV) If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:10 (NIV) If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

These two verses are referring to those who are claiming to be sinless. The middle verse, verse 9, states that if we are willing to acknowledge that we are sinners, we need have no fear that God has not forgiven us and, further, that He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is one of the clearest indications that Jesus has made restitution for our guilt and we are free from guilt. So this verse, rather than being a condition for forgiveness is a promise to those who realize their sinfulness, of God's lavish forgiveness. It is a positive promise flanked by two negative statements which are describing our denial and/or rebellion.

There are two reasons why our only hope is in the unconditional forgiveness of God: No one ever remembers all the sins they have committed; No one ever recognizes all the sins they are guilty of. If forgiveness is based on confession we have no hope of forgiveness for all our sins except those few we recognize or remember.

The truth is - God's forgiveness is based on His love and His grace and not our responses. Yes, confession is desirable and therapeutic because we are confronting our failures for God's glory and our joy. Confession is the perpetrator's responsibility and is necessary for possible reconciliation and is part of restitution. This might never be forthcoming yet the victim can still forgive.

It is because we are forgiven that we have the courage to confess our sinfulness and our specific sins. Confession of our state and our unkind acts helps us to confront our need of salvation, it helps to restore relationships, it gives evidence of the effectiveness of the changes God's love makes in human lives. Confession is therapeutic in every way but it is not the cause or condition of divine forgiveness which originates in the gracious heart of God.

God is the one who forgave us. So often we think Jesus forgave us but God is somehow made of sterner stuff. The root of our forgiveness is in the very heart of God the Father. It is God who loved the world so much He gave His Son. All glory to the Father.

### **Dealing with our Guilt before God**

Dealing with our guilt is where the real magic of God's grace shines in its most illustrious form. Lady Macbeth walks around the castle at night going through the motions of washing her hands and saying, "Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." With cold blooded murder pressing on her mind and heart how shall she be released from her guilt?

Guilt is the consequence of violating our sense of justice or personal integrity. We all have a sense that there is a right way and wrong way. We may differ on what is right, but we all know about a right way. When we choose the wrong way we experience guilt before ourselves. Guilt occurs when we know the wrong we did. Shame occurs when we have guilt but do not know what caused this feeling. Shame is much more difficult to deal with than guilt.

We also know inherently that in order to deal with guilt we must make restitution. But how shall Lady Macbeth make restitution for murder? She cannot give back the life she destroyed. How shall a mother make restitution to an aborted foetus?

In these instances and many others, we cannot make restitution or obtain release from our guilt. However, God can do this for us because He can give back life. He can make restitution under all circumstances. He can bring the murdered king back to life. He can recreate the aborted fetus in the future on this planet or another planet in the universe. When Isaiah says,

53:4 (NIV) Surely he took up our infirmities (guilt) and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities (guilt); the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

he is saying that God has assumed our guilt and He has made restitution for all crimes, committed by all people, for all time. This is the wonder of understanding what God has done for us guilt laden people on this planet. It is breathtaking for those who wish to be released from their guilt. Thank you God for the graciousness of your heart. God has rewritten our history. He has created our future; He has given us meaning and purpose and courage for the present.

Remember now the prayer Jesus taught His disciples,

Matthew 6:12 (NIV) Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our

debtors.

It is as we forgive that we start to appreciate some of the depth of God's overflowing acceptance towards us. Go now and forgive the person who has deeply wounded or hurt you for God's sake and your highest joy.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion we may say that to forgive is to give up the justifiable right to revenge. To forgive is necessary when one has been wounded and experienced hurt. It is to recognize any feelings of resentment are unworthy of the noble life to which God has called us. Forgiveness is something that the victim does irrespective of the attitude or response of the perpetrator. Forgiveness is not necessarily reconciliation. Sometimes the perpetrator has died but still holds power over us because we have not dealt with the hurt. Forgiveness is not co-dependancy where the victim enables the perpetrator. Forgiveness is an attitudinal stance which occurs because the forgiver has learned to love, or as in the case of God, is love.

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## ***Who done it? by Job***

**T**he right place to start a book is at the beginning if you want to follow the author's plot unfold. If you cannot wait to know "who done it," better read the last chapter first. The Bible, being amongst other things great literature, is full of surprises. One of these surprises is that in probably the first written of the sixty-six books, the villain is unmasked for the discerning reader. Once this is noticed, the understanding of the rest of the Bible is dramatically and radically different. Certainly, the book of Job is about three misguided comforters; the ignorance of Job; his sour wife; the creative power of God; and a tragic story of misfortune and restoration; but the most important part of the book lies elsewhere.

Here it comes then. Right in chapter one (verse 11) Satan says the following to God:

But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face.

There it is. If God will strike Job then Job's attitude will change. The next verse continues,

The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

So apparently, God is going to strike Job, and this means Job is in Satan's hands. Are God and Satan in cahoots in the misfortunes that fall on Job? Do they both actively plan and execute the tragedies that strike him? When verse 16 states that the "fire of God" destroyed the sheep and herders. Is this a literal statement? Definitely not. We know what is going on. God's protection must be removed before Satan can touch this obedient child of God. It is all there for us to read. God is the protector and Satan the destroyer. When God commands Satan not to touch the man himself we again have confirmation of who destroys and who protects.

These roles are confirmed so strongly in chapter two that only those who choose to be blind cannot see it. God challenges Satan in verse three:

"Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him without any reason." "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The Lord said to Satan. "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you

must spare his life."

There it is again "You (Satan) must spare his life." If that is not enough, read the next verse.

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. (**Job 2:3-8**)

One cannot miss it. Satan is the destroyer and God is the protector. All at once we have identified the source of trauma and tragedy, doubt and discouragement, pain and persecution. But we have also discovered much more, we have identified the Hebrew mind set that permeates all of the Bible. In the writer's mind, the all powerful God is the source of all these misfortunes because He allows them at the horrible hand of the deceiving serpent, Satan, who deceives the whole world. (**Revelation 12:9**)

Satan certainly deceived Job. While we can read the first two chapters and understand what is going on behind the scenes Job was ignorant of all this negotiation. Throughout the narrative he demonstrates that he believes all his misfortune comes from God. Here are some examples:

2:<sup>10</sup> He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, **Job** did not sin in what he said.

6:<sup>4</sup> The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshalled against me. (Cf **10:2,3; 13:21; 16:7-9; 17:6; 19:6,22**)

That is the key that unlocks the whole drama that will unfold in the following sixty-five books. Get it in your head, cherish it and the God who loved unto death emerges from the pages that have been smudged and dusted with misapprehension about the character and the government of the Creator, Maintainer, Redeemer God. Will you be led astray by the Deceiver as you read the Scriptures? It has happened before.

You diligently study the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (**John 5:39,40**)

Take courage, it requires a great deal of effort to change the way we have thought for years or decades but it is worth the effort since "truth" **is** the pearl of great price. There is more from the story. In this dialogue between God and the devil we have illustrated, the conflict between good and evil, between right and wrong, between love and selfishness, between light and darkness. God is being challenged from

all sides by evil. The devil accuses Job of serving God for the protection he gets out of it. How shall the question be answered? For what reason or reasons does Job actually serve God? There is only one way to answer the accusation. God has to allow trouble to come to Job. It is a risk He has to take, and it is the cost of freedom. In taking the risk on Job, God opens Himself to blame for being responsible for all the evil that comes to Job.

The great news from the story of Job is, however, that he comes through with flying colours on this central issue. While Job has many misunderstandings about God his loyalty is unsullied. He does not turn on God because of his misfortunes. He is not God's friend for what he can get out of Him. Here is a man who operates on the principles of heaven.

But then God has, and continues to be accused of evil in the creation of every being who started out good and turned bad. Since God knew the future, He is responsible for all evil beings even though they started out good. He knew it would end up being bad, therefore He is party to the cause of evil. Some would argue that God went ahead and created evil because His rightness would be all the more visible and prominent as a result of the contrast between good and evil.

This is where the cross of Calvary finds its centrality in Christian thinking. At the cross, God in Christ was faced with the supreme test of His being: Is there any selfishness in God? To Christ it appears that He is dying forever at the hands of His creation. Shall He die forever or shall He go back to Heaven? When Christ cries out,

My God why hast Thou forsaken me? (**Matthew 27:46**)

He expresses a blackness of depression that prevented His seeing through the gates of the grave. At that moment Jesus believed He was dying forever. That is the triumph of the Cross. God would rather die than have His creation lose hope and life. That is the magnificent answer of love to the supposed "selfishness" of God.

Perhaps it would have been better to place the book of Job right at the beginning of the Old Testament. In that way many of the misconceptions created by the first five books would have been prevented. But then again possibly not. Most readers seem to have missed the implications of what the book teaches in essence. The right perspective is not easy to gain and to maintain because the evil one has sowed weeds in the wheat. It takes a lot of mental weeding to keep the wheat clean in our minds but it can be done and must be done by God's friends. So do it!

## God and Judgement

The "day of the Lord" is a favourite phrase of the Old Testament prophets (**Isaiah 13:6; Joel 2:11,31; Zechariah 14:6; Malachi 4:5**) and it referred to the time when Messiah would judge and punish the nations, and take over the world for righteousness.

In **Acts 17:30,31** Paul, the great gospel preacher, calls men to repentance and holy living for the day of judgement is yet future. In **Jude 14,15** Enoch, the seventh from Adam proclaims that all men will come to judgement and this judgement will condemn the godless. **Hebrews 10:26,27** speaks of a fearful expectation of the judgement.

In **Daniel 7:9,10,22**, a judgement scene, the books are opened, and the kingdom is given to the saints. In **2 Peter 3:6,7** judgement is linked with the day of the Lord. **Romans 2** is the good news and the bad news about the judgement. Jesus predicts that careless words will condemn men in the judgement

**Matthew 12:36** (NIV) But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

**Matthew 25:30** indicates a judgement.

The curse is upon you; go from my sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels.

**Matthew 25:41** assumes a day of recompense. Scripture is clear there will be a day of Judgement or Crises in the future.

Jesus brings another perspective on the judgement.

The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son. (**John 5:22,27**)

For judgement I (Jesus) have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind. (**John 9:39**)

From these statements it seems the judgement is the reaction people have towards the Christ. Jesus has judged us worthy of His company but we judged Him unworthy and crucified Him. The judgement of Jesus also has to do with the condemnation of the evil one.

When he (Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgement, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (**John 16:8-11**)

It is thus clear that Jesus does not regard judgement as condemnation from Himself or the Father. Sin is rejecting your Saviour, and judgement or condemnation is upon the devil, not sinners. Sinners condemn themselves in the way they treat God. Judas destroyed himself by betraying Jesus. He experienced this self-condemnation and hanged himself as a consequence.

According to Scripture the universe also participates in judgement. In **Daniel 7:9,10** the angels are all at the judgement. The two symbolic angels above the ark of the covenant (**Exodus 37:7-9**) faced the mercy seat with reverent wonder and the question, "How can God forgive sinners and yet be just?" The embroidered angels on the veils in the sanctuary also symbolized angelic interest in the salvation of men. How can it be that sinful men will be forgiven and then become their neighbours?

It is also helpful to recognize what the judgement does not do. Firstly, the judgement does not provide information for God. He is omniscient, He knows all. Secondly, the judgement does not condemn. Condemnation is from our own conscience and our rejection of the compassion of Christ. (**John 3:18**) But for God's grace, we flee His presence, because of the condemnation we experience. We experience the same condemnation Adam and Eve felt after sinning in the garden of Eden and like them, we also seek to hide.

The Judgement appears to be concerned with the revealing of information to the universe about matters in the great controversy. **Amos 3:7** states the Sovereign Lord never does anything without revealing his plans to His servants, the prophets. The judgement is thus an opportunity for the universe to come to their own conclusions about God. This is an ongoing process since **Revelation 12:7** indicates an ideological battle rather than a physical battle. God does not need angels to throw the Evil one out as God is omnipotent, as the following quote suggests.

Satan's representations against the government of God, and his defense of those who sided with him, were a constant accusation against God. His murmurings and complaints were groundless; and yet God allowed him to work out his theory. God could have destroyed Satan and all his sympathizers as easily as one can pick up a pebble and cast it to the earth. But by so doing he would have given a precedent for the exercise of force. All the compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. He would not work on this line.

He would not give the slightest encouragement for any human being to set himself up as God over another human being, feeling at liberty to cause him physical or mental suffering. This principle is wholly of Satan's creation. (RH, September 7, 1897)

The removal of Satan and his sympathizers from heaven was a consequence of the remaining angels deciding they no longer had any sympathy for them. The judgement has to do with created beings making decisions about God rather than God deciding about His creatures. This is the reason there are so many songs about the righteousness of God in the book of **Revelation (11:15-19; 14:7, 15:4; 16:5; 19:1-2, 20:4)**.

The Sodom and Gomorrah Judgement (**Genesis 18:20-32**) indicates how anxious God is to have His friends understand what is going on in the great controversy. God knew the situation in Sodom, Abraham did not! After the interaction between God and Abraham, Abraham was satisfied God had done His best when the flames engulfed the city on the next day.

**Job 2:1,2** indicates Satan was allowed access to the courts of Heaven after Adam and Eve sinned. In **John 12:31-33** Jesus is sure that Satan will be cast out of the court of Heaven as a consequence of what was about to happen at Calvary.

**Revelation 12:10** labels Satan as the "Accuser of the brethren" and this role would thus have been reduced after the cross. This view is supported by **Colossians 2:15**

. . . Christ stripped the spiritual rulers and authorities of their power.  
(marginal reading in TEV)

In **John 19:30** "It is finished" refers to the answering of Satan's accusation that God is essentially selfish. Here was God (Jesus) prepared to die the eternal death for those who were murdering Him. At the cross God provided a complete atonement in that, man can add nothing to improve on God's provision; and secondly, salvation has been provided for every man and woman. The judgement at the cross is also the judgement we made about God in a human body: "Crucify Him," "Betray Him," "Deny Him," and "Forsake Him," are our judgements on God.

The Pre-advent judgement is clearly indicated in Scripture. "The hour of His judgement has come" (**Revelation 14:7**) indicates an end time judgement. We are a spectacle to the universe, which includes the world. (**1 Corinthians 4:9**) In the picture given in **Daniel 7:26,27** the court sits and sovereignty is given to the saints **before the coming of the Son of Man**.

The Good News of the Judgement is that Jesus is our defence and he has never lost a case!

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. (**John 6:37**)

Furthermore, if we fail He personally takes up the matter when we come to Him.

If we sin we have an advocate. (**1 John 2:1**)

The outcome of the matter is also certain.

Who hath the Son hath life. (**1 John 5:12**)

The wedding garment, or our fitness for heaven, comes with the invitation. (**Matthew 22:11-12**) Actually, Scripture is insistent that every provision for our acquittal and acceptance has already been made:

For by one offering he has perfected for all time . . . (**Hebrews 10:15**)

A new era is about to be. There is no sea (**Revelation 21:1**) means there is no physical separation. The New city (**Revelation 21:2**) means perfect physical security. God being there (**Revelation 21:3**) means perfect spiritual security. The tears all wiped away (**Revelation 21:4**) means perfect emotional security. The gates that never close and the absence of night means freedom from all fear. (**Revelation 21:25**) The absence of impurity (**Revelation 21:27**) means there is no selfishness .

Tragically, **Revelation 6** tells how men and women will cry on the rocks to fall on them at the Second Coming. They have judged God unworthy of their respect and admiration and, tragically, would prefer suicide to life with God. It is the story of Judas all over again on a more massive stage. That is the awfulness of sin.

The Millennial Judgement describes a long time in heaven to explain all those questions that we have wondered about through the years. (**Revelation 20:1-6**) This is the time when we find out why some are there and others are not.

