

“Oh my God!”

A pew-sitter gives up on the “Organizational” God
and starts from scratch:

“Are God and the Bible understandable for ordinary
people?”

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

(ok...maybe that your 8th-grader can understand)

by

Paul Cinquemani,

who gives all the credit to a friend and mentor

Special thanks to Ann Kleinhans for
the cover design

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Paul Cinquemani

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Library of Congress Control Number 2002093632

Printed in the U.S.A. by
Morris Publishing
3212 East Highway 30
Kearney, NE 68847
1-800-650-7888

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

“”
Pat Robertson

“”
Billy Graham

“”
Robert Schuller

“”
“ and “”

Pope John Paul II

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

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

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

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

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

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

John 8:32

“Oh, my God!” – God’s character and the way He runs His Universe

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome! Glad you decided to give this a read!

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

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

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

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

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

OK, then, let's go!

Chapter # 1:

The War That Started It All

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The War That Started It All

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUNDS PRETTY INCREDIBLE DOESN’T IT??

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Absolutely Trustworthy!

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

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

WE MATTER!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The War That Started It All

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

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

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

1 Corinthians 4:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter # 2:

What Went Wrong Up There In Heaven?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Obey and be rewarded;
Disobey and be destroyed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rom. 14:23 – “*Any action that is not based on faith is sin*”
(Moffat’s Translation)

“*Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin*”
(Revised Standard Version - RSV)

“*When we act apart from our faith we sin*”
(Phillip’s translation)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRUST

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

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

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

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

Which view makes the most sense to you?

Chapter # 3:

“Please, Trust Me!” God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter # 4:

If YOU Were God, How Would You Restore Trust?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All right...get this big point now:

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

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

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

EVIDENCE!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clearly methods God does not use.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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It's in the STORIES!!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If YOU were God, How Would You Restore Trust?

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

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

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

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

“What does this tell me about my God?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(New English Bible) or

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

(Goodspeed)

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

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

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

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

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

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

READ THE BIBLE!!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter #5:

The Bible Contains the Evidence

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

The Bible is the true and only Word of God

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

Can the Bible be trusted?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LAW – *Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy*
THE PROPHETS – *Joshua; Judges; Samuel; Kings; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi*
THE WRITINGS – *Psalms; Proverbs; Job; Song of Solomon; Ruth; Lamentations; Ecclesiastes; Esther; Daniel; Ezra; Nehemiah; And Chronicles*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh My God!”

Psalms of Solomon
Magical Books of Moses
Story of Ahikar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aramaic: מְלִבְּאָ לְעֻלְמָן חַיִּי
live ever for king O

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

... GODISNOWHERE?

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

GODISNOWHERE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter #6:

Evaluating the Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BUT...WHAT ABOUT THEIR MEANING?

“Oh My God!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ouches of gold" Exodus 28:11

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

"I trow not." Luke 17:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But

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

Are WE more forgiving than our God???

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

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

And there’s SO much more:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh My God!”

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

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

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

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

BUT THEY NEVER DID!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT GOD?

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

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

“Oh My God!”

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

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

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

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

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

Evaluating The Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter #7:

Where Does God Get His Authority?

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

Should God have such authority? Is that safe?

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

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

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

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

THESE ARE BIG AND WORTHY QUESTIONS!

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

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

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

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

“Oh My God!”

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

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

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

The GOOD NEWS! Just what is it anyway?

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

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

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

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

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

AUTHORITY!

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

- Position
- Power

“Oh My God!”

- Miracles
- Special Communication From God
- Popularity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AUTHORITY!

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

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

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

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

“Oh My God!”

You are being tried.” (GNB)

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

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

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

Does THAT say something about our God?

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

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

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

Why DID Jesus have to die?

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

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

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

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

“Oh My God!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh My God!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter #8:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The angels and rulers had never seen death before!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOU DECIDE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Only the most devout
- Sabbath keeping
 - Tithe paying
 - Health reforming
 - Bible quoting
- Members of the Faith!!!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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5. “Paying the price for sin” – All of these concepts are so into legal rules as opposed to developing trust in a relationship. What have we learned God’s aim is...to restore trust? Or to make sure no rules are broken? By the way, who gets paid the “price for sin”? If Christ paid the price, who got the proceeds? Make some sense out of that. Often, we use this term “paying the price” to describe what it cost someone to achieve a goal. Olympic athletes “pay a price” to achieve the stature to compete for the “gold”...to be the best of the best. They sacrifice their social lives, typically, and instead spends hours upon end in the practice of their expertise. This is called “paying the price”. Using this analogy, one can understand that Christ “paid a price” in His sacrifice for us. But just what was that price? One thing we think we know: He came as a human and will always be “flesh” for the rest of eternity. For Him to do otherwise would call His demonstration to the universe that mankind could live a right life into question. He therefore cannot anymore be everywhere present like His Father and the Holy Spirit can. This is a mystery to us. I dare say it’s only the tip of the iceberg in terms of price.