It is God's people who are to judge the world, surely you know that. And if the world is to come before you for judgement are you incompetent to deal with these trifling cases? Are you not aware that we are to judge angels? (**1 Corinthians 6:2**)

With all the information available in heaven we will decide if it is fair of God to have excluded the lost.

The Final Judgement occurs at the end of the millennium. According to **1 Corinthians 6:3** we are to judge angels. This judgement is confirmed in **Revelation 20:7-9,14,15**. Why resurrect the wicked, some of whom have suffered

torture and pain for years before dying? Because every parent must be satisfied that when their son is given a second chance he will not change his mind. He is an incurable rebel. The responsibility for sin is thus moved or placed where it belongs. It is the real version of the scapegoat symbolism in the Old Testament. **(Leviticus 16)**

When we make God the judge of the earth we do not take responsibility for ourselves. We are the ones who must decide who is worthy of our worship. You will judge today whom you will worship and admire. As for me, I will admire the patience and the forgiveness of God. I will live my life to honour Him since He has won my respect in every possible way. I have judged Him worthy of my worship, worthy of my adoration and admiration.

Isaiah 35:4 (niv) say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." 5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. . . . 8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10 and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.



## God and Justice

**T**raditionally Christians have held that the "justice of God" includes both negative and positive aspects. God's positive justice lies in His recreation of a new earth and new heaven in place of the sin polluted planet we now have. God's negative justice lies in that He punishes sinners, they get what they deserve. Sheila told me she became interested in God because she heard that He was going to have a judgment in which all the mean and evil people would be punished and this was music to her ears. This retributive justice is desirable to most religious people since they generally like to think they will come off best. For instance the Psalms are full of requests for redress in light of the unfairness or injustice on the planet. (**Psalm 58:6-11**)

Punishment must also be proportional to the crime, in this line of thinking. So we have, along these lines, the concept of some burning longer than others in Hell. The justice of God thus means the persecutors become the persecuted. Hell is thus revenge and retribution on a grand scale. Is this really what God's justice is about? Does God's justice parallel traditional human justice, which is often a euphemism for revenge.

**Justice** certainly means to be treated as one deserves. **Mercy**, on the other hand, is to be treated as one does not deserve and **grace** means to be treated far better than one deserves. While justice may have different meanings, in its primary meaning it has to do with being fair and impartial, that all situations are treated in a consistent manner. This would mean that all sinners should be punished in a manner proportional to their crime or sin. How is it then possible for God to grant mercy or grace to some sinners and not to others?

One very common Christian model, the so called forensic-penal one, holds that God punished Jesus in the sinners' place and thus the saints escape their due punishment. In this model it appears that God acts justly to sinners, they get what they deserve, but acts rather unjustly to saints because they get what they did not earn or deserve.

This model fails to take into account that Jesus died in place of **all** men and women. This is clear from many Scriptural passages.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us! (**Romans 5:8**)

The argument is strengthened in verses 15 to 19 of **Romans 5** where Paul is emphatic: just as sin came upon all men through one man, Adam, just so righteousness has come to all men through one man, Jesus Christ. Take, for instance, verse 18:

Consequently, just as the result of one man's trespass (Adam's sin) was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness

(cross) was justification that brings life for all men.

So, if Paul is right, and we have every reason to believe that he is, God will not punish a sinner for that which Jesus has already made atonement. So, how shall we now relate justice, mercy and grace?

Firstly, salvation is about restoring what is lost, not causing further loss. The grace of God lies in healing our eyes rather than removing them, as some Rabbi's interpreted the cause of Samson's blindness. In the story of the prodigal son, the father was interested in music, dancing and joy when the boy came home. The returning boy and the Father had lost so much already. It was the older brother that wanted "justice" and sulked when such was not forthcoming.

The grace or mercy of God means that in the new earth, the poor will be rich, the paralysed will be athletic, the blind will see and the deaf will hear. And they will hear much more than Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. It also means the abused in childhood will come to understand, probably for the first time, the meaning of intimacy.

There the weary and tired of earth will be eating more than huge chunks of cold water-melon on hot days from the tree of life. There the hungry will be able to become the finest gourmets. But best of all, those who lost family or friends will finally have their hurting hearts healed through the resurrection. That is positive justice. That is what God's salvation is all about.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!" Thank you John Newton for this, the most sung song on the English language! This one sentence rings across the decades and says all I wanted to say.

The tension between justice and mercy is partially solved by recognising that in the justice of God He has absorbed the punishment or consequence of sin. All men and women are forgiven.

**2Corinthians 5:21** (NIV) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There are new robes, beautiful sandals and golden rings for all. (**Luke 15**) It is far, far better than Aladdin merely offering new lamps for old. This is exactly the justice of God. He knows that we did not choose to be born on this planet, into a world of sin. He is perfectly just in that He forgave all of us, all our sins, and accepted us just as we are.

**Colossians 2:13** (NIV) When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Now the ball is in the sinners court. Will we believe the kindness of God or will we,

because of our pride, choose to battle it out alone, struggling to become good enough to earn God's favour?

The tragedy of our pride and unbelief is well illustrated in the demise of the anti-deluvians. The ark could have held them all, but they would not go in, even though every board and nail was an invitation to escape the coming catastrophe. Taking 120 years to build the ark, which God could have created instantaneously, was a demonstration of God's patient ongoing invitation to accept deliverance.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the city that would not be saved.

**Matthew 23:37** (NIV) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

At the end of the sixth chapter of Revelation we have sinners, forgiven by God, who would rather die than look on the face of Jesus.

**Revelation 6:15** (NIV) Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Strange but true. This attitude is illustrated in the life of Judas. Loved, educated, filled with the Holy Spirit to raise the dead and heal the sick, he still chose to turn from and betray his Redeemer.

Thinking this way makes me think a whole lot about God's grace, about my pride and my rejection of Him who loves and cares for me. These thoughts are worth thinking about! They are thoughts about eternity and destiny. We need to think these thoughts often.



## The Kindness of God

Is God, at the centre of His being, kind? Does the best mother's love for her child reflect God's love? Must we temper God's love with His justice? Is the love of God an extravagant, overflowing, Amazonian flood of kindness which deluges all people in the planet? Is His love the essence of His being or just one component of His being? To answer these questions we must investigate the witness of the Scriptures.

The New Testament presents an amazing picture of the kindness of God as demonstrated in the life of Jesus. A brief look at **The Gospel of Matthew** from chapter one will demonstrate this claim.

. . . He will save His people from their sins. (1:21)

Come follow Me . . . and I will make you fishers of men (4:19)

Jesus calls us primarily to friendship with Him. He does not see us as slaves or servants.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him **all** who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics and the paralytics, and **He healed them.** (4:23)

The unseen Centurion's servant is healed at the moment the request is made of Jesus (8:5-13). Peter's mother-in-law is instantly healed of a bad fever (8:14-15), and

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to Him, and He drove out the spirits with a word and healed **all** the sick. (8:16)

The two demon-possessed men of Gedara are delivered. (8:28-31)

The paralytic is healed. (9:1-8)

The healing of the bleeding woman and the raising of the ruler's daughter. (9:18-25)

Two blind men's sight is restored. (9:27-31)

The dumb are healed, the demon-possessed are delivered.. (9:32)

Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (11:28)

The world had never experienced anything like this before. Jesus brought a flood of kindness and healing to the people. The newness of the prophetic voice of Jesus was the picture of God's kindness that He brought to this planet. Forgiveness, in the Old Testament scheme of things, was the consequence of a life filled with radical repentance, consuming contrition and rising righteousness. (**Psalms 15, 32, 51**) People who were ill or poor were so because they were sinners. Those who were healthy and rich were so because they were upright. It was so simple for the successful and so hopeless for the hurting.

Jesus came and changed all this superstition. He forgave and healed gross sinners. He raised dead people who had never heard of Him, who were not consciously sorry for their sins and could not have had faith in Him. He healed ungrateful lepers. The God He "represented" was unheard of and unimagined. Actually, the grace and mercy Jesus breathed and spoke and lived is the greatest evidence that the God of the Bible is not an invention of some man's mind. Here is how one has described the reason for Jesus coming to our planet.

God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us. Yet these but imperfectly represent His love. Though all these evidences have been given, the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice, – one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. (SC 10,11)

But what about the passages in Scripture which seem to portray the very opposite picture of God. What about the God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Ananias and Sapphira? What about the God who sent the Israelites back into the desert for 40 years after they had spied the land for 40 days? What about a God who destroys with fire?

We do not have time and space to answer all the questions that arise but here are a few suggestions that help establish the unbelievable love of God for sinners.

The explanation for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah given in Isaiah is interesting.

**Isaiah 13:19** (NIV) Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Babylon was destroyed by the Medes and Persians under the command of Cyrus in 539 B.C.. We would hardly attribute this destruction to God but Isaiah does and Isaiah further says that this was the way that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. This does not mean that the Medes and Persians destroyed these cities but rather that they were destroyed by “natural” means if we knew the whole story.

When Jesus suggests that it is necessary to hate your father and mother (**Luke 14:26**) in order to be His disciple He is making a point about priorities. “Hate,” used in this sense means to “like less than.” Jesus is saying, unless your love for Me is greater than your love for earthly family and friends you will end up deserting me. Some of the modern translations have captured this meaning.

What about,

Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated? (**Malachi 1:3**)

Paul also uses this statement in **Romans 9:13**. However, the same Paul, in **1 Timothy 2:4** writes that “it is God's will that **all** men should come to salvation.” We must have Paul consistent with himself. The Malachi statement, made in foreknowledge, does not cause Jacob's love for God and Esau's apathy, but predicts the choices the sons made. In **the Epistle to the Romans**, Paul appeals to his fellow Jews to wake up and accept God's way of salvation rather than depending on their ancestry, and the supposed predestination of the Old Testament. All Paul is trying to say in this passage is that in the same godly family it is possible for the children to choose salvation or destruction. It depends on the individual's choice, not on God's choice.

One passage about the terrible burning fire at the end of the world is found in **Revelation 14:10b,11a**:

He will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.

The apparent meaning of this passage is that “the holy angels and the Lamb” watch some sort of inquisitorial punishment by fire which lasts for eternity.

Here is an alternative view of what the passage means. **Isaiah 34:9-15** describes how Edom was to be destroyed in almost the same terms as used in **Revelation 14**.

**Isaiah 34:9** (NIV) Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulphur; her land will become blazing pitch! 10 It will not be

quenched night and day; its smoke will rise for ever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no-one will ever pass through it again. 11 The desert owl and screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb-line of desolation. 12 Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away. 13 Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls. 14 Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest. 15 The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate.

So, Edom's smoke rises "for ever" but at the same time birds live there. Clearly "eternal burning" in Hebrew thinking did not mean what it means in our thinking. In their way of speaking and writing it meant an inescapable fate. The fire could not be put out. **Even the "holy angels and the Lamb," who are present, cannot save one from the consequences of sin at the end of the world.**

While there is a fire at the end of the world it may not be literal. The fire may be symbolic of destruction and purification, but total destruction of sin and sinners is certain by God's own promise. Who starts the fire? Most Christians assume that it is God. Is this true? For the first time in history we know that humans can start a nuclear fire which we might not be able to put out before everyone on the planet is destroyed.

One can, if one is so inclined, take any of the passages which seem to portray God as harsh, arbitrary and vindictive and reinterpret them in the light of the knowledge that Jesus brought us of how God thinks, feels and acts towards His creation. We do this with a few Old Testament passages.

**2 Samuel 12:11** This is what the Lord says: "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight."

If we take this passage at face value we have a God who can think up this immoral act as a punishment for David's sin. This can hardly be true for a God who has

. . . no darkness in Him at all. (**1 John 1:5**)

A Bible scholar comments on this passage as follows:

Not that God prompted these acts of wickedness, but because of David's sin He did not exercise His power to prevent them. (PP739)

When we sin we open up windows through which the inherent consequences of sin and Satan-planned penalties can come. A drunken driver sets up greater probabilities for disaster. The possible resulting death to a victim is not God's punishment for some personal or family sin. It is the consequence of an alcohol befuddled brain. Clearly the above passage in **second Samuel** is the writer's interpretation of why Absalom had intercourse with his father's wives on the palace roof to consolidate his attempted take-over of political power.

Take the herder's statement in the book of **Job**

The fire of God fell from the sky. (**1:16**)

We know from reading the rest of the story that this fire was engineered by the devil himself to bring disaster after disaster on Job. The devil is doing his best to show that Job serves God for what he can get out of Him and not for any other reason.

We have already referred to the story of the venomous snakes in **Numbers 21**. A parallel passage is found in **Deuteronomy 8:15**

Who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water . . .

Refer also to **Isaiah 30:6**. And then notice this comment on the incident.

To punish them for their ingratitude, and complaining against God, the Lord **permitted** fiery serpents to bite them. . . . The Israelites, up to this time, had been preserved from these serpents in the wilderness, by a continual miracle; for the wilderness through which they travelled was infested with poisonous serpents. (1BC1119. Read also PP429)

Traditionally we have accepted that the people who lived before the flood were wicked, so very wicked that God decided to wipe them out. He provided the ark to save those who were willing to be saved but only eight people went in and the rest chose to take a chance on their fate and perished. Then God promised never to do this again, almost as if He had been a bit impetuous, and as a reminder that He had decided not to drown the wicked again, He placed a rainbow in the clouds. Is this not cynical of God when He knew that He would "destroy" sinners with fire the next time?

There is a alternative way of understanding what happened at the flood which makes for very different conclusions. Because of sin, the water canopy above the earth, which regulated the temperature and watered its surface, was

about to collapse. God warned Noah about the impending catastrophe and saved all who were willing. The rainbow is a promise that a universal flood will not, perhaps cannot occur again and a reminder of God's kindness at the time when there was such a disaster.

God's cry for His creation is reflected in **Hosea 11:8**,

How can I give you up?

The cry is not, "Now I must destroy you." God, in order to respect our freedom, has had to give us up to the consequences of that rebellion which includes coming under the influence of the cruelest of all foes, the devil. He has had to watch us suffer under the curse of sin time and time again. Notice this graphic description of the situation:

Our world is a vast lazar house, a scene of misery that we dare not allow even our thoughts to dwell upon. Did we realize it as it is, the burden would be too terrible. (Ed 263)

And as if that is not bad enough, Satan has managed to get most of the world to blame their sufferings on God. What a triumph for him. This perhaps explains the meaning of **Hosea 11:9**:

I will not let loose my fury, I will not turn around and destroy Ephraim; For I am God and not a man, the Holy One is in your midst.

God is not harsh, arbitrary and vindictive. He is God. He does not respond to evil with evil. He is God, the God of love and kindness and His response will be one of love and kindness.

One cause of the Israelite's suffering has been identified as follows:

. . . by departing from God's law the Hebrews had failed to become the people that God had desired to make them, and then all the evil which was the result of their own sin and folly they charged upon the government of God. So completely had they become blinded by sin. (PP605)

This desire to blame God for our problems is not new. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. The tragedy is that so few of us take responsibility for our own foolishness and its consequences.

From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false

conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself - as arbitrary, severe and unforgiving - that He might be feared, shunned and even hated by men. (5T738)

When this happens it is no wonder that the good news of God's love is rejected as being a travesty of justice, legal fiction or the desires of a fearful heart.

The truth of the matter with regard to the consequences of evil and the influence of the evil one are well described in the following passage.

Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, "No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work." The time is right upon us. The Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the earth. When the angel of mercy folds her wings and departs, Satan will do the evil deeds he has long wished to do. Storm and tempest, war and bloodshed - in these things he delights, and thus he gathers in his harvest. (RH, Sept 17, 1901)

Understand now the following Old Testament passages which tell of men killing each other at crisis moments in history, including the end of the world.

Judges 7:22 When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords.

2Chronicles 7:23 The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

Ezekiel 30:21 I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother.

Zechariah 14:13 On that day men will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other.

When God removes His friends from earth to heaven at the Second Coming there will be no restraining agencies left on the planet. The "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (**Matthew 5:13,14**) are gone, those who remain will be totally controlled by evil. The consequences are too horrible to imagine. Belsen, Auschwitz, Bosnia and Rwanda are warnings of the awful terror to come.

What will we choose to believe about the kindness of God? That is our choice and we must take responsibility for the choice we make. The consequences are there. If we believe in a vengeful God we give ourselves licence to be vengeful. The truth about Jesus and His Father sets us free from our own wickedness, that is why the search for truth is so important. It is the best reason to search for truth. The result is beyond joy. It is the "abundant life" (**John 10:10**) that Jesus came to share.



## The God of Love

**W**hat would you like said at your funeral? What would you like on your tombstone? I would like my epitaph to read "Here lies Ian Hartley. He spoke well of God." So let me try to speak well of God through this chapter.

John, the disciple who came to understand God best, wrote a great deal about what motivates God, how God thinks and feels at the centre of His being. John's witness is reliable. Early in his life he has an intense love of power (**Matthew 20:20,21**), at the end of his life he knows the power of love. He writes, for instance, in **1 John 4:8**:

God is love. Love is from God. If you do not love it is because you do not know God.

So, I think it is legitimate to substitute "God" for "love" in **1 Corinthians 13**.

Before I make the substitution I want to think for a minute about the relationship between love and God. Is love one of God's attributes together with others such as justice, mercy, faithfulness and so on? No, I believe that love forms the basis, the foundation, the essence, the spring, the source, the origin of God's character with all other attributes flowing as a consequence. If this is true it makes for some startling conclusions in the 15 points that Paul makes about love in **1 Corinthians 13**.

### God is patient.

He is "slow to anger" (**Exodus 34:6**) "not willing that any should perish" (**2 Peter 3:9**), but that all should be saved. (**1 Timothy 2:4**) He waited for 40 years before the Israelites were ready to enter Canaan. He waited 4000 years to come and tell us personally about Heaven. He has already waited another 2000 years for His bride! One of these days He will sigh the greatest sigh of relief in the universe when He says, "Now at last I can be with My people." (**Revelation 21:3**)

Actually, I believe that saying "God is patient" means that **God never gives up on us!** God never gives up on sinners. The sin against the Holy Spirit is sinners giving up on God! The close of probation is not God slamming the ark's door on sinners but sinners refusing point blank to go in. When Jesus says,

I am with you to the end of the world. (**Matthew 28:20**)

He means just that. Desertion was invented on this planet. The problem is here, not in heaven!

### God is kind.

In His grace "God gave His only son" to redeem men and women (**John 3:16**), and "the kindness of God leads to repentance" (**Romans 2:4**). One of the crimes we are most guilty of is discounting God's grace and limiting His kindness. We will prefix His grace with "but." If I say "God saves by grace" you inevitably retort, "but obedience is important." If God's kindness is as conditional as some perceive it, then the earth would have swallowed up the wicked men who accused, condemned and crucified Jesus Christ. Nothing like that happened. Strange. But then, if God is kind it is not strange at all that these men were treated with the utmost kindness and dignity. If God is kind then it is just natural that Jesus would pray forgiveness for those who murdered Him. For a kind God that would be just the thing to do.

### **God does not envy.**

Do not think that because you have everything you are immune from envy. Lucifer had all of heaven and was envious. God will never take anything from you. He does not begrudge you your small happiness on this planet. He wants you healthy, wealthy and wise. He wants you to have family and friends and a fabulous life. "I am a jealous God (**Exodus 20:5**) does not mean that God is envious. When a mother is jealous over her child, she has the highest concern for that child. I know God has the greatest concern for His children. Jealousy, in the negative sense, is born of insecurity. A mother is not insecure over her child. In a positive sense, jealousy is protective of the one that is loved.

### **God does not boast.**

When Moses asks "Who shall I say sent me?" God replies "I Am" (**Exodus 3:14**). He does not say "He who created the milky way," or "He who designed the duckbilled platypus," or "He who lifts the elephant with a small finger," or "He who pulls the dinosaur's tail." You will find no boasting by God in the book of Revelation. Yes, the saved cannot say enough about the Lord of Glory but that is another thing altogether for they are bursting with admiration for God.

### **God is not proud.**

We knew Him as the carpenter up the road. He lived on our street. He washed our feet. He left the throne of heaven, the adoration of the universe to be taunted and tempted. We despised Him, we neglected and rejected Him. Try neglecting and rejecting me and see how long it takes for me to move away or retaliate. I am embarrassed how little love and humility I have.

### **God is not rude.**

Well, what about calling the pious religious leaders of his day hypocrites, blind guides, blind fools, snakes, and murderers (**Matthew 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29**)? Yes, but in almost the same breath God can say, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I longed to gather your

children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. (**Matthew 23:37**) Something does not jell here. Bruce Marchiano, who plays the role of Jesus in the Movie "Matthew," played every scene with two assumptions: Jesus loves people, that is all people and He was a man of joy. These two concepts were clear to him as he immersed himself in the role. So when Jesus speaks to Jerusalem's religious leaders and says, "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? . . ." He does it from a heart of love for these leaders. There will be a poignant longing and a terrible sadness in his voice. ("In the Footsteps of Jesus," Harvest House, 1997.)

It seems the idiom has escaped the translators here as also in the wording of the Lord's prayer, "And lead us not into temptation." Now **James 1:13** is clear that God never tempts anyone, God never leads anyone into temptation. We are not sure of the body language of Jesus when He apparently calls the religious leaders of the day names. The way one says "blind guides" makes all the difference in the world as to the intent of the statement.

I know that children and feeble people came to Jesus, and they would not be drawn to a rude person. I know that when Judas came with the soldiers, Jesus did not refuse the kiss of death, He did not threaten the soldiers. He politely warned that there will come a day when all will all see King Jesus come and it will be a solemn day. He wept over Jerusalem instead of cursing that wicked city. I have a rude friend. What a pain it is to visit him. Heaven is a happy, inviting place for God is not rude.

### **God is not self-seeking.**

God had nothing to prove about Himself on this planet. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Our planet is not an experiment. God does not feel better off for what has happened on this planet. He would rather that it had never happened. Imagine His having to watch His children torture, kill and maim each other, often in the name of God. It has repeatedly broken His heart.

### **God is not angered.**

What about the cleansing of the temple by whipping the traders out (**Matthew 21:12**)? Well, what about the blind and the lame (**Matthew 21:14**) that came in as fast as the traders left? And when Jesus noticed the disciples were keeping the children away he was indignant! (**Mark 10:14**) We do the story an injustice to focus on the supposed anger of Jesus. The whip was for the cattle, conscience drove the traders out! Jesus wanted to clear the outer court so the Gentiles had their place of worship! This cleansing was also a parallel to the heart cleansing He desires so that there is a place where God can be worshipped in our body temples.

What about the "wrath of God?" The truth of the matter is that the "wrath of God" is God sadly allowing us our banquet of consequences (RL Stevenson). The "wrath of God" is a metaphor in which we try to describe the consequences of

evil (cf **Romans 1:17,24,26,28**). Because we get angry, we have created a God who reacts in the same way. If God got angry every time we sinned or wronged Him, He would have been angry for the last 6000 years. The opposite is true. All of Scripture indicates an inviting God. Jesus, after 4000 years of rejection, came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (**Luke 19:10**).

### **God keeps no record of wrongs.**

Well what about the books that are opened (**Daniel 7:10**)? Is there not a record kept of every deed we have done? Yes, in our minds, and the devil certainly keeps a record of all our evil deeds. He is the accuser and would use this information to destroy our confidence in God! But the most obvious meaning is that God keeps no record to hold against us! Students often keep records in their minds about their teachers and this record keeps them from the teacher's company in later life.

God has forgiven us our sins. He has forgiven every person ALL of their sins! Jesus died on the Cross to demonstrate the forgiveness of God.

While we were yet sinners Christ died for us! (**Romans 5:8**)

Can you believe that? God nailed all my sins on the cross of Calvary (Colossians 2:14). To be crucified means to be destroyed forever. That is what God has done with all my wrongs. The kindness of God takes my breathe away.

### **God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.**

That is how I know He is God, which is an abbreviation of Good. We delight in evil. It sells the tabloids. Murder outsells maternity, immorality outsells morality, bitching outsells bonding, wicked winning outsells fair losing and scheming outsells serving. God is pained by evil. He was pained to death by it!

### **God always protects.**

So why do some die? Why do some lose their jobs or money? Why do some lose their children? He will keep your life (**John 8:51**). He will keep you from the evil one. Money, houses and cars bring mostly cares. They all will pass away, but God and those who accept Him will live for ever! This planet is full of sin, or unrighteousness. Now unrighteousness means unfairness. That is what sin is: unfairness. Mafia bosses sometimes live long, healthy lives while Red Cross workers are raped and killed. Old cranks have all the money and health care while little children die because they have no food!

With the freedom that God gave us there is no way that He can simply over ride the consequences of our choices and the choices of others. When a teenager asks for the car keys on Saturday night for the first time, freedom and control are face to face. Parents want to protect their children from car accidents and the risk of late teenage drivers but they also want their children to grow up and

learn to take responsibility. To do that they must experience the freedom to be responsible. They have to “fly solo” if they are to be pilots!

**God always trusts.**

He trusts you with His reputation. He trusts you with His biological children. He trusts you to care for others emotionally and financially, He really trusts you to care for those around you. He entrusted Jesus to us via Mary and Joseph. He trusts you to make good choices.

**God always hopes.**

God believes in you. He hopes in you. He is disappointed when you turn Him away. “O Jerusalem I wanted to save you, I wanted, I really wanted you for myself.” “You're my city, my child, my bride!” are the sentiments of **Matthew 23:37**.

**God always perseveres.**

God never rejects people. Never, ever! People reject God. God perseveres. Christians sometimes argue on the basis of

the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit (**Matthew 21:43**)

that God has rejected the Jewish people. This is not true from Paul's view

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite Myself . . . (**Romans 11:1**)

The truth about God's perseverance has been there a long time for those who will understand:

I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. (**Deuteronomy 31:6**)

The story told in Hosea one and two of how Hosea never gives up on his wayward, wilful, wife illustrates the love of God for His straying people. God never rejects people. Never, ever! They might reject Him but it is never the other way around. Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost. No one who ever came to Jesus was ever rejected. His very words are,

whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (**John 6:37**)

**God never fails.**

He will win in the end, not because he is stronger than anyone else, but because he has loved more than anyone else. Love is the basis of God's Kingdom. It is the

strongest force in the universe. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated the truth of the saying, written long ago in the **Song of Songs** (8:6), that love is stronger than death. All the romantic writers have tried to express this sentiment through their Romeos and Juliets. Death with love is to be preferred to life without love. The love of God raises us up from the deadness of sin and eventually from deadness of the body.

One modern writer has grasped the meaning of God's love working in Christian hearts as follows.

Christian love is the unconquered goodwill which never knows bitterness and never seeks anything but the good of others. This is not a mere reaction of the heart, as human love is; it is a victory of the will, achieved by the help of Jesus Christ. It does not mean loving only those who love us; or those whom we like; or those who are lovable. It means an unconquerable-goodwill to even those who hate us, to those we do not like, to those who are unlovely. This is the very essence of Christian life; and it effects us in time and eternity." William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, p33)

### **Love is Vulnerability.**

To love someone is to be in relationship with them. This means at least the following: taking responsibility for the relationship's success; understanding the other person; offering acceptance, forgiveness and compassion; and pursuing purposeful communication. As a consequence, this means we become vulnerable to the one we are in relationship with. They are now able to hurt or wound us by their rejection or abuse of the relationship to which we are committed. Even loving a dog means my happiness is now connected with the dog's well being. A dog which I loved died on me after 11 years. I mourned for weeks. I think I still grieve for the loss of this canine friend. That is part of what it means to love.

This is why I think I was taught to minimize the number of people to whom would say "I love you!" It was a tacit recognition of the implications of loving. The more people we love the more likely we are to be hurt. So, keep your affections to yourself, was the prevailing wisdom. Today, it seems we go around loving ice cream, new cars, and who ever we meet. It is not true. Loving is hard work. Love is commitment and suffering with another when they are ill or in bad humour. It is inescapable commitment we make to anyone we love. The wedding vows of yester year understood these implications in the words: "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death us do part."

Where does this desire to be loved and to love originate. Why is it so important to most of us? This is a difficult question to answer. We know the desire, the need, is there. It is part of us. For Christians, the answer is that we were made

by God and God is love. I believe this but there are the implications.

If God is love, then He is also vulnerable to those He loves? We can hurt God, can we bring pain to Him as glorious and all powerful as He is? He loves us, at least as we understand the term, and so then we must answer all the above questions in the affirmative.

Here is some evidence of the vulnerability of God. In the Old Testament Jacob wrestles with an assumed assailant who turns out to be God who has come to give Jacob assurance of forgiveness and acceptance. Jacob actually prevails in his wrestling with God (Gen 32:28), and his name is changed to Israel. This story is about the vulnerability of God to one He loves.

The best evidence for the vulnerability of love is given by God Himself. On the cross, God is murdered by the creatures He loves. This is the ultimate evidence of the vulnerability of God.

**Romans 5:8** (NIV) "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

There is no other way with love. When love is brought to the test, its vulnerability will always shine through. Simone Weil writes:

Love consents to all and commands only those who consent. Love is abdication. God is abdication.

Do I love any other? When I think about this sober question, I wonder if I love at all? What I do know, because of the cross, is that I am truly loved by God. This is enough for me. God is love means that there is nothing else to God. It means that He loves all people in all places, at all times.

I desire to love, O how I desire this gift, but for now it is enough to know I am loved. Love cannot be commanded or enticed. Love originates in the heart of the lover and longs for a similar response but it cannot be required. To love is to risk and opens the heart to great pain but it is worth the risk for those who have never loved have never lived.

Never in history has man been taken as seriously as in prophetic thinking . . . Whatever man does affects not only his own life, but also the life of God. . . . He is a consort, a partner, a factor in the life of God.

Abraham Heschel, *Prophets*, p. 226.

God is love and so God is life and light. The life and light flow from the love in His immense heart of compassion and care. We were created by God so that He could love us for all eternity. Thank you God. Those who believe that God is love, learn to love and will be together with God one day, because God never fails to

love. I have completed the substitution of "God" for "love" in **1 Corinthians 13**. This chapter has spoken well of God. How will you speak of God? I will trust you, in love, to speak well of Him.



## Towards a God-Model

Our views of society, life and God are not necessarily the result of logical conclusions. The adage "two men behind prison bars, the one saw mud the other saw stars," is very true. Our attitudes, assumptions and prejudices determine to a large degree what conclusions we make of the information we receive.

The very words we use to communicate with each other must be individually defined otherwise they are unintelligible sounds or black marks on paper. To communicate at the gut level can be very difficult or very easy depending on the relationship between the communicators. Take for instance the following words: "I could eat you up!" A mother saying this to her baby is showing love and affection. A cannibal saying this to a captive is talking food.

So today "bad" no longer means less than good, "gay" no longer means happy, "pansies" are no longer only flowers and about the only thing we can be certain of is that: "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard, is not what I meant!"

Fortunately, in normal conversation we are able to get the sense of what the other is saying through variations in the voice, body language, context and so on. Reading is, of course, much more difficult, especially if the literature is from a different age or culture. Many of the apparent problems that have been raised in regard to our views of God are related to the Bible writers' world view and also our world view. Not only are our views of God coloured by the Bible, they are also coloured by our own thoughts and feelings. We might, for instance, expect God to be harsh if we are harsh by nature, or have been treated badly by authority figures.