6. “The Blood of the cross” – There is a serious debate about the efficacy of the “blood of Christ” among theologians. Alright, alright...what on earth is “efficacy”? The word means “the power to produce an effect”. Now, no Christian would disagree that the cross experience has had quite an effect on the future of the universe. Our theologian friends, however, squabble over whether it was the “blood” that did it! For the life of me, I cannot understand and have little tolerance for debates of this kind. Does Christ’s literal blood have magical power? We sing, “There’s Power in the Blood”...but what do we mean? Symbolically, “blood” in the Bible has always meant “life”. Certainly there is power in the life that Christ led! Does the word “blood” have any power? Only in the meaning! There’s power in the “meaning” of the blood! There’s power in the meaning of the word! To repeat the words does nothing! To understanding their meaning does everything!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter #9:

Afraid of God?...Forget About It!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now look at Proverbs 9:10:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Afraid of God?...Forget About it!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Afraid of God?...Forget About it!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Afraid of God?...Forget About it!

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

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

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

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

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

The truth about GOD!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter #10:

The Great Reminder...A Celebration of FREEDOM!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Observe what James said about the Ten Commandments:

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

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

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

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

God values nothing more than our FREEDOM!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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On that day, the defense rested its case!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” John 1:3 (NIV)

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” Colossians 1:16 (NIV)

Think about that a minute...the One who came to save us is the One who made us in the beginning! Who would know better how to heal the damage done!

So, then, every time we observe the seventh-day Sabbath, we are publicly acknowledging to God, our friends and ourselves that we have faith in Jesus as our Savior, as our Creator and as our God! Many wonder about the proper way to worship or observe the day so set aside. It is in this context that we should determine for ourselves how we should observe the Sabbath!

NOW...when the question is raised: “What kind of being is our God? Could the Father possibly be as gracious as the Son?” The resounding reply comes every Sabbath! “God is just as gracious as the Son...for Christ, the One we call the Son...is God!” If Christ is Creator-God...then, if you want to know what God is like...just look at Christ! Every Sabbath is to remind us of theology that is that consequential – that profound!

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There are other ways, of course, in which the Sabbath helps strengthen our faith...and they are beautiful in their design:

“Keep the Sabbath, my day of rest, because it is a sign between you and me for all time to come, to show that I, the Lord, have made you my own people.”
Exodus 31:13 (GNB)

“Make the Sabbath a holy day, so that it will be a sign of the covenant we made, and will remind you that I am the Lord your God.” *Ezekiel 20:20 (GNB)*

“I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the Lord make them holy.”
Ezekiel 20:12 (GNB)

This is Christ talking to us as the God of the Old Testament. He points out that the Sabbath is a reminder about a very important truth about our God and His relationship with His people. *His people!* A short study of these people will reveal them to be a bunch of ingrates! Unholy! Sinful! And yet God says to them: *“I’ve not abandoned you! I’m still working to save and to heal you! I still regard you as my people!”* Who are God’s people today? Are they any better than those of Old Testament times?

Notice now that salvation is more than forgiveness. It is also a healing of the damage done! Up there in Exodus, God said He is making us “holy people”. What does that mean? We’ll play a little “word algebra” here. Webster, and so many others, define “holy” as “without sin”. Remember the simple definition of sin that we started with? It means: “separated from God”. So being “holy” means nothing more than “without being separated from God”! Given what we’ve studied, that makes sense, doesn’t it?

So here are more reasons we keep this special day:

- To show that only the Creator can heal the damage that’s been done...only He can recreate!

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- Only the One who made us in the beginning can restore us to what we used to be!

David acknowledged that Creative Power of God when he wrote:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me.” Psalms 51:10 (KJV)

The creative power is necessary to make us trustworthy children of God one more time. We can't do this by ourselves! Some people try...by self restraint, discipline, etc. But only by faith and trust in our Creator can all the damage be perfectly restored!