We must confess that we are all too willing to clothe God with our human tendencies and emotions and that is a frightening prospect. Cain, it seems, killed his brother largely out of envy, and we are too closely related to Hitler and Idi Amin for comfort. The witness of Jesus as to what God is like is so very different from the traditional view of God as a harsh, arbitrary deity, that it is difficult to grasp. If we could see God as Jesus portrays Him we must certainly come to very different conclusions about the way God thinks, feels and acts.

In search of a God-model we notice firstly that the physical world in which we live consists of two opposites. On the one hand there is a world of life promoting factors such as nutritious food, good air, clean water, relaxing physical exercise, joy and happiness in social relationships and so on. But, on the other hand, we have life destroying factors such as germs, droughts, and megaplagues, all of which are a consequence of both the devils (cf. **Job 1,2**) and man's sinful actions (**Revelation 6:4,8; 11:18; Micah 7:13**).

Scripture is clear that it is the devil who instigates disease and other problems on the earth (**Genesis 3; Job 1 and 2**) and further, that he goes around as a

roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (**1 Peter 5:8**).

This “devouring” is not only spiritually, but also physically true. He, the devil, delights in destruction and death. With this understanding, it is no longer necessary to blame God for disease and accidents. Not only is it unnecessary to blame God for disease but it is not hard to understand that, but for God's protection, all of mankind would have been destroyed a long time ago. (cf **Revelation 7:1-3**) Man's desperate searching for solutions to the cancer problem and more recently, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), are cases in point. In a society that does not understand either the origin of disease or the existence of a real devil, God is bound to get the blame for all the bad events we cannot explain.

Many God-models have been constructed over the centuries. It is interesting that most Bible writers seem to hold to the view that God must step in and actively punish sinners. One reason for this view is the failure to distinguish between primary and secondary causes. Another reason is the confusion over foreknowledge and predestination. A third reason is accepting philosophy or psychology in place of Biblical teachings. Thus the stage is set for the many differing God-models that exist.

One model, based on the immortality of the soul, finds it necessary for God to step in and destroy sinners by actively imposing death by eternal fire. This model is premised on the concept of man having an immortal soul which has to be confined to eternal, active punishment. While there is no substantive Scriptural evidence for man having an immortal soul, the concept prevails in most of Christendom.

Another model, regards sin as having such a destructive nature that it destroys itself in the same way that smoking is self-destructive. In this model, it would not be necessary to punish a smoker, since if lung cancer does not destroy him emphysema probably will! If God had not stepped in and saved and protected us from time to time, we would all have destroyed ourselves a long time ago.

I would like to suggest the following model: God's umbrella of protection is at present over the world, (**Revelation 7:1**) but as men become more and more rebellious this protection is forced away (cf **Ezekiel 8:6**). Not that God wants to withdraw His protection but He must respect the choices we make. He is merciful and can delay the consequences but eventually they come to those who persist in rebellion. In a special way God's protection is over those who wish to be loyal to Him for they are the objects of Satan's anger (**Job 1:10; Psalm 91; Revelation 7:3; 9:4**).

If God's people are disobedient, they become the victims of Satan's attacks because they have changed sides and the opposition demands access to them, thus **forcing God to allow the legitimate consequences and devil created afflictions**. An example of this situation is the serpents in the wilderness. In this case the rank rebellion of the Israelites forced away God's protection and then the

snakes, already present in the desert, encouraged and energised by the evil one, did their dastardly work. At other times we have the situation described in the book of Job where the devil tries to demonstrate the selfishness of one of God's faithful followers.

So, in the Job scenario, Satan harasses and inflicts pain on one of God's children but all is not lost, since Job's integrity and faith results in the building of God's Kingdom somewhere else or at some other time. Then there are situations where we experience the consequences of living on a dying planet and tragedy is the consequence of someone else's poor decisions. We really do not have to blame God at all. It is the result of living in a free universe where some have made bad choices. Freedom necessitates experiencing the consequences of our own bad choices, the bad choices of others and the machinations of an evil supernatural being, the devil and his human allies, as the next passage indicates.

I will be his (David's family) father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. (**2 Samuel 7:14**)

With perceptive insight one writer puts it this way:

Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, "No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work."

The time is right upon us. The Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the earth. When the angel of mercy folds her wings and departs, Satan will do the evil deeds he has long wished to do. Storm and tempest, war and bloodshed, in these things he delights, and thus he gathers in his harvest. (R&H, September 17, 1901)

Taking all the above into account, we can only really form a correct picture of God by viewing Him through Jesus Christ, who God revealed in the flesh. The writer of Hebrews speaks of how God spoke in "fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets," but now He has spoken to us through the Son who is "the stamp of God's very being (Greek: Karakter)." This is the same splendour or glory that was revealed to Moses as described in Exodus 34. What Moses saw as the glory of God was His kindness and patience, His long-suffering and mercy. These are the

attributes that God glories in. This is what distinguishes God from all man made gods. Their gods are claimed as god because they possess more power, more knowledge, or more control in one way or another. But God is God because He has loved more than anyone else. This is why only Jesus could reveal God.

Only Jesus understood the depth of the great love and kindness of God.

Jesus said to him "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you have known Him and have seen Him." "Lord show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know Me Phillip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father . . ." (**John 14:6-9**)

So the best way of understanding how God treats sinners is to study the way Jesus treated them. Jesus is, after all, God in the flesh and He would combine justice and mercy in the same way that God does. What we find is so good that it surprises the best of saints, even now! The newness of the revelation that Jesus brought was the way He treated undeserving sinners. He did not wait for them to come to Him. He went and found them and told them of God's great love and forgiveness. That is what God's coming to this planet is all about.

One of my favourite authors has said it so well.

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, full of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. The thick darkness with which Satan had endeavoured to enshroud the throne of Deity was to be swept away by the world's Redeemer, and the Father was again made manifest as the light of life. (5T739)

In this line of thinking the same author describes the reason for the coming of Christ as follows:

. . . the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice - one who is a severe judge, a harsh exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgements upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. (SC11,12)

So really, my responsibility, your responsibility, is to work with Christ, the Holy Spirit and the angels to clear away the misconceptions that surround God. Here is where

our best efforts should be focussed. The traditions and platitudes of the centuries need to be stripped away. The truth about God must shine in all its marvellous simplicity and wonder. The truth about the kindness of God creates its own entrance into hearts and minds. It is the pearl of great price, it is treasure hidden in the field, it is the seed that springs up into eternal life, it is the Word of God.

Our witness through our lives and attitudes and words are of immense value to this planet. Jesus said this when He stated:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matthew 5:13)

“Without the presence of people who love and serve God, this world would destroy itself.” (*Messiah* 184)

We, Christians, are the means by which God saves this planet from itself. What value we have in God's eyes and our own if we are willing to see!



## God and Morality

Is God moral? Can we decide that God is fair or unfair or do we just accept that God must be fair and then defend all His actions? Do we really have the freedom to judge for ourselves? Is our function, as some suggest "to praise the Lord," to be happy and content under all circumstances, because "the Lord is good" and never to question the painful situations we find ourselves in?

There are many Biblical stories which hardly give the idea that God is moral and fair. Take for instance: "And that night the angel of the Lord went forth, and slew 185 000 Assyrians" **2 Kings 19:35**. Why did the same God not stop the Nazi machine which massacred millions of people in Europe, many of them just as much His children as the Jewish people during the time of Assyria? Did God only defend His people in the Old Testament by killing their enemies? Are the enemies of Israel not God's children too? Why does God not actively kill the "baddies" in our day and age? Or does He?

Perhaps we should start by considering what it means to be moral. To be moral, ethical, just or righteous, means to work on the principle of right or good conduct and to live by a body of such principles. Children demonstrate this ability at an early age and certainly by the time children go to school the idea that fairness should prevail is well developed.

The Old Testament book of **Habakkuk** concerns itself directly with the question of God's morality or righteousness. At the beginning of the book (**1:1-4**) Habakkuk complains that God does nothing about injustice in His land. God's reply is that the Babylonians are coming to punish His people for their wickedness. (**1:5-11**) Habakkuk is mystified that God would allow the evil Babylonians to punish His people. (**1:12-17**) God's reply seems to be: "Don't worry about all that, the Babylonians will also reap what they sow." (**2:1-20**)

There are many questions that bring the morality of God into focus. Some of these are as follows: Is it fair to resurrect and then destroy sinners at the end of the Millennium (**Revelation 20**) to prove a point about the fairness of God? Some of these people have already suffered terrible pain and agony with their first death. Is it moral for God to allow pain and destruction on this earth for millions, perhaps billions of creatures, so that in the long run He benefits Himself? Is it fair for God to punish the Israelites on the ratio of a years punishment for a day's rebellion (**Numbers 14:34**)? Does that not sound harsh and arbitrary?

One writer makes the point that "God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome with force. Compelling power is found only under Satan's government ... God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power. (DA759) If this is true, how is it that God apparently uses force and death, such as at the time of the flood in order to preserve righteousness? What about sending snakes to teach the rebellious Israelites a

lesson or two in the desert? Is that not using compelling force?

Or take the following New Testament passage:

Thus He not only shows mercy as He chooses, but also makes men stubborn as He chooses. You will say, 'Then why does God blame a man? For who can resist His Will?' Who are you, sir, to answer God back? Can the pot speak to the potter and say "Why did you make me like this?" (**Romans 9:18-20**)

This passage hardly pictures a just situation for moral beings. On the contrary, it gives the impression of a mechanistic, manipulative Creator.

Would it be just for God to kill us since He is our Creator and because He has warned us repeatedly against disobedience and evil? If, as Jesus taught, our forgiveness is to know no limits, i.e. seventy times seven implies ongoing forgiveness (**Matthew 18**), how consistent is it for God to step in and execute those who are opposed to Him? Or are they forgiven first and then executed?

Is it not morally cynical to place the rainbow of promise in the clouds to give us the security that the world will never experience a universal destruction by water when God plans to destroy the planet by fire?

According to **1 Chronicles 22:8** David was not allowed to build the temple because he was a man of blood. What has this got to do with building a temple for God if God sheds blood and the temple service required thousands of slain lambs each year?

The battle between good and evil has to do with deciding between God's government and Lucifer's, or the devil's, alternative life style. Would using force and violence not negate all that God has worked for through the centuries?

If God destroys sinners at the end of time, could He not do it more humanely? We reject people who burn others. Why do we then accept that it is moral for God to burn the opposition? Some who believe in the great love and justice of God, are happy to accept, not only that God burns sinners but that hell-fire lasts for ever. Believing that God burns people means that He is rather brutal in His methods. Burning is not a very nice way to leave this life.

It has been used on the argument that the stake or the necklace functions as a strong deterrent. The argument hardly holds when only saints are left after this final holocaust. Then the everlasting burning creates another set of moral problems. Surely the punishment should suite the crime. An everlasting hell can hardly be considered a moral or just punishment for someone who has sinned for a maximum of 70 years?

If God finally settles the controversy by force, how does the Cross of Christ fit into the whole picture? Is the cross a temporary revelation of God's justice and mercy? Is His real "justice" still to come at the end of the world?

Any perspective or model of God must answer to the above questions in

a way that makes moral sense even to the unbelieving, secular mind. It is not good enough to have God's friends concur on His morality. Divine morality must be a universal concept, recognized by both friend and foe alike. That this will occur is predicted in the Scriptures. (**Philippians 2:10**) Why would this happen unless it is recognized by all that God has been just and moral in all that He has done?

I believe that God is moral. While what is happening on this sin-stricken planet will vindicate God and immunize the universe against sin and selfishness, that is not why it is happening. The sin experience is not God's will. The universe would have been better off without the trauma and tragedy of sin on this planet.

However, in a free society, the risk is always there and will always be there for anyone to exploit. We are free precisely because we can and did opt out of God's life-style, and the awful conditions on this planet prove this.

In all our sorrows and pains God has to watch and restrain Himself from actively preventing the consequences of our choices. This is real life. God tried His best to communicate with us by prophets and priests but He never could get through to us. Eventually He came in the person of Jesus, the Christ and we murdered Him at Calvary. (**Acts 7:52**) That is the depth to which our rebellion has led. It is fratricide.

God has not and never will destroy any of His creatures, for any reason. It is immoral to punish someone who, out of free choice, did not choose your option. To destroy a living creature for exercising free choice is to negate the purpose of a good creation. Since only God is immortal, (**1 Timothy 6:16**) all creatures are mortal and, left alone long enough, will die. We only live because God sustains us in His mercy. Thus, it is unnecessary to destroy any creature since all creatures are mortal and thus doomed to death.

The many Old Testament stories of God killing left right and centre are the writers opinions of why they died. One example to substantiate this claim will suffice since most questions raised are answered in other essays. According to **1 Chronicles 10:4** King Saul committed suicide by falling on his sword. According to verse 14 of the same chapter "the Lord put him to death." We can hardly say that God placed suicidal thoughts in Saul's mind.

So how can the writer make such contradictory statements? Probably they were not contradictory for the writer at all. He would have been a firm supporter of monotheism, and would have not wanted to yield any space to any other supernatural being, good or bad. In this case the only person that can be blamed is God. It happens still. Many funeral remarks include, "For as much as it has pleased Almighty God to take . . ." Saul, as I understand it, committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of the enemy. He doubted God was on his side and was in severe depression. In my way of thinking God had nothing to do with his death.

I believe God is moral, ethical, just, and righteous, because He works on the principles of right or good conduct and lives by a body of such principles. I want

to summarize this by saying: God not only loves us, but that He is Himself love. There is no unkindness, no vindictiveness, no evil of any kind in His being. He is light and there is no darkness in Him at all. All that is evil, including death and pain, is from another source. If there were no sin, there never would have been death or pain. God will never stoop to employ means that sin uses to solve any problem. He is far more creative and far too moral to resort to such means. God's goodness is wonderfully demonstrated in His responses, even under extreme provocation. He has never entertained vindictive thoughts or purposed vengeful actions which are so common on our planet. What a God!



## God, Punishment, Consequences and Free Choice

**A**re we free to choose our destiny? Christians are divided on the issue. Some believe we can, others believe God has created some to be His friends forever and others to be damned forever. The latter also believe He is the Sovereign of the Universe and to question His methods of going about His business is plain impertinence.

Even if we have free choice are we simply told by God through the Bible that we are going to hell or heaven? That is a choice, but hardly a free choice if heaven is a reward and hell is a punishment. Only if these destinations are consequences, can free choice exist. There is no freedom if God, at the end of the day, executes all those who choose an alternative life style to the one He has prescribed. Many justice-loving and liberty-supporting men and women reject the notion of the Judeo-Christian God for this very reason. The concept of a just God destroying those who choose another way of living, even though they have been warned, is unfair and smacks of Stalinism.

In thinking about freedom and God's control in the universe it is helpful to make a distinction between punishment and consequence. Punishment is an arbitrary, forced action imposed by another. This punishment may be regarded as fair or unfair by the recipient. Some murderers, for instance, accept capital punishment because they acknowledge they are guilty of murder. Other murderers refuse to accept the death sentence, appeal, and refuse to accept their punishment to the bitter end.

Consequence, on the other hand, is a natural result of a course of action. A murderer experiences alienation from people and society, fear of being apprehended, and a change in his own self-image. These are not imposed actions, they are a result of the deed. Even if he is never discovered, he still experiences these consequences. They are not imposed by others but are results arising from his own being, his own sense of justice and fairness, and the way he knows society would view him if they knew.

The possible punishment for smoking heroin is a jail sentence, the long term consequence is a disturbed mind and reduced health. The possible punishment for ignoring a red traffic light is a heavy fine, the consequences may be a wrecked car, damage to life and limb, or even death.