This doesn't mean that more elementary reasons for observing the Sabbath don't have a place or validity. What do you tell your children, for example, when it comes to this topic? Don't you speak to them in a language that they can understand...taking into account their experience and allowing for their growth? God did (and does) the same with His children. Moses gave a different reason in the book of Deuteronomy for observing the Sabbath than he did in the book of Exodus for example:

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and for that reason the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:15 (NEB)

Is this valid? Or is it a contradiction? Is it a lapse of memory? No, that doesn't make sense, does it? As we have seen in past chapters, God works with His children within the limits of their own understanding...and He risks being misunderstood Himself in order to get through once in awhile.

The Sabbath is about God...He created us free in the beginning. When we lost our freedom, He used His creative power to make us free again! The exodus was always to remind of this! Note how the Sabbath is always connected to freedom!

St. Paul has an entire discourse in Hebrews on yet another way to consider the Sabbath. In Hebrews chapter 4 he says the Sabbath is a

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type and a foretaste of the rest to come. Paul argued that the Israelites physically entered the Promised Land when they crossed into Canaan...but they did not enter God’s rest...because they didn’t trust Him! He said, therefore, that there remains a Sabbath-like rest to the people of God:

“So there must still be a promised Sabbath of Rest for God’s people.” Hebrews 4:9 (Goodspeed)

“There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God’s people, the seventh-day rest.” Hebrews 4:9 (Jerusalem)

Thayer’s Lexicon (A form of Greek dictionary) defines “sabbatismos”, the word used for “rest” in this passage. According to that Lexicon, this rest is “the rest looked forward to by the true followers of God in the world to come.” If we’ve really been led and won to trust God, we begin to enter that Sabbath-like rest now...and certainly in the new earth we’ll know what that Sabbath rest is all about completely!

The Sabbath, through the years, has answered the four basic philosophic questions of mankind. This is fascinating to me. Here they are:

- Where have we come from? *We’ve been created! We arrived in the Creation and all that came with it!*
- Why are we here? *We’re here as a part of the process to restore the universe to what it was before that great war between Lucifer and God took place! We have a role to play in the vindication of God!*
- Where do we go in the future? *When Christ comes the second time, we’re going to heaven with Him to meet the rest of the family! Then we’re coming back home to a new earth.*
- What kind of person is our God? What does He want from us? *God is just like Christ. He wants us back!*

Is there ANY information Satan would rather that we not have than THIS?

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It should come as no surprise, then, that Satan would seek to confuse the meaning of the Sabbath day!!

There is this “Tie” to God, then, as Moffatt put it in his translation of Ezekiel 20:12 (compare it to the GNB version used above on Page 142):

“I gave them my Sabbath, to mark the tie between me and them, to teach them that it is I, the Eternal, who sets them apart.”

The world has broken this tie. The last message of God to the world is the restoration of this tie and all it stands for! It’s in the Book of Revelation. It’s a message of love and faith...it’s not the legalistic: “*if you don’t keep that day...I’ll kill you!*”

Whenever you hear someone preach that:

- Christ is our Creator
- Christ is our Savior
- Christ is coming again
- God the Father is just like Him

you are hearing the message of the seventh day!

At the end of the 66 books of the Bible, we see the world divided into two camps. The last book of the Bible, Revelation, discusses this. In chapter 12, John presents the great war in heaven. In Chapter 13 he talks about Satan’s final campaign where all but a few will be taken in by him. In Chapter 14 he talks about the few who will not be taken in. Look at how they’re described:

*“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”
Rev. 14:12 (GNB)*

In that day, intelligent and whole-hearted Sabbath observing will represent faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus. There will be a group that still worships Jesus as Creator and God.

“Oh My God!”

To reiterate...the Sabbath is not about us...it's about God! Someday God will recreate our environment...and give it back to us. There are several Bible passages that talk about this:

“The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

2 Peter 3:10 (KJV)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

Revelation 21:1 (RSV)

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.”

Isaiah 65:17(NIV)

Will there be any need for the Sabbath in the hereafter? One could make a case for it. Isaiah was impressed to indicate so:

“Just as the new earth and the new heavens will endure by my power, so your descendants and your name will endure. Month by month, at the new moon, week by week on the Sabbath, all mankind shall come to bow down before me, says the Lord.” Isaiah 66:23 (NEB)

If God asks us to celebrate that special Sabbath day in the world to come, what will your reaction be? Shouldn't it be the same reaction here and now?