Having made the distinction between punishment and consequence we can now consider the requirements of true freedom. Free choice must exclude punishment as part of one or more of the alternatives. If punishment is involved, the choice is weighted or forced, and freedom is limited. A politician who offers to lower taxes for those who vote for him and who jails those who oppose him, is treated with legitimate contempt by fair minded men and women. They would, and correctly so, regard such an offer as intimidation. A child who is asked "Would you like to go to bed now?" does not really have any choice if the question is just a way

of communicating that it is time to go to bed. The Biblical writers do not seem to have made the distinction between punishment and consequence. We must, otherwise we shall run the risk of alienating some of the very people we want to influence for God. It is exactly those people, who feel strongly about freedom and justice, that God needs as champions on a planet where freedom and justice are diminishing at an exponential rate. We also run the risk of fuzzy thinking about issues which matter a great deal.

Jesus' disciples had related difficulties when they questioned Him about the cause of the man's blindness in **John 9**. "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" They understood the congenital blindness to be punishment for some morally wrong action of the parents or the unborn baby. However, even in the disciple's traditional way of thinking, this did not seem fair and so they appealed to Jesus for help. The reply Jesus gave them does not seem to be reflected accurately in the translations. The most likely reason for the problem is that the translators may also have not have made the necessary distinction between punishment and consequence.

Jesus' reply is as follows: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." The translation implies that God made the man blind so that after suffering for 38 years Jesus could perform a miracle for the glory of God. Would a moral God do that? The meaning of the passage hinges on the words "so that."

The Greek word "hina," which is the key word here, may be taken to express purpose but it is also translated as expressing result as in **Luke 9:45; Galations 5:17; and 1 John 1:9**. If "and" is used instead, the passage reads "Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened and (in place of "so that") the work of God will (might) be displayed in his life." Which translation is correct? This depends entirely on the view one has of God. Both options are permissible from "hina." We cannot make a direct connection between the man's blindness and his personal sin without making a statement about the morality of God. True, his blindness is as a general result of sin in this world, for there is no physical blindness in heaven, but certainly not a punishment for personal sin since the blindness was congenital.

An earlier example of the problems caused by not making a distinction between punishment and consequence can be found in **Exodus 4:21**.

And the **LORD** said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you te power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he shall not let the people go." (cf. **Exodus 7:3, 7:13, 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4**)

Does Pharaoh's heart become hard as a punishment from God, or is it a consequence of Pharaoh's choice? The above passages support both views. How

shall we decide? Shall we say that both views are correct? Perhaps we need to look further before we draw any conclusion.

Probably the most important passage for those who believe there is not much freedom on the planet is **Romans 9:13-22**

Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 14. What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. 19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 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?'" 21 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? 22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath - prepared for destruction?

This passage taken in isolation really seems to say that God is a manipulative dictator. He simply does as He pleases with all those He has created and our ideas of free choice are only an illusion.

However, if we read chapters **9 to 11** of **Romans** as a whole we come to a very different conclusion. Reading bits and pieces in isolation results in missing the thrust of Paul's argument. What Paul is showing is that while God had chosen the Hebrews as His people and thus predestined them, if there is such a thing, to be such forever, they have rejected and murdered the Messiah. He is not arguing for the determinism or predestination that is a part of Hebrew and Christian thinking. He is rather showing how terrible their rejection of God is. The chosen people, the nation "predestined" for salvation has rejected the very God who chose them. Since God has favoured them with the prophets, the Torah, miracles and protection how can it be that they break out of God's plan, reject and finally murder the Messiah?

Paul thus accomplishes at least two things. Firstly, he shows how awful their rejection of the Messiah is and secondly, he demonstrates that there is no such thing as "predestination."

The idea of man being able to choose his own destiny is, it would seem, one of the clearest teachings of Scripture. **Genesis 2:16,17** indicates that man had a real choice in eating from the tree of good and evil. Cain is told that sin crouches

at the door and he must not let it in. Joshua wants the people to choose between Baal and Yahweh. The Psalms are full of admonitions to serve the Lord. The prophets urgently call men and women to choose the Lord and then warn of dire consequences when the people of God choose alternative, ungodly life styles.

**Galatians 6:7** Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

All of the above examples indicate that there is a choice to make, and furthermore, the choice has profound implications for one's destiny. Pharaoh, deciding against granting freedom to the Israelites, does something to his own mind. He takes a position, and feels that he must stick with it, come hell or high water, and thus causes his own destruction. It still happens today. We must take responsibility for our own choices. One way to encourage ourselves to do this is to make the necessary distinction between imposed punishment and inherent consequences. In an ordered universe, inherent consequences have far more important results. The principal can punish a child for smoking in the school toilets, but lung cancer is far more to be feared. There are consequences in everything we choose to think or do. If this is true, then the best decision we can ever make, is to choose wisely and live responsibly.

Since it is possible to pile up Scriptures which seem to say the very opposite to what has been said above, how shall one come to a conclusion? Traditionally, Christians have solved this paradox by affirming both the love of God and the justice of God. What is meant by justice is that it is legitimate and desirable that God should punish sinners at some point in time. Justice, then becomes a synonym for punishment. But, if we go this route, we have the problem of so much evil not being punished. Many murderous members of the Mafia live long prosperous lives while thousands of selfless saints have been martyred. Where is the so called justice of God in that?

A more realistic view is that God's justice refers to His fairness. The justice of God lies in that He blesses sinner and saint alike with opportunity after opportunity to make choices, holding back some of the legitimate, natural consequences, giving more time to make good choices, because our choices determine our destiny. God gives more than a fair deal to friend and foe alike and thus His fairness or justice is established.

It is not experiencing the terrible consequences of sin that establishes the justice of God. All that does is to demonstrate the awfulness of sin. What establishes the justice of God is that He has treated those who hated him with such unbelievable kindness. This kindness is the centre of His being. Justice and love met at the cross when the God of love, who could have and should have destroyed

His murderers in a moment, forgave them. Amazing!

Often the words "consequence" and "punishment" are used interchangeably as synonyms by many writers. However, the context generally makes it clear which meaning is required. Here are some examples of just one author doing so.

Read this paragraph and note how the destruction of Israel is demonstrated to be a consequence, not a punishment of their rejection of divine love.

The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance. In the utter destruction that befell them as a nation, and in all the woes that followed them in their dispersion, they were but reaping the harvest their own hands had sown. Says the prophet "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;", "for thou has fallen by thine iniquity." (**Hosea 13:9; 14:1**) Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control. (GC35,36)

Here the destruction of Israel is demonstrated to be a consequence, not a punishment.

Notice how in this next paragraph the word "punishment" is used to describe consequences in the last sentence. It might be argued that this is confusing usage. The context is, however, so clear that there is no need for confusion.

We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God's mercy and long suffering in holding in check the cruel malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest (consequence). The spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last

withdrawn from the sinner, and there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment (consequences) that will fall upon the guilty. (GC35,36)

The point being made is that the "evil passions of the soul" and "the enmity of Satan" result in consequences too terrible to imagine. While the word "punishment" is used in the last sentence it clearly means "consequence." It might be argued that this is all very confusing but then we must always determine the meaning of a given word from its context.

In this next paragraph, eternal torment is recognized as a humanly invented punishment for 70 years of sin, and the consequences of preaching this punishment are portrayed.

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colours Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels. (GC536)

Notice the emphasis on the final death as a consequence rather than as a punishment in the following quotes.

Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.  
(**Psalm 34:21** (NIV))

God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. (COL84)

God destroys no one. The sinner destroys himself by his own impenitence. (5T120)

The earth has almost reached the place where God will permit the destroyer to work his will upon it. (7T141)

It is of interest to notice that the term "destroyer" is used four times in the Bible.

(**Exodus 12:23; Psalm 17:4; Jeremiah 2:7; 1 Corinthians 10:10**) Often the first reference is understood as referring to God or one of His angels. Makes one think!

In the following quote, the "harvest" or "end of the world," is finally meeting all those consequences held back by grace.

Satan is the destroyer. God cannot bless those who refuse to be faithful stewards. All He can do is to permit Satan to accomplish his destroying work. We see calamities of every kind and in every degree coming upon the earth, and why? The Lord's restraining power is not exercised. The world has disregarded the word of God. They live as though there were no God. Like the inhabitants of the Noahic world, they refuse to have any thought of God. Wickedness prevails to an alarming extent, and the earth is ripe for the harvest. (6T388)

Notice how the word "vengeance" is used as a synonym for "consequence" in the following quote:

God keeps reckoning with the nations. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. Those who work evil towards their fellow men, saying, "How doth God know?" will one day be called upon to meet long deferred vengeance. In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, "No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience, for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work." (R&H September 17, 1901)

While some might argue that "vengeance belongs to God" demonstrates that God does take revenge, the intent of passages like **Hebrews 10:30** is not that God avenges but that we must not avenge ourselves. Consider the following:

"Wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" They were surprised to see that Jesus was pained by their words, and still more surprised as His rebuke fell upon their ears, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. Under a

pretence of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by revealing His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas. (DA487)

Notice the deadly effects of sin in the implied emphasis on consequences in the following quotes:

Sickness, suffering and death are the work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer. (MH113)

They (thousands of angels of God) guard us against evil and press back the powers of darkness seeking our destruction. (MH253)

Rebellion was not to be overcome with force. Compelling power is found only in Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power. (DA759)

The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. (DA22)

Every generation has been growing weaker, and disease of every form afflicts the race. Thousands of poor mortals with deformed, sickly bodies, shattered nerves, gloomy minds are dragging out a miserable existence. Satan's power upon the human family increases. If the Lord should not soon come and destroy his power, the earth would ere long be depopulated. (1T304)

Certainly, the above statements indicate that the consequence of sin is death to every person on the planet. What we have often labelled as punishment, to escape our own responsibility, is really the consequences of our selfish choices. Lung cancer is not punishment for smoking. AIDS is not punishment for promiscuity, death is not dealt out to the defiant. These are all inherent consequences of choices and actions, in the same way jumping off a cliff means broken bones and

torn tissue. Broken bones and the torn tissue are not "punishments" but "consequences." Famine, disease, and death on this planet is the consequence of sin, it is not the punishment of God.

We must make the distinction if we are to think and live responsibly. More important, we must make the distinction if we are to think responsibly about God and His kindness. This is the crucial issue. Even the darkest mind is susceptible to the influence of kindness, how much more so by appreciating the kindness of God.



## God and Relational Metaphors

**T**here are many metaphors or word pictures which describe the relationship we can have with God as described in the Scriptures. We consider some of them.

### **I am the clay and He is the Potter.**

**Jeremiah 18:3** (NIV) So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

This is a very comforting metaphor. The potter takes all the responsibility for the results and the only concern for the clay is to be pliable and soft to the potter's touch.

### **I am a sheep and He is the Shepherd.**

**Psalms 23:1** (NIV) [A psalm of David.] The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

The responsibility lies mostly with God who is the Good Shepherd. In this metaphor it is possible for the sheep to wander away and so the sheep must at least take the responsibility for listening for the Shepherd's voice and following it at all times.

### **I am a purchased slave and God is my Owner.**

**Romans 6:16** (NIV) Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

My responsibility then is to work for my owner to the best of my ability.

### **I am a servant and God is my Lord and Master.**

**Romans 10:9** (NIV) 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.

Now we have responsibility for speaking and believing in addition to the work that is expected of a servant. The servant must take far more responsibility than clay, a sheep or a slave, however, the primary responsibility still rests with the master.

### **We are the accused and God is the Judge.**

**Psalms 7:11** (NIV) God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

God has taken our side against the accuser or Satan. The Judge is on our side and we can trust Him to the utmost. This is our responsibility. If we do not trust Him we can muddle the case that He is presenting against the Accuser.

### **We are the hostages and God is the Liberator or Ransomer.**

**Isaiah 51:11** (NIV) The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

**1 Peter 1:18** (NIV) For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

The responsibility of the liberated hostage is that of gratitude for the redemption provided and wonder at the value the Liberator placed on us.

### **We are the children and God is the Father.**

**Matthew 6:9** (NIV) This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father (Abba) in heaven, hallowed be your name."

To have a father of the calibre of God is to experience the greatest security and peace. Our responsibility is to honour Him with all our being. "Worthy, Worthy is our God!" is the song we are responsible for singing.

### **We are princesses or princes and God is the King.**

**Romans 8:17** (NIV) Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

**Revelation 3:21** (NIV) To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Our responsibility as part of the Royal Family of the Universe is to bring honour to our Father and His Son who has accomplished all things for us. It is also our responsibility to be His ambassadors to the rest of the Universe to ensure that sin will never arise again.

### **We are the beloved and God is our Lover.**

**Isaiah 62:5** (NIV) As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

**Hosea 2:16** (NIV) "In that day," declares the LORD, "**you will call me 'my husband'**"; you will no longer call me 'my master'."

**Ephesians 5:31** (NIV) "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

**Revelation 19:7** (NIV) Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

**Revelation 21:9** (NIV) One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

What is the responsibility of a lover? Surely to identify the desire of the other and to satisfy this desire in the best possible way. To be God's lover is to attempt to think about what God desires in Himself beyond mere obedience. It is to enter into the relationship of unconditional, unremitting love which God has modelled or revealed to the universe in the life, trial, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because of these metaphors, in which God attempts to illustrate the relationship He desires with each one of us, we are Blessed of God in every way.

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long

before we first heard of Christ, and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. (**Ephesians 1:11** Message Bible)

One reason of the spiritual feebleness of today is the low estimate that believers in Christ are constantly inclined to form of themselves. Christ paid an infinite price for us, and he desires his chosen heritage to value themselves according to the price he placed upon them. Do not disappoint Jesus by placing a low estimate upon yourselves. (ST Oct 22, 1896)

God literally swapped Jesus for us with His birth in Bethlehem and His death at Calvary. We are of inestimable value because of what God has done for us. Diamonds might be forever but Christ is for infinity and eternity. Having Jesus Christ and God as our lovers we are secure forever, in all places with all the beings in the Universe.

Our Redeemer thirsts for recognition. He hungers for the sympathy and love of those whom He has purchased with His own blood. (DA 191)

In conclusion, there are many metaphors of mercy. The clay and the Potter, the sheep and the Shepherd, the slave and the Owner, the servant and the Master, the prisoner and the Judge, the hostage and Liberator, the child and the Father, the princesses or princes and the King but the one that tops them all is the beloved and Lover. In this understanding we have a relationship not religion, we experience delight in place of duty and we have pleasure in place of performance.



## God and Violence

If an armed robber entered heaven and held up God would God use a lazer beam to annihilate the robber or would God just disappear? In **Exodus 32** it appears that Moses is more kind than God as he argues for keeping the Israelites alive when God's anger would apparently have destroyed them. Could it be that Moses is more kind than God? How can we explain that Moses' "kindness" prevailed against the violent "wrath" of God?

Furthermore, it also seems God killed fewer sinners in New Testament times as compared with Old Testament times, and in our day God appears to be very lax. We have evil and wickedness on every side and yet the ground does not swallow up sinners, we do not execute Sabbath breakers and we do not stone idolaters at His command. Child molestation increases or becomes exposed at an ever increasing rate and God apparently lets these perverts live on. Men and women still die but we attribute their deaths to other causes. Has God changed His mode of operation or has He changed His violent ways for more gentle ones in dealing with sin and sinners?

There are many passages of Scripture which imply that God uses violence to restrain evil and promote righteousness. Some examples are the following:

**Genesis 6:7** And the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth-man and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air-for I am grieved that I made them."

**Genesis 19:24** Then the LORD rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and upon Gomorrah-from the LORD out of the heavens." (Read also 19:25,29)

**Exodus 32:9** And the LORD said unto Moses, " I have seen this people, and behold, it (is) a stiff-necked people: 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." (Read also Joshua 10:11)

**Exodus 32:27** And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, "Put every man his sword by his side, (and) go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion and every man his neighbour."

The question that must be asked at this point is, "Where did the liberated slaves from Egypt get these swords?" Swords were not part of their building equipment and there would not have been sword dealers in the desert between Egypt and

Sinai.

There seems to be only one explanation. When the Egyptian army was drowned the Israelites had collected as many of the weapons that they could lay hands on. Carrying a weapon changes the way one thinks. An armed man is going to factor in the power that the weapon gives him. I know this from personal experience. It was never God's intention that His people rely on arms to protect themselves or conquer the Promised Land to which He was leading them. This God had clearly promised as it is later rehearsed,

**Deuteronomy 7:17-19** You may say to yourselves, "These nations outnumber us, how can we drive them out?" But you need have no fear of them; only remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt, the great challenge which you yourselves witnessed, the signs and portents, the strong hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. He will deal thus with all the nations of whom you are afraid.

Thus the need for weapons was obviated. Carrying and using weapons was not God's intent for His people. If they had followed His instructions there would have been no swords and no lack of trust at Sinai but the people were faithless and as a consequence they resorted to idolatry and subsequently to violence.

**Numbers 21:6** And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." And Moses prayed for the people.

**2 Samuel 12:14** "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also (that is) born unto thee shall surely die." 15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

**Matthew 22:7** But when the king heard (thereof), he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

**Revelation 20:9** And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

This view of God and violence is also espoused by many Bible commentators. One scholar comments as follows:

The Lord is regarded as cruel by many requiring His people to make war with other nations. They say that it is contrary to His benevolent character. But He Who made the world, and formed man to dwell upon the earth, has unlimited control over the works of His hands, and it is His right to do as He pleases, and what He pleases with the work of His hands. Man has no right to say to His Maker, 'Why doest Thou thus?' There is no injustice in His character. He is the Ruler of the world, and a large portion of His subjects have rebelled against His authority, and have trampled upon His law . . . He has used his people as instruments of His wrath, to punish wicked nations, who have vexed them and seduced them into idolatry. (1BC1117)

Or,

Like the men before the flood, the Canaanites lived only to blaspheme heaven and defile the earth. And both love and justice demanded the prompt execution of these rebels against God, and foes to man. (PP492)

So how shall we relate to the apparent use of violence by God? How shall we have a violent God when violence is equated with evil in many Old Testament passages? Here is just one example of violence as a synonym for evil,

Rescue me O Lord, from evil men; protect me from men of violence.  
(**Psalm 140:1**)

### **The parable of the destruction of Jerusalem**

In the parable Jesus told about the destruction of Jerusalem (**Matthew 22:7**) it would be easy to conclude that God sent His armies to destroy the city by fire. Now the city, and more precisely the temple, was destroyed by Roman soldiers in 70 AD. Are these soldiers really the army of God? Did God plan the burning of the temple when the Roman commander, Titus, wanted to keep it intact? According to the history of the time, it was the intransigence of the Jewish resistance that led to the temple's destruction.

The explanation lies in understanding that the city's destruction was a direct result of the wickedness and disobedience of its inhabitants. They rejected the advice and protection of Heaven and suffered the consequence of their evil ways. God planned for Jerusalem to be the centre of blessing for the whole earth forever, but the people of the city had other plans.

When **Revelation 20:9** states that "fire came down from Heaven" it gives

the impression that God sends the fire that destroys the people outside the New Jerusalem. On careful analysis it is clear that this conclusion cannot be justified. "Fire from God out of Heaven" is the way the messenger in Job describes the cause of the destruction of **Job's** sheep and servants. (**1:16**) From reading the rest of the story in Job, we know that Satan was the cause of the fire. Our interpretation can be misleading if we do not take into account the literary backgrounds and the context of the incidents. We must give the Scriptures a fair hearing.

### The Cleansing of the Temple

What is helpful in dealing with the issue of violence is to consider what Jesus said about God and violence. Firstly, Jesus never used violence against people. The only possible exceptions are the temple cleansing and the cursing of the fig tree. In the former, Jesus did overturn the money changers' tables and let the animals go free but there is no record of violence against people. The Bible record demonstrates exactly the opposite. Those who had left the temple were upset that they had left and returned to question Jesus about His authority to remove them. (**Matthew 21:23**) They must have fled before His authority, not before His violence. If He had whipped them out they would not have asked by what authority He had done it. Furthermore, the children and the sick flocked into the temple at this very same time singing praises and receiving healing. (**21:14**) They had no fear of violence on the part of Jesus. Jesus never harmed anyone while He was on the planet. Here is the mission statement by which He lived His short life:

**Luke 9:55,56** NASB But He turned and rebuked them, [ and said , "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for **the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives , but to save them.**" ] And they went on to another village .

Here is God's stated purpose for sending Jesus into this world:

**John 3:17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

With regard to the fig tree: A figtree in leaf at Passover time was an anomaly. The tree showed signs of un-seasonal fruit, but this was a pretense. In nature diseased or stressed plants often try and seed themselves before they die. This tree was dying before Jesus approached and He observed that it would never bear fruit again. He saw in the tree a symbol of the spiritually dead Jewish leaders who were pretending to be the spiritual leaders of the nation. Jesus was not making the future, He was foretelling the future. It was Peter who decided Jesus had cursed the tree. (**Mark 11:21**) Cursing is very popular with sinners. Because we are under

the curse of sin we are apt to curse others and notice curses very easily.

Christians often subscribe to the idea that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to crime. This view is held even though there is no evidence to support this view. We often impose our views on God and the Scriptures. James Gilligan in his book, “**Violence. Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes,**” (G.P. Putnam’s Sons. 1996) gives insights which echo what Jesus Christ was telling us 2000 years ago.

. . . many more murderers kill themselves than are ever killed by the state, even when capital punishment is the usual penalty for murder. The suicide rate among men who have just committed a murder is several hundred times greater than it is among ordinary men of the same age, sex and race in this country and elsewhere. p41

Many have made suicide attempts before they are jailed, others attempt or complete suicide after their release, and a certain percentage of murderers never enter prison because they kill themselves before they are even arrested or convicted. Also, more inmates are killed by other inmates than were ever killed by the State. In other words, no group is more strongly and widely in favour of capital punishment than are the murderers and other inmates. They will impose it on themselves and each other when the State fails to do so, which is why I feel I am living in “cloud-cuckoo-land” when I hear people suggesting that capital punishment will deter murder and induce more “reverence for life.” The men I know already feel so spiritually dead that they long for physical death as well. For many, the only means capable of expressing in a final catharsis the rage that is within them, so as to settle at last their accounts with the world, is the fantasy of dying in a shoot out with the police in which they would at least take as many people into death with them as possible before they die – an acting out of the Bonnie and Clyde myth, the Gotterdammerung myth. Every year hundreds of criminals go to their death in exactly this way.

Perhaps this should not be so surprising if one thinks of all the male warriors throughout history who have lived and died, or made it clear they were willing to die, by the same code – from Hector to Hitler, from Achilles to the Ayatollahs, from Samson and Julius Caesar to the Japanese samurai and kamikaze pilots. For a healthy man, the threat of death would be a powerful deterrent to forbidden behaviour (but then healthy men do not commit murder even in the absence of such a threat), but for the men who commit murders, death is not a threat. If anything, death is a promise of peace, which makes it understandable that executions and

capital punishment encourage more murders than they deter, as judged by the fact that the only Western Industrialized nation that still retains the death penalty – the United States – also has a murder rate many times higher than do those nations which have sufficient reverence for life to abolish punishment by death p 42.

It really was the death of God at the hands of His creatures that changed the course of the universe. Violence begets violence and nothing else. The best way to deal with malaria is not killing mosquito's but draining the swamps where they breed. The swamps of evil which breed violence must be drained. He drained the swamp of sin by piercing its wall with His wounded side. The Prince of Peace knew this as He walked the dusty roads of Palestine 2000 years ago and the optimism of kindness is a large part of "the mystery" (**Colossians 1:26**) of God which has been so well hidden by our selfishness and wickedness.

Monty Roberts, the man who listens to horses, is able to tame and train horses because he has learned their body language. It is an amazingly different method to the traditional, time honoured violent breaking of a horse. God is more understanding than Monty Roberts. He does not need to break us to make us. He was broken at the cross so that we might be tamed for love.

All this was prophesied of Jesus hundreds of years before He came:

**Isaiah 53:9** (NIV) He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, **though he had done no violence**, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

The genius of Jesus lies right here, in the way He relates to sinners. His great joy has always been the salvation of every person that He comes into contact with. It cost Him His life, but it was worth it, at least in His value system. I want my value system to reflect the values of heaven. It will cost me something, perhaps my life too, but in the end it is the love of God demonstrated at Calvary that changes everything. I believe that implicitly.

Here is a promise of a future time when there will be no violence:

<sup>6</sup>The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

<sup>7</sup>And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup>And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

<sup>9</sup>They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

**Isaiah 11:5 - 9 (KJV)**

This is how it was and this is how it is to be and this is how it is in God's world. When we are "full of the knowledge of the LORD" that is how it is in our world. WE will not use violence because it is only in the world of evil.



## God and War

**T**he history of our planet earth is one of war and more war. David, all too familiar with war wrote as follows in **Psalm 55**:

20 My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant.  
21 His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart;  
his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.

War, or the force of arms, is regarded as the ultimate solution on this planet. There are not many Christians who believe there are solutions other than war when faced with a national threat. Pacifism has never been very popular among religious people. Many of the wars on our planet have been over religious differences. Some would argue that religious differences have been the cause of most wars.

The concept of a Holy or Just War is often justified from the Old Testament account of the wars that Israel, God's chosen people, fought during their existence as a nation, prior to the Babylonian captivity. It is thus helpful to look at the background of these wars and the intent God had for His people.

Moses attempted to initiate the deliverance of Israel by killing the Egyptian who was abusing one of his brothers. (**Exodus 2:11-12**) While this might be considered an ill advised, rash response by Moses, it suggests that Moses, trained in the art of war, believed that deliverance would have to be a military one. One writer graphically describes the situation as follows:

The elders of Israel were taught by angels that the time for their deliverance was near and that Moses was the man whom God would employ to accomplish this work. Angels instructed Moses also that Jehovah had chosen him to break the bondage of His people. He, supposing that they were to obtain their freedom by force of arms, expected to lead the Hebrew host against the armies of Egypt, and having this in view, he guarded his affections, lest in his attachment of his foster mother or to Pharaoh he would not be free to do the will of God. (PP245)

The Egyptian army was the most powerful military force in the world at the time of the Exodus. That God could accomplish the deliverance of the Israelites from the world power of the time is more than powerful evidence; it is proof that God meant to care for the delivered nation, and that He was well able to do so. The Israelite contribution to their deliverance on this occasion was to stand and watch the Lord work.

There is compelling Scriptural evidence that God promised to continue to protect the Israelite nation during their travels and after they had occupied the

Promised Land.

Here are some of these promises:

**Exodus 14:13,14** Stand firm and see the deliverance that the Lord will bring you this day; for as sure as you see the Egyptians now, you will never see them again. The Lord will fight for you; so hold your peace.

**Exodus 23:27** I will send my terror before you and throw into confusion all the peoples whom you find in your path.

**Exodus 33:2** I will send an angel ahead of you, and will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.

**Exodus 34:10,11** The Lord said, "Here and now I make a covenant. In full view of all the people I will do such miracles as have never been performed in all the world or in any nation. All the surrounding peoples shall see the work of the Lord, for fearful is that which I shall do for you. Observe all I command you this day; and I for my part will drive out before you the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites."

**Deuteronomy 1:29-33** Then I said to you, "You must not dread them nor be afraid of them. The Lord your God who goes at your head will fight for you and He will do again what you saw Him do for you in Egypt and in the wilderness. You saw there how the Lord your God carried you all the way to this place, as a father carries his son. In spite of this you did not trust the Lord your God, who went ahead on the journey to find a place for your camp."

**Deuteronomy 7:17-19** You may say to yourselves, "These nations outnumber us, how can we drive them out?" But you need have no fear of them; only remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt, the great challenge which you yourselves witnessed, the signs and portents, the strong hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. He will deal thus with all the nations of whom you are afraid.

The Lord had never commanded them to "go up and fight." It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands. (PP 392)

There are many examples of God making good His promises of protection to the Israelites. The Biblical record demonstrates that when the people trusted in God's protection by living in obedience to His commands, they were protected from all their enemies in a most remarkable way. Here is some of the evidence.

**Genesis 35:4,5** So they handed over to Jacob all the foreign gods in their possession and the rings from their ears, and he buried them under the terebinth-tree near Shechem. Then they set out, and the cities round about were panic-stricken, and the inhabitants dared not pursue the sons of Jacob.

**Joshua 6:20** So they blew the trumpets, and when the army heard the trumpet sound, they raised a great shout, and down fell the walls (of Jericho).

**Judges 7:20,21** The three companies all blew their trumpets and smashed their jars, then grasped the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right, and shouted, 'A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!' Every man stood where he was, all around the camp, and the whole camp leapt up in panic and fled.

**Joshua 8:34** Then Joshua recited the whole of the blessing and cursing word by word, as they are written in the book of the law.

This was at Mount Ebal and Gerizim which were in hostile, unconquered territory.

**Joshua 10:11** As they (the attackers of the Gibeonites) were fleeing from Israel down the pass, the Lord hurled great hailstones at them out of the sky all the way to Azekah: More died from the hailstones than the Israelites slew by the sword.

**Joshua 24:12** I spread panic before you, and it was this, not your sword or your bow, that drove out the two kings of the Amorites (in Transjordan).

**1 Samuel 7:10** As Samuel was offering the sacrifice and the Philistines were advancing to battle with the Israelites, the Lord thundered loud and long over the Philistines and threw them into confusion. They fled in panic before the Israelites . . .

**2 Chronicles 20:20-23,29** So they rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and, as they were starting, Jehoshaphat took his stand and said "Hear me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: hold

firmly to your faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in His prophets and you will prosper.” After consulting with the people, he appointed men to sing to the Lord and praise the splendour of His holiness as they went before the armed troops and they sang:

Give thanks to the Lord  
For His love endures for ever.

As soon as their loud shouts of praise were heard, the Lord deluded the Ammonites and Moabites and the men of the hill country of Seir, who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. It turned out that the Ammonites and Moabites had taken up a position against the men of the hill-country of Seir, and set themselves to annihilate and destroy them; and when they had exterminated the men of Seir, they savagely attacked one another. . . . So the dread of God fell upon the rulers of every country, when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel; and the realm of Jehoshaphat was at peace, God giving him security on all sides.

Three times every year all the Israelite men would go up to the feasts in Jerusalem. During this time the Lord protected their houses and lands from hostile surrounding enemies. This protection and leading of God is clearly recognized in **Psalm 44:3**.

It was not our fathers' words (that) won them the land,  
nor their arm that gave them the victory,  
but Thy right hand and Thy arm  
and the light of Thy presence;  
such was Thy favour to them.

**1 Chronicles 28:3** indicates that King David was not permitted to build the temple because he had been a man of blood. If it was God's will or design for David to be involved in so much death and destruction, starting with the way he responded to Goliath, then it is hardly fair for God to later reject David's desire to build the temple because he was a man of blood. It is rather that God's temple, His dwelling, can never in any way be associated with force since the government of God is based on free choice and love. Compelling force is not part of His rule. God risked the disappointment of one of His dearest friends to make this point.

The teachings of Jesus were totally against the use of force and violence. A few examples taken from the Sermon on the Mount will justify this claim. The first is in **Luke 6:28**:

Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you spitefully.

This is a radically different approach to that common on the planet at present. However, it is God telling us in plain language what He has been trying to communicate all along. This attitude is so alien to us that we really cannot believe that it is true. We will believe that we can solve problems by using force and violence to compel the other to our way of thinking and living.

One writer comments as follows:

“Because your heavenly Father is kind to the ungrateful and wicked, because He has stooped to lift you up,” therefore said Jesus, “You may become like Him in character and stand without fault in the presence of men and angels” (MB76).

Is it possible to read the following statement of Jesus Christ and still believe that violence is part of His scheme of things?

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.” 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to his brother “Raca” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell. 23 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. 38 You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” 39 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 5:21-24; 38-39** NIV).

Notice how Jesus qualifies admission to the family of God:

You have learned that they were told, 'Love your neighbour, hate you enemy. But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes His sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and dishonest. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Surely tax-gatherers do as much as that. And if you greet only your brothers, what is there extraordinary about that? Even the heathen do as much. There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds (**Matthew 5:43-48** NEB).

Peter is sure that Jesus did exactly this in His life on earth.

When they hurled insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered He made no threats (**1 Peter 2:23**).

Peter's comments must be trustworthy since Peter was a man committed to violent solutions when provoked. He was the one who cut off the ear of the High priest's servant.

Why did the Israelites end up fighting their own battles? One reason is they were often attacked by their enemies as a result of their own rebellion.

Moses saw that the people were out of control and that Aaron had laid them open to the secret malice of their enemies (**Exodus 32:25**).

Because of Israel's disobedience and departure from God, they were allowed to be brought into close places and to suffer adversity; their enemies were permitted to make war with them, to humble them and lead them to seek God in their trouble and distress. "Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim." This took place immediately after the children of Israel had given themselves up to their rebellious, unjust and unreasonable complaints against their leaders whom God had qualified and appointed to lead them through the wilderness to the land of Canaan (2T106,107).

When this occurred God helped them even in spite of their rebellious attitude. Why did God help them to fight if it was not His intent that they should fight? That is the "magic" of the real God. When we stubbornly resist, we suffer the consequences, but we are not forsaken. The Father God suffers with His wayward children. He meets us where we are, not to condemn us but to rescue us and to encourage us.

God never intended the Israelites should divorce each other. When they insisted on divorce He gave laws to make it as humane as possible, but it was never His desire (**Matthew 19:8**). God never intended the Israelites should fight any wars, holy or otherwise. The Israelite's contribution was to watch God's deliverance time after time. That experience would have strengthened their faith in God. The deliverance from the Egyptian army at the time of the Exodus was to be normative for the future.

It is thus quite understandable that one inspired writer will then comment as follows:

In the parable of the unjust judge, Christ has shown what we should do. "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" Christ our example did nothing to vindicate Himself. He committed His cause to God. So His followers are not to accuse or condemn, or resort to force in order to deliver themselves (COL171).

So having gone through all the above evidence what shall we do with passages where the Lord commands the Israelites to go and fight. One example is found in **Joshua 8:1**

Then the Lord said to Joshua, . . . "Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai."

And there are devotional writers who will comment as follows:

He (God) has used His people as instruments of His wrath, to punish wicked nations, who have vexed them and seduced them into idolatry (1BC1117).

Such passages, however, no more legitimize war than King Saul being used of God legitimizes a monarchy for Israel. God never intended Israel to be anything other than His nation, and He would have been their king. God wanted a theocracy. Israel, in the hardness of hearts, wanted a monarchy. They wanted to be like the nations all around them. God respected their choice but it was not in their best interests.

Jacob's experience is meant to be our experience and God hoped it would be normative for all His people after Jacob's experience. When Jacob was fleeing from Laban, his father-in-law, he did not resort to arms but trusted in the Lord for deliverance, and the Lord worked for him.

**Genesis 31:24** (NIV) Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

When Jacob was to meet Esau and his armed men he wrestled with the angel for the Lord's blessing, and he lifted up his voice to God for help.

**Genesis 32:9** (NIV) Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' 10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. 11 Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12 But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

The meeting turned out well because of the intervention of God between Jacob and his angry, well armed brother.

**Genesis 33:4** (NIV) But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

If we will depend on God He is able to deliver us when it is in the best interests of all concerned.

We have three approaches by Christians to the matter of violence, especially in times of war. **Pacifists** believe all violence is anti-Christian and abstain from all forceful action. The Quaker said to the burglar: *Verily I am about to shoot where thou art standing, perhaps thou carest to move thy body somewhat!*

The **Just War** tradition suggests that when Christians are attacked they may and should defend themselves against aggression. This was the stand of South Africa when attacked from without her borders. This tradition cites God's command to the Israelites to go to war to destroy evil attackers. A **Just War** is fought for a righteous cause, by controlled means, and with a reasonable expectation of success. These ideas were enshrined in the 1925 Geneva Convention. Unfortunately it is hardly worth the paper it is written on since almost all the signatories have developed atomic, biological and chemical weapons contrary to this convention.

**Relative Pacifism** is a consequence of the Nuclear Age where most Christians now agree atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons can not be limited only to the destruction of evil but will include the innocent and should thus be avoided at all costs.

Jacques Ellul, the French theologian and sociologist, has formulated five laws of violence. These are: The Law of Continuity, The Law of Reciprocity, The Law of Sameness, The Law of Nothing Else, and The Law of Justification.

### **The Law of Continuity**

Our history has been one of continual violence.

**Genesis 6:11** *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.*

In the Bible, earthly kingdoms are symbolized by violent beasts. Violence has a strange and captivating appeal to men and women. We rehearse the Second World War on the screen ad nauseam. Westerns, Martial Arts heroes, Ninja Turtles, boxing and wrestling fascinate many. Violence sells newspapers, films, videos and TV programs.

## The Law of Reciprocity

**Matthew 26:52** *All who draw the sword will die by the sword.*

There is no qualifier for the "all." Even those who draw the sword with good intentions, expose themselves to the consequences of violence. This is not a decree of God, it is a statement of cause and effect. The person who carries a violent weapon thinks differently from the one who is not armed. This violent thinking results in actions that cause only more violence.

## The Law of Sameness

It is impossible to distinguish between justified and unjustified violence, between the violence that liberates and the violence that enslaves. The violence that liberated Eastern Europe from Nazism enslaved it to Communism. If we use violence we condone our enemy using it too. It is for this reason Jesus refused to use violence.

**Matthew 5:38,39** *You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

Jesus recognized the Kingdom of Peace can never be built by violence. It is for this reason the early Christians refused to be involved in violence. It is for this reason Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., refused the temptation of violence.

## The Law of Nothing Else

We have in view admirable ends and objectives. Unfortunately, to attain them we have to use a little bit of violence . . . If we revolutionaries are allowed to use a little violence (you can't make an omelette without breaking the eggs), you'll see the reign of justice, liberty and 'equality'. This kind of argument is repeated again and again, and it sounds logical enough. But it is a lie.

The end does not justify the means. On the contrary, evil means corrupt good ends . . . Let the man who wants to use violence, do so; let the man who thinks there is no other way, use it; but let him know what he is doing. This is all the Christian can ask of this man - that he be aware violence will never establish a just society. Yes, he will get his revenge; yes, he will subdue his 'enemy;' yes, he will consummate his hatred. But let him not confuse hatred with justice. (Jacques Ellul)

### The Law of Justification

The first thing a violent man does is justify his violence. It is as if he knows that it is inherently evil and everybody knows it as such. There is always the propaganda machine that must somehow explain the legitimacy of violence and its Siamese twin, hate.

**Genesis 4:23** *Lamech said to his wives, 'Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.'*

Michael Cassidy, a South African writer who understood the futility of violence and force, adds three more laws to those of Ellul's. They are: The Law of Mindlessness. The Law of Silencing Love. The Law of People becoming Things.

### How do we, as Christians, relate to violence?

Our life on this planet is transient and temporary. It is the *hors d'oeuvre* for the real thing that starts with the Second Coming of Jesus. We may lose our lives ahead of our personal estimated time of departure, but the destination is sure. How will you think? Will you let the world's way of thinking in terms of hatred and revenge be yours? Or will you dare to be Christian in your mind and reward evil with good? This is the grand option we have. Will you allow fear to dictate your actions and thoughts or will you be born again of love and trust? We actually have this option to exercise.

If we watch the news and read the papers to the exclusion of the good news of God's care, we will reap the results in the way we think and act. The way we allow ourselves to think influences the way we live our lives, the way we react to events around us.

We are called to be peacemakers and peacemakers can only make peace when they have peace with their Maker. Peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability to respond to conflict with love and concern and care. Peace is triumphing over anxiety and worry in the same way courage triumphs over fear.

**Matthew 8:23** *Then He [Jesus] got into the boat [church] and His disciples followed Him [this is what makes a disciple].* **24** *Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat [These storms are the result of evil caused by the evil one or the evil in our own hearts.] But Jesus was sleeping [A disciple can sleep well. Peter in jail is sleeping even though he knows James has been executed.]* **25** *The disciples went and woke Him [A disciple turns to Jesus in crisis], saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'* [The truth is we are all going to drown because of sin.] **26** *He replied 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?'*

Our sin is we do not trust God, we do not believe He loves and cares for us and at the end of time when all things are revealed we will give God three hoorah's for what He did. Perhaps we will also have the courage to boo ourselves for all the fretting and fuming we did in unbelief on this tragic planet. **Doubt** caused the disobedience of Eve. **Disappointment** resulted in the envy of Cain; his sacrifice was not accepted. **Discouragement** led to fear and the loss of hope for Elijah. Pharaoh's pride led him to **defy** the God of Heaven.

*Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of a man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!' [This is worship.]*

The question is not "Is Jesus in the boat?" But, "Am I in the boat?"

Jesus believed or trusted His Father to the point where He could sleep well even during the storm on the lake. I remember as a small boy getting into bed with Mom and Dad. I could lie between them and feel totally secure. It was a wonderful feeling of security. Nothing could harm me in any way.

While Wesley was crossing the Atlantic they ran afoul of a storm off Newfoundland. All the passengers were sure their last day had come and were weeping and wailing or cursing and drinking except for a group of Moravian Missionaries who were quietly singing hymns. Wesley, who was going as a missionary to the Natives of North America, never forgot their quiet peace and trust in God.

This peace is not the absence of fear but a confidence in God's grace and care. This peace is a consequence of knowing God as your Maker and Redeemer, One who really loves you and holds the winds of strife in His hand and will do what is best for you in the long run. Christianity is best revealed in crisis. It is revealed to ourselves in the dark recesses of our minds.

Are you afraid? Will you not take hold of His strength and believe He will keep that which is committed unto Him? Even if you have to give up this temporary life, He will also give you the courage to do so.

Paul, Peter, John the Baptist and countless martyrs were as afraid as we are sometimes, but the grace of God was sufficient for them and it will be for you if you will not refuse His help.

**Isaiah 57:20,21** *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

**Psalm 107:29,30** *He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them into their desired haven.*

**Romans 5:1** *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**2 Timothy 1:7** *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

**John 14:27** *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Do you believe God knows your situation? Do you believe God knows what is best for you? Do you believe God loves you?

Do you trust God?

**2 Timothy 1:12b** *because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day.*

God meets us where we are in our individual or corporate experience. Slavery laws and the divorce laws in the Old Testament do not legitimize slavery or divorce or indicate that these aberrations were what God wanted. God meets us where we are so that He may lead us to where He is.

The divine call still sounds: "Follow Me!" O that we could break out of our human or sinful thought patterns and begin to understand the mind of God.



## The Wrath of God

The phrase "wrath of God" or "God's wrath" is often used in Scripture. The root Greek word from which "wrath" is translated is *orge* and *orge* is translated as follows in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible: 31 times as "wrath," 3 times as "anger" and once as "vengeance." It is understood to refer to the temper, character, movement or agitation of the soul, impulse, desire, any violent emotion, but especially anger, indignation, anger exhibited in punishment and of punishments inflicted by magistrates.

The following list of references is exhaustive for *orge* in the New Testament: **Matthew 3:7; Mark 3:5; Luke 3:7; Luke 21:23, John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Romans 2:5; 2:8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4; Ephesians 2:3; 4:31; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; 1 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 3:11; 4:3; James 1:19, Revelation 6:16; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15.**

The most definitive passage in giving the meaning of *orge* is found in **Romans** chapter **one**:

18 For the wrath (*orge*) of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness

We may thus define God's "wrath," "anger," "vengeance" or "indignation" as His righteous displeasure with sin and its consequences on this planet. When Jesus saw what would happen to Jerusalem "He wept" (**Luke 19:41**). When He perceived the hardness of the hearts of the people at Lazarus' resurrection He also wept (**John 11:35**). Jesus was weeping for the consequences these men and women were bringing on themselves by the hardness of their hearts.

God's weeping indicates the depth of feeling that He experiences because of the consequences of sin to His dearest friends. **Romans one** explains, in detail, what the "wrath" of God means:

19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

**Verses 24, 26 and 28** explain precisely how God's wrath operates:

24 Therefore God **gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for degrading of their bodies with one another.

26 Because of this God **gave them over** to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, he **gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

The phrase “gave them over” is from the Greek word *paradidwmi*. It is translated as follows in the KJV: deliver (53), betray (40), deliver up (10), give (4), give up (4), give over (2), commit (2), miscellaneous (6). It has been suggested that the word means 1) to give into the hands of another; 2) to give over into one's power or use: to deliver to one something to keep, use, take care of, manage, to deliver up one to custody, to be judged, condemned, punished, scourged, tormented, put to death, to deliver up treacherously, i.e. by betrayal to cause one to be taught, moulded; 3) to commit, to commend; 4) to deliver verbally; commands, rites, to deliver by narrating, to report and 5) to permit or allow: when the fruit will allow i.e. when its ripeness permits; gives itself up, presents itself.

The meanings of *paradidwmi* are thus all very similar. The context of the word will then, as usual, determine the exact meaning. There are two passages in Romans in which the word *paradidwmi* is used in connection with Jesus Christ. An examination of these passages will be helpful.

These are firstly,

**Romans 4:25** Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification

and secondly,

**Romans 8:32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Both usages of *paradidwmi* again indicate an active giving up to consequences rather than a punishment or execution.

On the cross Jesus did not cry out: “Why are you killing Me?” but, “Why have you forsaken Me?” He could have just as well cried out: “Why have you given Me over into the hands of the evil one?” The death of Jesus on the cross is an illumination of what it means to die the death from which there is no return. This death is referred to as the **second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8)**. It means to come to the end of life or existence, it is to have no hope for a future. It is to be

without hope or courage of any sort. It is the ultimate discouragement, it is the final depression. It is an impenetrable blackness. It is to be forsaken of God who is light and life and love. It is to die of hopelessness. It is to return to the nothingness out of which we were made by God in the beginning.

So, it is not stretching the meaning of either *orge* or *paradidwmi* to suggest that the “wrath of God” means that God is forced to allow sinners to reap the inherent consequences of their sin. God’s wrath, in plain language, is experiencing the consequences that come to us unrestrained by His mercy and grace. God protected Israel against her national and natural enemies as long as He was permitted to. The book of Judges explains how the people would push God aside and then experience the consequences of famine, plagues, war and slavery. In the book of Hosea we are taught how the Lord loves and how His people turn from Him and experience the consequences of their choices. How can this passage be overlooked?

**Hosea 11:1** (NIV) When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. 5 Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? 6 Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. 7 **My people are determined to turn from me.** Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.

8 How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. 9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man – the Holy One among you. **I will not come in wrath.**

The Old Testament writers are sure the wrath of God is when He is forced away by rebellion and they suffer the consequences of losing God’s protection against evil.

“My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and **I will forsake them**, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods” (Deut. 31:17, 18).

“I will slay in My anger and My fury all for whose wickedness **I have hidden**

**My face from this city” (Jeremiah 33:5).**

“For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God . . . Therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and **He has given them up to trouble” (2 Chronicles 29:6-8).**

“For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; **I hid and was angry” (Isaiah 57:17).**

“They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore, the Lord was very angry with Israel, **and removed them from His sight.** . . . The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight (2 Kings 17:17-20).

As much as we used to fear the Black Death which ravaged Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and destroyed a third of the population of Europe, as much as we used to fear polio, as much as we fear cancer, as much as we fear AIDS, or the Ebola virus, there is simply no comparison with the awful, terminal effects or consequences of sin. Nicotine might cause lung cancer, a poor diet and lack of exercise might result in heart problems, promiscuity might result in STD's or AIDS but sin will utterly destroy you every time. The consequence is inevitable in with the infection. Once infected there is no hope outside of God. The cumulative effects of sin on the planet will do what sin has done to every human being. It utterly destroys. No one has ever escaped death on this planet. God never killed them. The consequences are inherent in the “disease.”

The wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**).

One Bible scholar has made this point as follows:

Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels “No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. **I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work.”** (RH September 17,1901)

In another instance the same writer comments as follows:

The time is right upon us. The Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the earth. When the angel of mercy folds her wings and departs, Satan will do the evil deeds he has long wished to do. Storm and tempest, war and bloodshed - in these things he delights, and thus he gathers in his harvest. (RH, September 17, 1901)

God has not ignored or failed to act towards sin. He acted in the most decisive possible manner at Calvary. All heaven was given to save sinful man. God acts in his wrath against sin by giving up sinners to the consequences of their actions. This is "His strange act" (**Isaiah 28:21**) since all through history God has protected people from the consequences of their choices and the designs of the evil one. Now God must stand aside, forced away by those who do not want Him there, forced away by God's respect for our freedom. God must watch His creation destroyed. Imagine watching the people, possibly your own children, for whom and with whom you have lived and worked being destroyed. It would be heart breaking, especially when it is all so unnecessary.

This calamity (the killing of the baby boys in Bethlehem) the Jews had brought upon themselves. If they had been walking in faithfulness and humility before God, He would in a signal manner have made the wrath of the king harmless to them. But they had separated themselves from God by their sins, and had rejected the Holy Spirit, which was their only shield. (DA 65)

This is best seen at Calvary where God gave Jesus up to these awful consequences. Calvary is a warning to all that the consequence of sin, although not punishment from God, is so awful that it broke the heart of God and killed Him at Calvary. Sin is an awful malignancy. It destroys everything with which it comes into contact. All of us would have been annihilated years ago but for the preserving power of grace. God's wrath is active in the sense that God finally concedes that grace and mercy are no longer wanted on this planet. He is forced away by sinners wanting to be free, that is away from Him and apart from Him. If He remained He would be limiting their freedom. Sadly, He must leave sinners to their chosen doom. Calvary tells us of the awfulness of that choice.

None of this is new. The prophet Isaiah understood these matters clearly and wrote about them.

**Isaiah 35:4** (NIV) say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; **with divine retribution he will come to save you.**"

## The Conclusion of the Matter

Could it be, because of our faults, that God sometimes wonders if He has failed? Did the problems Jesus faced on earth, which required nights of prayer, tell us something about God and His battles with the consequences of sin. Or do we see God as a stoic with absolutely no emotions. But then why did Jesus weep? Why is there joy in heaven for a sinner who repents (**Luke 15:10**).

From where did Jesus get the idea for the parable of the father who held a party, with wine and dancing and music (**Luke 15:23**) when the runaway son returned. While it is certainly true that God is infinitely different to those He created, they are also made in His image and so there must be touch points in their experiences. If this were not true there could never be a relationship between creature and Creator.

It is a law of nature that we become like the people we admire. For young children these people are usually parents and most children are very much like their parents. God is also one of the "people" we admire in our lives. Our picture of God drives our behaviour as nothing else does. Our friends of yesteryear who burned heretics at the stake did so on the understanding that God also burns "bad" people. The picture we have of God determines the way we think and feel and thus the way we treat ourselves and each other. If our God cannot "tolerate," whatever He cannot tolerate, then we will tend to be intolerant too.

It is ironic that the God who has suffered with us and tolerated sin for at least six thousand years has, as His friends, those whose greatest crimes often seem to be intolerance and inhumanity. Many of the wars on this planet have been fought by those claiming to be His friends. What a travesty of the truth about God.

These essays have suggested that God is moral, that He would never use any means that would not have been used in heaven prior to sin. Sin has not changed the way God enters into relationship with His creatures. Sin has changed the way we perceive God and interfered in our relationship with Him. It was Adam and Eve who left the presence of God and it was God who searched for them. It was Cain who murdered Abel and avoided God, but again it was God who came and sought him out in his alienation. It was God who called Abraham in Ur and took him to the land of promise. It was God who came and found runaway Moses at the burning bush. God has always taken the redemptive initiative throughout history.

I have suggested that God has been misunderstood both by the writers and the readers of the Scriptures as a consequence of sin. God has taken the responsibility for sin, just as a good father takes responsibility for his child's misbehaviour, but we can if we wish, come to know the truth about God. These essays have been an attempt to speak for God, to point out that God is not responsible for the mess we are in.

His plan was that we would enjoy light and life and love in a beautiful environment. He still works toward that goal which will, one day, come to fruition.

It will happen, not because He will force it on the planet, but because after we have totally destroyed the planet, He will remake it for those who want to be there.

The patience of the saints is a consequence of their serving a patient God. The loyalty of saved sinners is a result of their admiration for God's thoughts and feelings towards sinners throughout history. The change that came about in John, the Son of Thunder, who became John the Beloved, still happens today. I covet the same change for myself, and I thank God you do too!

So, for God's sake

Take courage for the rest of the journey

Confuse not cliché and Christ

Distinguish between tradition and transformation

Mix not metaphor and meaning

And, when the power of love triumphs over the love of power

Then grace reigns sovereign in our hearts



## Appendix 1

The Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* printed a fascinating article on November 28, 1998, entitled “Natural Disaster Costs Soar to World Record.” The subheading of this article stated, “Study blames deforestation and human meddling for 1998’s 130 billion in damages.” The newspaper reported that violent weather had resulted in major disasters throughout the decade of the 1980’s, but that more money was spent for disaster relief in 1998 alone than in all the other years put together. Human meddling in nature was to blame for much of this \$130 billion loss, which came from storms, floods, droughts and fires, and resulted in an estimated 32,000 people being killed and another 300 million being displaced— more than the entire population of the United States.

A spokesman for World watch, an environmental research group, was quoted as saying, “More and more, there’s a human fingerprint in natural disasters in that we’re making them more frequent and more intense and we’re also . . . making them more destructive.” This spokesman, Seth Dunn, a research associate and climate change expert at the institute, went on to explain:

*When hillsides are left bare, rainfall will rush across the land or into rivers without being slowed by trees and allowed to be absorbed by the soil or [to] evaporate back into the atmosphere. This leads to floods and landslides that are strong enough to wipe out roads, farms and fisheries far downstream. In a sense, we're turning up the faucets . . . and throwing away the sponges like the forests and the wetlands.*

Our secular newspapers are giving testimony to our neglect as stewards! We have not been vigilant to take hold of our mandate; and the land and people are suffering for it. That is the bad news. The good news is, the effects of our sin committed on the land — war, famine, disease, ecological devastation — are used by God to catch our attention so that our fallen stewardship can be addressed, the land can be healed and God's purposes for His land and people can be released.

What will we do with the mandate given us as servants of the Kingdom of God? We are challenged with this question in the parables—the expression of Jesus’ theology about the Kingdom of God.

Releasing Heaven on Earth, Alistair Petrie, Chosen a Division of Baker Book House, 2000, p209.

## Appendix 2

**D**ear Dad

I have been thinking about relativism. Isn't everything relative to everything else? For instance, while there certainly is right and wrong isn't it determined in its relation to a certain understanding of morality. Also, isn't this exactly what you're doing with your interpretation of the Bible? You are creating new meaning by re-interpreting through another framework, that of God's mercy and lack of violence or force? So now you retell the stories through those glasses. Is that not relativism? I know that religious people love to propound the existence of absolutes and "the truth." But hasn't all of these absolutes and truths been "changed" in the light of new understanding? So that from our perspective there is nothing that cannot change? Isn't this what is so complex in understanding God? The fact that he has such an understanding of us, himself and the universe that he doesn't have to continually reinterpret things? Isn't this what we mean by absolute and unchanging and all knowing?

So what do you think?

Love from Shell

**Dear Shelley**

I think you hit the nail on the head by stating that our understanding of truth is dynamic. Only God can be absolute in His understanding and that is because He made it all. My favourite example is how we thought the sun went round the earth and used the marvellously, complicated epicycles of Ptolemy to describe this obvious "truth." Then Galileo came along (with Copernicus) and voila! We now have a simple ellipse to describe the rotation of the earth around the sun. Oh! There is another point that needs to be made. Truth tends to be elegantly simple.  $E=mc^2$  is so simple really compared to the many other previous explanations of how to relate mass and energy. So the perception of truth will always be an infinite journey for finite beings because God is so deep and wide! We must search for the simple, obvious and elegant explanations which take our breathe away and bring glory to the genius of God.

Love

Dad

## Appendix 3

**Ian:**

This is the issue I was addressing in the essay: EVIL. The whole history of this planet is wretched. Why does God let it continue? I also with the “souls under the altar” cry out, “how long?” There does not seem to be any other solution than to let evil play itself out. Does God have another option? I am sure God would have gone that route if there was another way.

The pain we experience is only infinitesimal compared to that which God experiences. “The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.” (Ed 263) Whatever your argument against any pain that God allows in the future must also hold for the 6000 years of past pain we know of.

**Jamie:**

I guess my understanding was that, sure there is pain in the world at present, but there is still hope of repentance/redemption or even just for love to be shown and experienced. When Jesus returns, the time for deciding whether we are for God or against Him is over - the Great Controversy has reached its end. So I think I see that as a different kind of environment in which suffering exists. In our present situation we suffer but hope remains - at the end if there is suffering there is no hope, which leads to my question of would God not want to bring that sort of suffering to an end instantly and “humanely?”

**Ian:**

A more difficult question is that of why God resurrects the wicked at the end of the millennium knowing that they will be destroyed again. This is really vindictive if there is not a very good reason for the second resurrection. What is your solution to this problem? Serious question from me!

**Jamie:**

Good question. My attempt at an answer will probably sound cagey but it goes like this. The O.T. writers [among other things] pointed toward the life and death of Jesus, but they [usually] did so in a sketchy and often obscure way. Jesus came and fleshed out those writings and through his life and teaching they came to life and we have the opportunity to understand the O.T. writers better because of him. In the NT John points forward to an event after the millennium [the second resurrection] in a similar shadowy manner [about 3 sentences] just as the Old Testament writers pointed to the first advent. I presume, therefore, that when Jesus comes again we will be given more enlightenment and understanding of what the second resurrection is about. Who knows? Maybe there will be an opportunity for the raised dead to respond to God positively and for their names to be transferred

to the book of life. My short answer then is "We don't have enough information now, but we will then." Probably not very helpful to you.

**Ian:**

The Hebrews did not believe in the devil as a supernatural being. Satan is only mentioned three times in the Old Testament: Job, Zechariah and Chronicles. However the term "Satan," comes from "shattan" which is "the accuser" in Hebrew. When a Hebrew reads these passages he does not think of an evil being anyone more than you would when you read of "the prosecutor" in the news paper. Jesus is the one who told us about the devil and drew the veil aside. Jews today do not believe in a devil either. They believe that the devil is a concept that Christians have invented to take the blame for their evil. They believe Christians are irresponsible for doing so.

So, most often anything supernatural in the Old Testament was attributed to God. This is still true in Islam today. *Insha Allah* means that God willed it, however good or bad. Many other cultures believe this way too. We still have the concept in our insurance language such as: "acts of God." I do not blame God for lightning strikes. Not too many years ago, this was a direct, personal retributive act of God. Do you believe that God gave king David's wives to Absalom to have sex with in daylight as a punishment for his adultery with Bathsheba? I would not tolerate a church board that prescribed this kind of response to a pastor's affair! The reason I would have nothing to do with this kind of action is that the mind that conceives this discipline is evil. What about the women? These were evil consequences that were attributed to God. God is not like this. He could never conceive of such a deed. He is pure and holy. This was the devil's work through evil men.

So we have to some how come to some consistency in our understanding of the Bible. How shall we decide in any given incident if God did it, or evil angels and men did it? My solution is to go to Jesus' life and teaching and then reinterpret the Bible from the clearest revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-3).

**Jamie:**

I agree, we certainly need consistency in the way we interpret the Bible. I guess I feel quite apprehensive about saying that even when scripture says, "God said this. . ." we can't be sure God actually said that. It makes me more apprehensive when it is a central issue [like the Flood] that other parts of scripture then refer back to - such as 2 Peter.

I find the passage that you refer to in 2 Samuel 12 very interesting for a number of reasons. David is elsewhere described - as we all know - as a man after God's own heart. When Nathan relays the rebuke/punishment from God about having his wives given to another in broad daylight, it's interesting what David says. He doesn't say "Isn't that a bit harsh, Lord?" He does say, "I have sinned against the

Lord” - he is repentant. Going on, Nathan then says “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.” Why does he say that?

What it makes me think of [which is just an interpretation and should be read as such] is that God said to Adam and Eve, “If you sin, you die,” or even “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Why didn't they die as soon as they ate the fruit? Would God have been unjust if Adam and Eve had died as soon as they ate the fruit? After all, that's kind of what he spelled out to them as the conditions. What I'm getting at is that, from Nathan's words it seems that David had an acute consciousness that he was deserving of death for his crimes [his major crime being despising God] - Nathan seems to bring something like a reprieve “you are not going to die.” Instead of a death sentence David gets a lesser punishment [you could say] - is that God being merciful rather than cruel? The response[s] of David seem to indicate that he still found God compassionate, gracious and merciful:

1. He felt that it was worth praying and fasting for the child that was going to die because “Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.”

2. He refers to the “great compassion” of God. I find it interesting that we can look at the incident and think “how awful,” but David lived through it and found God compassionate!

I do understand the method you have elected to use for understanding the Bible consistently. The Hebrews 1:1-3 way. It's a good method, a sensible method. I'm sure that - at least at some level - I'm using that approach in evaluating scripture too. I guess I tend to be inclined to leave stuff like Matt 13:40-42 in, however, because it seems consistent with other parts of scripture.

I appreciate the time you have given to me - I value being able to communicate across the globe with you on this great topic. I wish I could be in your church for this Sabbath's sermon; I feel I would get a great deal out of it.



## **About the author**

Ian Hartley's undergraduate studies were in Mathematics, Physics and Religion. He spend the first half of his life studying and teaching mathematics, education and religion.

His first love has always been sharing the God of the Bible with others and was ordained as a gospel minister in 1975. He moved from education to full time pastoral ministry in 1989.

## **He conducts seminars in the following areas:**

Examining Ephesians  
Grabbing Galatians  
Interpreting the Bible with Clarity and Integrity  
Interpreting Revelation  
Leadership, its Nature and Nurture  
Living with someone of another Gender  
Revelling in Romans  
Stress and Distress  
The Character of God  
Understanding the Fundamentals of Christianity

## **He has written the following books:**

**A Packetful of Plays** - A collection of Plays to Communicate Spiritual Truths

**Are Men Mad? Are Woman Weird?** - Bridging the Differences in Gender Attitudes and Communication Styles.

**Bible Study 101** - The Fundamentals of Christianity

**Ephesians for Everyone** - A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians.

**For God's Sake** - A compelling presentation on the character of God.

**Outlines in the Book of Revelation** - A concise commentary on the book of Revelation.

**Revelling in God's Righteousness** - A commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.

**The Good News in Galatians** - A commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians.