

Chapter # 11:

Why the LAW?...God's Emergency Measures

This chapter is about the steps God had to take to hold things together long enough to demonstrate some of the truth about Himself. When Lucifer plunged the heavenly family into that crisis of rebellion that resulted in a war and massive distrust, emergency measures were required to maintain a semblance of order and respect until the basis for real peace and freedom could be clarified and confirmed. St. Paul came to understand this concept well after developing a close relationship with God over a three year period of “unlearning” his traditional training in Arabia. (See Galatians 1:17 & 18) When Paul wrote his famous letter to the Roman church, he spoke about this topic:

“But now God’s way of putting people right with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence. But by the free gift of God’s grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus who sets them free. God offered him, so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.” Romans 3: 21-26 (GNB)

God will settle for nothing less than peace and freedom based upon mutual trust:

WELL-FOUNDED TRUST AND LOVE!

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This will occur because of all the evidence God has provided us through the years in the history of His Word as well as in the history of our lives.

The EMERGENCY referred to above is the breakdown of trust and trustworthiness. It's the stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen that has made it so hard for God to heal the damage that has been done. The consequences of this breakdown have been *clearly* portrayed all through scripture; throughout history...and we see it every day in the world about us. No one trusts anyone anymore. Wives don't trust husbands and husbands don't trust wives. Why? Employers and employees don't trust each other. Why? People of one religion don't trust people of another religion. Why? Trust is completely missing at the highest levels of government. As this book is being written, we've just had the closest most drawn-out election of the Presidency of the United States in history. The Republicans and Democrats clearly don't trust each other. Why? Does this make for a serene sense of security in the universe? It surely doesn't seem so. Just yesterday I talked with someone trying to raise money in the venture capital market with a sensitive business plan. He has been counseled time and again not to trust anyone with it. So he lives in fear that someone will “steal” his idea. We all live in a state of fear...because trust is gone. Trust in God? You must be kidding.

God proposes to set right (simple concept for justification) and keep right (simple concept for sanctification) all that has gone wrong. In order to do this though, He must win us back to trust and a willingness to listen. He must also heal us of the damage done. You see, forgiveness is not enough...healing must take place! Think about it: do you want to spend the hereafter living next to pardoned (forgiven) criminals who have not been restored to safety? The object or goal of God has been to develop trusting and trustworthy saints. But what has God had to work with over history? People usually fell into these categories:

- Those unwilling to listen at all
- Those who just plain are not listening
- Those so influenced by Satan's lies that they've turned away to other gods

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- Those so influenced by Satan's lies that they don't believe in God at all
- Those so influenced by Satan's lies that they seek to worship the True God as arbitrary; vengeful; exacting; unforgiving and severe! In so doing they offer Him the obedience that springs from fear
- Those who live between the immediately above two extremes
- Consider yourself! Do you fit anywhere in this spectrum?

So, then, it is no wonder that we see God using many and various ways in the Bible...trying to reach us *where we are* in this great emergency...speaking a language we can understand...leading us no faster than we're able to follow. God has run grave risks of being misunderstood as He sought to gain our attention and hold it long enough to tell us more of the truth about Himself!

When we've been hard of hearing, God has raised His voice. We've looked at examples of that in the stories about Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19); Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16); the she-bears (2nd Kings 2); the Flood (Genesis 7 & 8); Mt. Carmel (1st Kings 18) and so many other stories that indicate God's willingness to run the risk of being misunderstood...to lead us to that reverence that is the beginning of WISDOM!

When we were tempted to take the idea of sin lightly; and underestimated the seriousness of its consequences...the One who sees the sparrow fall instituted that system of sacrifices and ceremonies that required the death of millions of His creatures, so that we might be warned in a language we understood! Consider what a distasteful task that was for God.

When we were tempted to accept Satan's lies that sin doesn't lead to death...God sent His own Son to die that death and so demonstrate the truth! The whole Bible is full of these Emergency Measures! It's full of illustrations of the lengths to which God is willing to go. We've seen many of these already. Divorce, for example, remember? God's male "children" were churning through wives like a kid with a Halloween bag full of candy. God didn't design

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marriage to be perverted in this way, nor was He happy with the way divorced women were cast aside as nothing. We looked at that story where the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus over the question of divorce (Matthew 19). Jesus made it clear that such a process was an emergency measure because of the “stiff-necked” behavior of God’s people. God had some pretty scathing things to say about divorce through His prophet Malachi. Check out Malachi 2:13 – 16. If you got right down to it, you could say that the entire Bible is an emergency measure! It was recorded to guide us through this time of distrust and rebellion.

With all these emergency measures to consider, we’re only going to look at two of them in this chapter. They are, however, two of the most important emergency measures...two of the most misunderstood. This will give you a framework with which to examine and understand the other measures.

NUMBER ONE: God’s emergency use of LAW.

If it is true that God values nothing so much as our *freedom*, then why has He made so much use of law? Isn’t law restrictive? If all He asks from us is *trust* and *love*...both which, incidentally, cannot be commanded...WHY did He give us the 10 Commandments which *seem* to demand love and obedience under threat of execution? If God doesn’t really wish to be seen as arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe...why did He surround us with all these innumerable rules?

St. Paul seemed to be on both sides of this issue. His emphasis was on freedom and trust...so much so that he was accused of doing away with God’s Law...or these rules. He, of course, rebutted this in chapter 3 of the letter to the Romans. He said that faith doesn’t abolish the Law. Rather, it establishes the Law by putting it in its proper perspective. And just what IS the right perspective from which to view God’s use of Law? Well, Paul doesn’t leave that up to speculation. He said the following in that little letter to the Galatians:

*“Why then the Law? It was added because of transgressions.”
Galatians 3:19 (RSV)*

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That seems pretty clear, doesn't it? It was added because it was needed! People were goofing things up so they needed a little guidance. Isn't that the way it works yet today? Every criminal incident perpetrated by someone using a gun brings us ever closer to gun control legislation. Paul went on to explain in that chapter just what the purpose of the Law has been:

“So the Law has been our attendant on our way to Christ, so that we might be made upright through faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer in the charge of the attendant.” Galatians 3:24, 25 (Goodspeed)

The King James Version refers to the “attendant” above as a “schoolmaster”. The Greek word used (paidagogos) actually referred to the slave that took children to school and protected them along the way. They needed that help until they were “grown up”. Do you get this picture?

What Law was Paul talking about in these passages? Theologians have argued that it was just the ceremonial law or ordinances given to Moses. Others argue that it is indeed the moral law. Some argue ALL law...even the Ten Commandments. Well...let's consider how God gave the Ten Commandments in the first place. One day He gathered His misbehaving children together at the foot of Mt. Sinai and He said:

- I want all the murdering to stop!
- Yes, and all the hating to stop too...
- And all the stealing and the cheating and the lying, the immorality...just stop it!
- And I want you to stop going after other gods too!

Come on! What an emergency there was in His family when He had to ask His children to stop doing all those things! The whole Decalogue...all Ten were given because of transgression!

Have you ever had to do this in your own home? I did once. I'll never forget it. My teenage son realized, one day, that he was a “free agent”. At first by a little...and then in ever greater proportions, he decided to live life in a much different way than he had been trained to live it. I was working hard and late. He knew I was upset with him

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and he avoided our inevitable confrontation. Finally I had to write him a letter and put some things down that never had to be spoken in our house before. I set forth thirteen rules:

- *No females permitted in your room or on the premises if your parents are not present.*
- *When you bring a female companion to our home, you will observe a code of propriety that requires you to refrain from physical contact (including wrestling, back-rubbing, sitting on top of one another, and similar conduct).*
- *No parties unless previously arranged with your parents and chaperoned by them.*
- *No smoking, drinking, drugs or lewd magazines or such material permitted in the house. This includes your not coming home drunk or high.*
- *No telephone calls made on your parents' or business telephones, and no telephone calls referred to your parents' or business numbers.*
- *No use of your parents' vehicles for any reason.*
- *No “borrowing” or use of your parent's assets unless previously approved by them and returned in good condition in a timely manner. This goes for your brother's belongings as well.*
- *Flexibility and understanding on your part that, if we have visitors on occasions (Christmas, grandparents, etc.), your bed may be given as an act of family graciousness and hospitality.*
- *You will secure the household at any time that you leave it and no one else is present in it.*
- *You will not play music loudly either in your room or in other places in our home so as to cause a disturbance.*
- *You will honor the day the family worships God together if and while you are in our midst.*
- *You will conduct any affairs or transactions that you know are not in keeping with the standards of our household outside and away from it (and hopefully without our knowledge).*
- *You will keep peace with your mother. She is under a great deal of stress and will be for some time.*

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This was part of a letter that I absolutely had to write. What a terrible emergency there was in my family that I had to ask my son to stop doing all those things. My other two teenagers didn't join him in this...but he affected the entire family with his behavior. It wasn't hard for me to make the leap between that experience and the one I observed God embroiled in.

The Law was added because of sin. Do you remember how we defined "sin" at the beginning of these lessons? Webster simplified it down to three little but profound words: "separation from God". You see...there was no need before sin entered the universe for God to say to His loyal angels: "*I want all this behavior to stop!*" They didn't need a law to do what is right. They did right simply because it was right. It made SENSE! Today, my son whole-heartedly agrees with the letter I wrote to him so long ago. He wants the same standards for his family because he can see that it is a right and safe way to live.

So, when sin entered the universe...the day came when God had to speak of Law...and then the awesome day came when God had to say that sin (rebelliousness...a break from love and trust ...lawlessness) results in death!

There are *such dangers* inherent in the use of Law. Consider these:

- The assumption that doing right merely means obeying the rules
- The assumption that sin is merely disobeying the rules
- The idea that the penalty for breaking the rules is that the maker of the rules will execute you
- The understanding that God made possible forgiveness so you won't have to be executed by executing someone else in your place who paid your legal penalty. This is referred to as justice.
- What if you turned down the above offer of forgiveness? Then you are painfully executed...all the more so because of your refusal to accept the gift.
- Obedience that springs from fear!

All of these are gross misunderstandings! Spend some time thinking about this.

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It's imperative that we look at all 66 books of the Bible and see that God does NOT want adherence to rules! He wants us to do right because it is right...because we see it...we get it...we admire it and we want the lifestyle! Jesus demonstrated this as He walked the earth. He admired His Father and didn't make a move without consulting Him on it. Jesus is our example!

“It was to this that God called you, for Christ Himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in His steps.” 1st Peter 2:21 (GNB)

Back to the question one more time: “WHY, then, the Law?”

It was added to protect us until we had a better understanding and better motivation! We ought to thank God for the Law! Some of the Law seems stern, but we needed all of it. The Law was an emergency measure. It is NOT needed when you are a new creation...are you comfortable with that? It is written on your heart and becomes a part of who you are and how you live. You don't need it written down anywhere to follow anymore. Consider Paul's conclusion about it in that same chapter 3 of Romans:

*“Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the law? No, not at all; Instead, we uphold the Law.”
Romans 3:31 (GNB)*

Paul also makes it plain that such rules are for misbehavers:

*“We know that the law is good if a man uses it properly.
We also know that law is made not for good men but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful...”
1st Timothy 1: 8,9 (GNB)*

There's an implication in this verse that the Law is bad if a man uses it improperly. The Law certainly can be used improperly. Jesus spent a lot of time trying to convince the Pharisees of this fact! A favorite translation of this verse comes from Moffatt:

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"We also know that the Law is not meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control." - 1st Timothy 1, 8, 9 (Moffatt's Translation)

Where do principles and self-control come from? If you have principles and self-control...do you need to be told to love God?

That's probably enough on God's emergency use of Law.

NUMBER TWO: God's emergency measure use of the system of animal sacrifices.

This certainly is a much misunderstood area. It's important to note that this system wasn't really against God's people in that it needed to be taken away. Rather, it was for God's people to teach us things we needed to know. It wasn't intended as a preferred method of teaching for God. His people were the ones that wanted it...we'll see that a little later. Sacrifices were given to remind us of sin (separation from God) and its grave (no pun intended) consequences!

"But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." Hebrews 10: 3,4 (GNB)

Misunderstood, however, these very same sacrifices (and ceremonies) turned many away from God!

Think again, for a moment, about what happened on that special Passover weekend in 31 AD. You know, the Friday when Christ was crucified, the day He rested and the day He was resurrected.

- Did the theologians and officers of God's church that celebrated this special Sabbath even know the "One" represented by the lamb?
- Did the church back then any longer understand the true meaning of the ceremonies in which they participated?
- Did they understand God's plan of salvation?
- Did they even know God Himself?

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Many Old Testament Prophets had tried to make clear the meaning of this sacrificial system. That’s right: the prophets in the Old Testament understood the symbolism and why God had given these rules and ceremonies. Let’s look at some evidence of this:

“ For on the day that I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them, nor give them command regarding burnt-offering or sacrifice; but this command I gave them, ‘Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.’”

Jeremiah 7:22,23 (American Translation)

Notice above that the system was not preferred by God!

“In those days...men shall speak no more of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; they shall not think of it nor remember it nor resort to it; it will be needed no more.” Jeremiah 3:16 (NEB)

So, Jeremiah tells us that the system is not needed any more! In Old Testament times, the tablets with the Ten Commandments were kept in the Ark of the Covenant. John the Revelator saw such an ark in heaven. He refers to it in Revelation 15:5 as the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony”. The Greek word used there that was interpreted in English as “testimony” is “*Maturion*”. It actually means “the Decalogue kept in the tabernacle”. Will it be a museum piece for us? What was the purpose for this sacrificial system anyway? What did God intend all along? Jeremiah again provides us the answer:

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying: ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me. Jeremiah 31: 33,34

Hosea, a “little” prophet or “minor” prophet not only taught this, but he demonstrated it in his life. He expresses what God told him:

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"It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hosea 6:6 (Phillips)

"I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me." Hosea 6:6 (GNB)

Again, I want to emphasize, God never wanted to use this "system"! The Bible says so in several other places:

"Samuel said. 'Which does the Lord prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him.'" 1Samuel 15:22 (GNB)

"You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them; you are not pleased with burnt offerings." Psalms 51:16 (GNB)

"The Lord says, 'I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry. People of Israel, I did not demand sacrifices and offerings during those forty years that I led you through the desert.'" Amos 5:21 – 25 (GNB)

Well! If God didn't demand or want those sacrifices...who did?? A hint is provided if we just read the next verse in Amos 5:

"But now, because you have worshiped images of Sakkuth, your king god, and of Kaiwan, your star god, you will have to carry those images when I take you into exile in a land beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is Almighty God. Amos 5:26, 27 (GNB)

AH-HAH! The Israelites wanted sacrifices...just like those in the heathen population around them! So God responded to their choice! This was an emergency measure to talk to His people in language they

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understood...to meet them where they were...to take them only as fast as they were willing to be led!

But notice God's preference. He has only wanted us to “know” Him again. What does that mean...to “know” Him? Does it mean to recognize His voice...His face? It means to love Him, to trust Him, to be willing to listen again. That's all He's ever wanted...or ever will want.....

FOR ALL ETERNITY!

All the emergency measures we see used in all 66 books of the Bible are designed to lead us back to this fact!

OK...back to the sacrificial system again...and a very tough question:

If God is so gracious...if He is love personified...why does the Bible picture the need for MEDIATION? Do we really need an intercessor...someone to stand between us and an angry God?

Where do we get such ideas from? Well, there are “proof texts” in the Bible that some people use to support such a position. The Famous Chapter 53 of Isaiah has this passage:

“And so I will give him a place of honor, a place among great and powerful men. He willingly gave his life and shared the fate of evil men. He took the place of many sinners and prayed that they might be forgiven.”
Isaiah 53:12 (GNB)

But there's more to support this:

“In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will... Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or

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rather, who was raised to life and is at the right side of God pleading with him for us!" Romans 8: 26, 27, 34 (GNB)

The same kind of language is used in the Book of Hebrews:

"And so he is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through him, because he lives forever to plead with God for them." Hebrews 7:25 (GNB)

So...it seems pretty clear from these passages that someone needs to plead with God on our behalf, doesn't it? Satan loves to have us misunderstand this! Nothing can distort a true picture of God more than this misunderstanding does! Satan would love for us to believe that, were it not for Christ's (or Mary's...or the saints...or the sanctity of the Mass) constant intercession, the Father could never find it in His own heart to forgive and heal! Come on...we know this isn't true!! Yet...priestly intercession runs all through the scriptures, especially the mediation and intercession of our own Lord! What's up with this? Could it be that this also is an emergency measure especially tailored to meet our own needs? Do we need this until we come to know God better and realize the incredible news:

There is NO need for anyone to stand between us and OUR GOD?!

We have had an enemy between...and the damage has been devastating! Is it possible we need a friend between us and God? If so...WHY?

Let's go back to the stories in the Bible...the experiences of those who went before us...and see what we can find. Remember back in Exodus chapter 19 at the foot of Mt. Sinai when God had to raise His voice again to get the attention of His people? He spoke to them directly, and they didn't like it! They were afraid,...distrustful!

*"They said to Moses, 'If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die.'
Moses replied, 'Don't be afraid; God has only come to test you and make you keep on obeying him, so that you will not sin.' But the people continued to stand a long way off, and*

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*only Moses went near the dark cloud where God was.”
Exodus 20: 19-21 (GNB)*

They begged for an intercessor! A mediator! Remember, now, God wanted to speak to them directly...but He’s always given His children what they chose! The fact is, though, God DID speak to them and they didn’t die! They just didn’t want to push the issue:

“Today we have seen that it is possible for a man to continue to live, even though God has spoken to him. But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire will destroy us. We are sure to die if we hear the Lord our God speak again... Go back, Moses, and listen to everything the Lord our God says. Then return and tell us what he said to you. We will listen and obey.” Deuteronomy 5:24, 25, 27 (GNB)

Again you can see here that the people pleaded for a mediator...for a friend between them and God! They wanted and thought they needed this...God did NOT! Fortunately for them, Moses was just such a friend. Was there anyone between Moses and God? No. Look at the record regarding this:

*“If any man among you is a prophet I make myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is at home in my house; I speak with him face to face, plainly and not in riddles.”
Numbers 12:6-8 (Jerusalem)*

“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Exodus 33:11 (GNB)

Years later, the *Creator* tried to encourage His disciples to believe that He wanted to speak to them as His friends:

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” John 15:15(RSV)

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Now Jesus didn't want "blind" obedience! His whole life and His testimony bore witness to this. He was long tired of these emergency measures. He clearly expressed what He considered the ultimate in His relationship with us...even though we still were not ready to understand it. He wanted His disciples to obey because they agreed...because they admired God for His wise and gracious ways! That's the obedience of a FREE person! It's intelligent obedience! That's a redundant statement...intelligence is obedience, and obedience is intelligence! You see, when you're friends, no one needs to come between! Some of our church forefathers partially understood this when they penned the hymn: "Nothing Between". The disciples were clear that nothing was needed between them and Jesus. They weren't afraid of Him. But they were not so sure about the Father! They wanted Jesus to tell them more about the One they thought responsible for all the sacrifices and the blood! In the upper room, Jesus tried to teach them that there was no need for this apprehension:

"I have been speaking to you in parables – but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that day comes, you will make your requests to him in my name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you." John 16:25,26 (Phillips)

Think about this once: Who stood between God and Judas? Judas had passed the point of no return...and there was still no one between him and God!

"He who has seen me has seen the Father!" John 14:9 (RSV)

Hopefully WE can be convinced about this finally...like Thomas:

"Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" John 20:28 (RSV)

Chapter #12:

Is God's Law a Threat to Our Freedom?

The Law...the LAW...THE LAW! Aren't you tired of hearing about it? We sure had a re-acquaintance with it as a result of the 2000 Presidential election! The Ten Commandments have enjoyed a rejuvenation of popularity in the United States though. I grew up in the sixties when Madeline Murray O'Hare chased prayer out of the public schoolroom. Liberals fought for and achieved a "stronger separation of Church and State". For the longest time, liberal theology has beaten upon conservatives in religious circles regarding a preoccupation with "the Law". Recently, a judge was forced to remove a sculpture of the Ten Commandments from an Alabama Courthouse. Evangelicals pride themselves in their certainty of being saved by grace, arguing that the Law was "done away with" on the cross. Yet they would confuse those whom they proselytized in requiring that certain of those standards "discussed in the Ten Commandments" be adhered to if one was to be a member of their church organizations.

More recently, conservatives organized at the "grass roots" to try to legislate morality and decent behavior in the United States. Differences with liberal theologians as well as differences between Protestants and Catholics have been set aside to fight for the sanctity of the lives of the unborn. More and more clerics have run for public office. The recent revealing of the dubious moral character of William Jefferson Clinton, coupled with random killings of youth on youth at high schools around the country like Columbine, have caused the pendulum to swing sharply right. There's now a call to have the Ten Commandments posted in every school in the United States. Pat Buchanan came back in vogue for awhile and gained enough momentum to break from the Republican Party. In a past election he headed the Independent Party as their candidate and based his platform upon moral and family values. If elected in the year 2000, Pat promised to run the country according to the Bible. George Bush said the person who had most influenced him in his life was Jesus. Al Gore said that the way he approached a difficult problem was to ask himself: "what would Jesus do?".

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What's all this got to do with this chapter? Well...more than meets the eye. There's a little different slant to this topic. Please bear with me, I promise it will be worth your while.

Question: *Is there anything more precious to intelligent human beings than FREEDOM: Freedom from tyranny; freedom from fear; freedom to do whatever you want...within reason, of course?*

We know that God wants us to be free! The past eleven chapters have anchored that down pretty well, don't you think? The *Good News* is that God values nothing higher than our freedom! He wouldn't have gone through everything that He has...put us through everything that He has...put the universe through everything that He has...created Lucifer, even...if that wasn't the case. Not all His children believe this, of course. Lucifer was able to persuade one-third of His family that God is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe! How many people in this world still believe that? Even among very devout religious people? The vast MAJORITY!

For thousands of years, God sought to reveal truth. In the last chapter, we considered the emergency measures God has taken to talk to us in a language we can understand; meet us where we are; and lead us as far and as fast as we are willing to go. The most notable of these emergency measures has been the Ten Commandments. God's extensive use of law *seems* to be opposed to *freedom*... but we'll soon see that as a gross misunderstanding. Let's look at some of the things said in the Bible that *seem* to confuse this issue:

*"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments... You are My friends if you do what I command you."
John 14:15 & 15:14 (RSV)*

Whoa! What kind of friendship demands obedience? This almost sounds childish: "You can be my friend if you do things MY way!" How do you fit "keep my commandments" with "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free!" (John 8:32)? We're free so long as we do exactly what we're told...is that it?

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Is this really such a contradiction? Or does it depend on how we *understand* what it is that God wants us to do? Or maybe it depends on how we *understand* the reason why He even had to ask us in the first place? I BELIEVE...(and I hope, by this time, that you do too!)...that all God’s laws...particularly the “10”...were given for our best good! And they were given *especially* to preserve freedom...not to infringe upon it! This truth has been so drastically misunderstood.

Let’s go back to look at another example that took place 1,400 years after Sinai. The Son of God Himself came to live among the people who had been especially entrusted with this revelation of God’s will formulated in the Ten Commandments. Of all people, they should’ve understood that it was an emergency measure! Moses was their authority. They *revered* Moses...and still do for that matter. When Jesus came to us, He found His people *totally preoccupied* with God’s laws and *totally preoccupied* with their obedience to every possible detail!

- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *“Don’t make graven images.” It took ‘em a long time, but after the Babylonian captivity they learned their lesson well. They didn’t do that anymore.*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *which day was the Sabbath! The highest duty they held was to obey all 10 commandments.*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to pay tithe! Matthew records them tithing the lint they accumulated in their belly buttons!*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to obey the laws of hygiene. He commented on their straining gnats from goat’s milk; washing after contact with the Gentiles*
- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to search the scriptures. They did it all the time! But they did it for the wrong reason:*

“You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me!” John 5:39 (GNB)

They thought they could become experts on “the rules” and earn their eternal life! But Jesus clarified that

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the Scriptures were about Him...not about US.

- HE NEVER HAD TO TELL THEM – *to be careful in their association with unbelievers. They took this to such an extreme that they became exclusive and insular. They washed their hands vigorously each time they came in contact with an “unbeliever”.*

They all could say, like the rich young ruler: “All these things we obeyed from our youth up”. You would think that Jesus would be pleased with such rigorous obedience, wouldn't you? You'd also think such people would recognize Him and welcome Him!

All heaven watched the *incredible* scene as those who claimed to love God's Law denounced the Law Giver as a Law breaker! Jesus ventured to suggest that while they were working so hard to obey that actually they were obeying for the wrong reason! Because they were obeying for the wrong reason, they really weren't obeying at all! They weren't too happy with this opinion...it was extremely offensive to them! Jesus went even further and suggested that if only they knew the God who had given the Law...they would keep the Law for an entirely different reason! Knowing the God that had given the Law would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time!

The idea that God's people misunderstood their calling was not new! The Old Testament prophets had mentioned it in the very Scriptures the Jews held so sacred...in Amos and Isaiah, for example:

“Listen to this, you that trample on the needy and try to destroy the poor of the country. You say to yourselves, ‘we can hardly wait for the holy days to be over so that we can sell our grain. When will the Sabbath end, so that we can start selling again? Then we can overcharge, use false measures, and fix the scales to cheat our customers. We can sell worthless wheat at a high price. We'll find a poor man who can't pay his debts, not even the price of a pair of sandals, and we'll buy him as a slave.’”
Amos 8: 4-6 (GNB)

Jesus quoted and commended Isaiah:

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“The Lord said, ‘These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.’” Isaiah 29:13 (GNB)

“How right Isaiah was when he prophesied about you! ‘These people’, says God, ‘honor me with their words, but their heart is really far away from me. It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach man-made rules as though they were my laws!’” Matthew 15:7,8,9 (GNB)

God’s laws were not understood, but rather were perverted to human standards and egocentric (self-centered) interpretations. It makes you wish God would’ve made yet one more commandment: “Thou shalt not misinterpret, misquote or erroneously teach any of the previous Ten Commandments I have just given you!” Rote! Memorized motions and traditions! Unthinking worship...what an insult this was to God!

So, Jesus set out to tell the truth about His Father and reveal the kind of obedience that is really pleasing to Him. Recall what Jesus did at such great risk on the Sabbath...it was all so innocent and good...*He healed people and helped them!* Those gloomy legalists that headed His church were shocked! They denounced HIM for disobeying the law! “No!” Jesus said...“I didn’t come to destroy or misrepresent the law...I came to fulfill it (live it completely)...to explain it to you *clearly!*” By teaching and explaining, especially on the Sabbath, Jesus set out to correct the wide misunderstanding of God’s Law. He said: “The Law was given for you to be an advantage, not a restriction!” This happened the day He was defending His disciples for stripping wheat and corn to eat on the Sabbath. As Jesus considered their rules and regulations just for the Sabbath alone, He said the following in Matthew 11:28 – 30 (Goodspeed’s Translation):

“Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened, and I will let you rest. Let my yoke be put upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-minded, and your hearts will find rest, for the yoke I offer you is a kindly one, and the load I ask you to bear is light.”

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He was referring to the Law here! Law Lite! This was coming from the One who wrote the Law and the One who sure should know what was intended! But how did the church leaders react to this? “Blasphemy!” they said! “He’s a heretic!” they cried. “What a false picture of God!” they taunted in shrill voice. And finally they screamed: “Crucify Him!”

Christianity took wing under such conditions. When the disciples finally figured out what Christ was trying to get through to them in those short 3 ½ years, they were themselves astounded. They became fearless promoters of freedom! The organized church came at them with a vengeance, you can read about it in the book of Acts. Through the spreading of the truth about God, they moved others to be as bold as they in furthering the communication of it. One of the church’s greatest persecutors became one of Christianity’s greatest orators. We know him as St. Paul, but he was first known as Saul.

As a Pharisee...a renowned Pharisee...Saul went from town to town in Israel ferreting out Christians and coercing them to come back to Judaism under pain of death. He was the scourge of Christianity and came to be most feared! You see, Saul also obeyed God for the wrong reasons. He worshipped a tyrannical God who would be pleased to see people

- Persecuted
- Imprisoned
- Stoned to death

to force them to obey! That’s the kind of God he worshipped. He had many texts of Scripture, he thought, to support his position. He conducted his own evangelism in the name of that God! That’s *why* he felt free to use so much force! What does this remind you of? Wasn’t there another period of history some hundreds of years later that lasted for hundreds of years, where such evangelism was conducted? Where so many on various sides were treated the same way in the name of God (Protestant or Catholic)? Don’t we see it today...in Serbia and Albania? In Ireland? In India and Afghanistan? Will we see it again in the United States?

On the Damascus road, Saul saw “The Light”! It really made a dramatic difference in his life too. Just what was it though? When he

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takes the name Paul and literally joins the side of Christianity, we note the following:

- He did NOT change his Bible
- He did NOT change the name of His God
- He did NOT change the day that he worshipped
- He did NOT change his diet
- He did NOT change his dress

What did he change? Did he change anything? Oh yes...he changed his picture of God! He changed his understanding of who God is! From then on, *who* has spoken more eloquently about **FREEDOM** than Paul? He spoke also about faith, grace, love and trust. “But don’t misunderstand me about this” Paul said. “My emphasis on these things does NOT abolish the Law!” See Romans 3:31.

Among those who believe in God...you’ll generally find little disagreement over whether God should be obeyed or not. The problem with obedience comes in the different reasons people have for obeying God. Which of these do you prefer?

- I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and the power to destroy.
- I do what I do because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him. (*This one sounds pretty good...doesn’t it?*)
- I do what I do because I have found it to be right and sensible to do so, and I have increasing admiration and reverence for the One who so advised and commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity. And being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has always proved to be so sensible, when He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding.

Permit me to quote a woman author for whom I have great respect. This is her description of true obedience:

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God

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from a sense of obligation merely – because he is required to do so – will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey... True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right – because doing right is pleasing to God..
Christ's Object Lessons, pages 97 & 98.

Paul told us why God made so much use of Law. Remember from our previous chapter? “It was added because of transgression” Galatians 3:19. All of Galatians Chapter 3 states that it was added to guard, guide and lead us back to a right relationship with God so that we would learn to do right because we agree that it is right...NOT because we're ordered to obey. In Galatians 3:24, Paul calls the Law our “Schoolmaster” in the King James Version. In the original Greek the word interpreted “Schoolmaster” is “Paidagogos”. That comes from “Pai” from which we get pediatrician...pedodontics...child, and “Agogos” which means a leader. The word “Paidagogos” means “leader of children”...that's what the Law is! It's designed for people who behave like children! How we have behaved and misbehaved as children...and how we have needed the guidance of God's Laws *to preserve FREEDOM!*

Surely by now, we can see a very gracious God who has used all these emergency measures for man's best good! There's nothing arbitrary about them. They make good sense and they *deserve* to be obeyed! We must understand why we had to be so instructed by these measures. Remember the following from the last chapter:

“We know, of course, that the Law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Yet, we also know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control...”
1st Timothy 1: 8,9 (GNB)

If you have self-control...you don't have to be ordered to behave! It's a way of life...a literal lifestyle...that comes to you how? Through the Law? No, no, no. Through the Spirit that reminds us of Christ's

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example. It comes through the Spirit of Freedom, not just for oneself, but for all.

It’s logical, at this point, to entertain the question of whether we should even need secular law or not. We could ask the same thing of it (Why, then, the law?) and get pretty much the same answer (It was added because of transgression!). That’s usually the reason our legislators enact laws. But consider some of St. Paul’s comments in his letter to the Galatians again:

“You, my brothers, were called to be free...The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:13,14,18,22,23 (NIV)

If this was really a way of life with us, would we need any laws to govern ourselves? Think of some by yourself...laws that govern, say

- Banking
- Taxation
- Transportation
- Criminals
- Probate
- Divorce?
- Real Estate

The list could go on and on, couldn’t it? Why would we need any one of them?

Some people want God to command and control them for the rest of eternity; to take and keep control. This seems so humble and safe, doesn’t it? But think about it now...it’s telling God that we don’t want the freedom He’s paid such a price to give us! How can we hand freedom back and say: “No...I don’t want self-control, thank you very much. I want You to control me.” ??? God did not make us that way, or else we wouldn’t be where we are and we wouldn’t have come through what we have. Lucifer wouldn’t have made the choices he did if God “controlled” him. There’s something about “love” and “freedom” that we have a lot to learn about yet. Now GET THIS

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POINT PLEASE: God has so much as said, "When you're fully under the influence of my Holy Spirit (something you have to choose to do), I won't control you! You will have recovered the dignity and joy of *self control!*

Come on now...isn't that MARVELOUS! **FREEDOM** once again!!

Now, St. Paul wasn't talking New Theology here in the New Testament, that "love" is the fulfilling of the law...that you should love your neighbor as you love yourself. That concept goes way back to the Old Testament. Moses was the first to state this in the Bible. Half of it is found here:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)

The other half of the same message is found here:

"Do not hate your brother in your heart...But love your neighbor as yourself." Leviticus 19: 17, 18 (NIV)

Paul was merely quoting the man instrumental in quoting the Ten Commandments as he heard them from God in the first place. Jesus quoted Moses in the same way:

"Jesus answered 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39...also found in Mark 12 and in Luke 10 (GNB)

When you come to understand that Jesus is the God of the Old Testament, as revealed by John in his first chapter, and other places in the New Testament, you come to the fascinating realization that Jesus was quoting Moses...who got it from Jesus Himself long before!

Now you really can't command these kinds of things, can you? How can you command love? Well...you *might* put them in the form

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of a command as an emergency measure...but that's all it is! Emergency measures do NOT provide the lasting motivation that God desires! As stated before...the concept of obedience is so misunderstood...but so is the concept of love. Consider the gross perversions of the love experience! “Making love” is a much different concept to God than it is to today's average United States' adult! You should consider why Satan attacks it so. It must be pretty important for us to understand! That's why Paul explained *True Love* the way he did in 1st Corinthians 13:4 – 6:

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.” (RSV)

Imagine a community in which people really live this way! To live in a place where, not only will people never do the wrong thing, they won't even *want* to! That's the meaning of Commandment number 10! That's evidence of being completely healed! That's real freedom! It reminds me a bit of John Lennon's song: *Imagine*. It's apparent that John rejected the picture of God that was given to him: “No one to kill or die for, and no religion too.” I can't blame him or millions of others for rejecting the misrepresentation of God that was given to them, the ugly misinformed picture of God that Satan has somehow inspired within and without Christianity.

Commandment number 1 says that we'll all love the same God. What kind of God would that be? Every member of God's family will admire the God who values nothing higher than the *freedom* of His children!

- A God who has paid such a price to prove it!
- A God who asks only for mutual love and trust!

This will produce real unity, peace, security and freedom! Seen in this light, the Decalogue is a guaranty of Freedom because God says He will always run His universe in keeping with these principles. He would rather DIE than have it any other way. The difference between our obedience of Law now and our obedience then is that we won't have to be told any longer! That's the meaning of the Law being

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written on our hearts...where we do our thinking! We will "internalize" God's Law as a way of life.

Are you thinking about that goofy Law...number 4? How to "internalize" the Sabbath Day? How does that fit in with this? What is the purpose of that Day anyway; what does it have to do with Freedom? Do you remember the significance of it from chapter ten? You might want to go back and refresh your memory on it. Right now, we need to be reminded of it...it's a help to us, not a test of our obedience. Look at Isaiah's understanding of it:

"If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the Sabbath a day of joy and the Lord's day a day to be honored, if you honor it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the Lord." Isaiah 58:13 (NEB)

JOY! That's one of the gifts of the Spirit of Truth! What truth is it we found that brings us such joy? It is the truth about our God...that He loves us just as much as Jesus does...that He is not the Deity His enemies make Him out to be!

If you were ever asked why it is that you obey God...assuming that you do...what answer would you give? Remember the potential responses we considered above on page 168? What speaks best on behalf of God? Bible interpreters have had a hard time with God's character...consider Deuteronomy 6:25 for example:

"If we faithfully obey everything that God has commanded us, he will be pleased with us." (GNB)

This comes from a very modern translation. It still sounds like we have a God here that needs appeasement. If we mess up in one thing, God won't be pleased. If He's not pleased...then what? It depends on your picture or understanding of Him, doesn't it? There's a footnote to this verse in the Good News Bible that restates this verse as another possible interpretation of the original Hebrew:

"The right thing for us to do is to obey faithfully

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everything that God has commanded us.”

That’s has a little different flavor to it, doesn’t it? How does it fit with your picture of God from the Bible?

James is thought to be the legalist among authors of the Bible. Martin Luther certainly thought this. He grouped James with Hebrews, Jude and Revelation at the end of the Bible as books he thought didn’t really have much to say about Jesus. He thought them to be a little different than the rest. But look at James 2: verses 8 and 12:

“You will be doing the right thing if you obey the law of the Kingdom, which is found in the scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself’...Speak and act as people who will be judged by the law that sets us free.” (GNB)

One day we will stand in front of God and say: “God...we would do all these things from here on...whether You ask us to or not...because we agree with You that they are sensible and right!” And I can imagine God’s response:

“Good! At last you’re free! Now you’ve learned the truth...the truth will set and keep you free!”

Chapter #13:

How God Treats Sinners

Superstitious people avoid the number thirteen. That chapter number thirteen should focus on this topic seems to fall right in line with this thinking! Even more so when you consider how superstitious people generally are about God! Well, you're in for a treat this time. This is one of my favorite chapters in this book because it's one of the most precious. It may have been more appropriately entitled, "How God treats His wayward children". I used the title above for good reason, though, because the traditional teaching is so diabolical. What is the tradition here? I'll tell you: "God burns sinners forever in hell". He does this because He has to...justice demands it. God operates under the principle of *lex talionis* which means "an eye for an eye...a tooth for a tooth". There are modifications of this traditional teaching that allow for less burning or less torture if one hasn't been as bad a person. All this is taught from the Bible. I believe, however, that it is taught out of context. Even Billy Graham agrees with me now!

TIME magazine featured Billy Graham on its cover for the November 15, 1993 issue. It was entitled "A Christian In Winter – Billy Graham At 75". TIME's Richard N. Ostling interviewed Billy about a variety of ideas that he believes remain firmly based upon the Bible. One of them, concerning hell, caught my eye. Here are his exact words:

"The only thing I could say for sure is that hell means separation from God. We are separated from His light, from His fellowship. That is going to be hell. When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it. When the Scriptures uses fire concerning hell, that is possibly an illustration of how terrible it's going to be – not fire but something worse, a thirst for God that cannot be quenched."

Oh all right! Billy Graham doesn't even know who I am...and he doesn't exactly agree with me. But he used to preach hellfire and brimstone sermons in earlier years. You see, Billy's been studying and talking to God for the greater part of his life. He has changed his

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understanding and picture of who that God is. He has rejected Satan’s picture of God. On that, we very much agree!

This chapter is so convincing about the love of God! As usual, we’ll look at evidence to demonstrate that. To start things off, let me ask you this question:

What do you think it will be like to stand before God and realize that He knows everything about you?...EVERYTHING!?

Yes, God has the ultimate “hard drive”...He knows it all. And all of us will stand before Him one day with this realization. Look at how the Apostle John described the final judgement:

*“Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sits on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence and were seen no more. And I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and then another book was opened, the book of the living. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.”
Rev. 20:11,12 (GNB)*

Awesome scene...don’t you think? Wow! The books! Many of us take this language so literally...do suppose they really have “books” like this in heaven? We have computers! Don’t you think things in heaven are just a little more advanced than we have them here? John was just trying to make a cogent point with the mechanical understanding he had at the time. That’s the language he understood...and God has always talked to people in this way.

Back to the issue. Forget sinners a minute. Even among the saved, is this “facing God” thing going to be a very comfortable experience? Consider what St. Paul said about this:

*“There is not even one who is righteous...For all have sinned, and all fall short of God’s glorious ideal.”
Romans 3:10, 23 (Twentieth Century New Testament)*

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This just doesn't seem like such a good basis upon which to face Him, does it? So...I repeat the question I posed to you above: Even though we're saved...forgiven: ***Will God haunt us with His very able memory of that "past" in which we all share?*** I believe the answer to this question depends on your picture of God. I said we'd look at some evidence to demonstrate the truth about God in this matter. What better evidence than looking at how Jesus (in human form) treated even the worst of human sinners? We agree that Jesus is fully God, don't we? Then if we want to know how God will treat us, Jesus would be a pretty accurate barometer, wouldn't you think? We'll look at a few stories to see what we can glean of the truth about our God.

The first story I'd like to consider is a famous one: THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY. We always focus on the woman as the sinner in this story. I want to encourage you to examine how Jesus treats her pious (hypocritical) accusers as well. Oooooo! What's a fourth-grade word for "pious" or "hypocritical"? Parents, why not explain to your children that these men were evil liars that pretended to be good. You're on your own handling the word "adultery". Ok, then, turn in your Bible to the Book of John, Chapter 8 and read verses 1 – 11. What brought this situation about anyway? The answer is right there in verse 6. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus so that they could accuse Him. That's what this thing was all about in the first place. But Jesus gives us a dramatic lesson from it. He provides evidence of how He responds when the hypocritical accuser, Satan, brings our case before Him. This is an important story, so please permit me to quote at length from a favorite author:

“...A group of Pharisees and scribes approached Him, dragging with them a terror-stricken woman, whom with hard, eager voices they accused of having violated the seventh commandment. Having pushed her into the presence of Jesus, they said to Him, with a hypocritical show of respect, ‘Moses in the Law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?’

Their pretended reverence veiled a deep-laid plot for His ruin. They had seized upon this opportunity to secure His condemnation, thinking that whatever decision He might make, they would find occasion to accuse Him. Should He acquit the woman, He might be charged with despising the law of Moses. Should He declare her

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worthy of death, He could be accused to the Romans as One who was assuming authority that belonged only to them. Jesus looked for a moment upon the scene – the trembling victim in her shame, the hard-faced dignitaries, devoid of even human pity. His spirit of stainless purity shrank from the spectacle. Well He knew for what purpose this case had been brought to Him. He read the heart, and knew the character and life history of everyone in His presence. These would-be guardians of justice had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus. Giving no sign that He had heard their question, He stooped, and fixing His eyes upon the ground, began to write in the dust.

Impatient at His delay and apparent indifference, the accusers drew nearer, urging the matter upon His attention. But as their eyes, following those of Jesus fell upon the pavement at His feet, their countenances changed. There, traced before them, were the guilty secrets of their own lives. The people, looking on, saw the sudden change of expression, and pressed forward to discover what it was that they were regarding with such astonishment and shame.

With all their professions of reverence for the law, these rabbis, in bringing the charge against the woman, were disregarding its provisions. It was the husband's duty to take action against her, and the guilty parties were to be punished equally. The action of the accusers was wholly unauthorized. Jesus, however, met them on their own ground. The law specified that in punishment by stoning the witnesses in the case should be the first to cast a stone. Now rising, and fixing His eyes upon the plotting elders, Jesus said, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.' And stooping down, He continued writing on the ground.

He had not set aside the law given through Moses, nor infringed upon the authority of Rome. The accusers had been defeated. Now their robe of pretended holiness torn from them, they stood, guilty and condemned, in the presence of Infinite Purity. They trembled lest the hidden iniquity of their lives should be laid open to the multitude; and one by one, with bowed heads and downcast eyes, they stole away, leaving their victim with the pitying saviour.

Jesus arose, and looking at the woman said, 'Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?' She said, 'No man, Lord.' And Jesus said unto her 'Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.'

The woman had stood before Jesus, cowering with fear. His words, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone,' had come to her as a death sentence. She dared not lift her eyes to the Saviour's face, but silently awaited her doom. In astonishment

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she saw her accusers depart speechless and confounded; then those words of hope fell upon her ear, 'Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.' Her heart was melted, and she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins.

This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to the service of God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady which is unto death everlasting. This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers. With self-sacrificing love and devotion she repaid His forgiving mercy.

In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the Character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reached to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, 'Go, and sin no more.'

It is not Christ's follower that, with averted eyes, turns from the erring, leaving them unhindered to pursue their downward course. Those who are forward in accusing others, and zealous in bringing them to justice, are often in their own lives more guilty than they. Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein."

The Desire of Ages, pages 460 – 462.

What a story, huh? What "stuff" Jesus had to deal with while He walked among us. How disappointed He was in His "church"...His "chosen people". OK, let's analyze this story a little bit.

Notice how Jesus was confronted with such incredible hypocrisy? Right off the bat the woman's accusers said "we caught her in the act!" They caught her in the act all right! They participated! Where was the man who was also to be punished according to the law?

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of a fellow Israelite, both he and the woman shall be put to death."

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Lev. 20:10 (GNB)

“If a man is caught having intercourse with another man’s wife, both of them are to be put to death. In this way you will get rid of this evil. Suppose a man is caught in a town having intercourse with a girl who is engaged to someone else. You are to take them outside the town and stone them to death. The girl is to die because she did not cry out for help, although she was in a town, where she could have been heard. And the man is to die because he had intercourse with a girl who was engaged. In this way you will get rid of this evil.” Deuteronomy 22:22-24 (GNB)

They were pretty strict back then, weren’t they? Wow! The point to be made, however, is the dishonesty of the woman’s pious accusers!

Notice how Jesus reacted to this entire scenario...how he answered their questioning. Especially observe His treatment of this scandalized, half-naked woman...terrorized at what she expected her fate to be. How graciously and generously the Son of God sought to recover the dignity and self-respect of the woman...especially in that culture! It is indeed a marvel. So was His treatment of her accusers, in a different sort of way. They certainly had no mercy coming, yet He did not publicly expose them for what they were. I find myself wishing that He did!

But what does it say about God, that He did not expose those self-righteous accusers? Could it be that God finds no pleasure in embarrassing His children? Weren’t those accusers also members of His family? They were the leaders of His church!

The second story I’d like to consider branches off of the first story, in a way: SIMON THE PHARISEE. This story is found in Luke 7: 36-50 and Mark 14: 3-11. Read it so that you’re familiar with it and come back. Simon of Bethany was counted a disciple of Jesus. He was actually one of the few Pharisees that openly joined Christ’s followers. But he initially did it for political reasons. He hoped Christ was the Messiah, but he hadn’t yet recognized Him as a Saviour...a personal Saviour. He had been healed of leprosy, and that’s what had

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drawn him to Jesus. He wanted to show Jesus his gratitude and thought he would throw Jesus a feast...a social affair...to meld Him into the church establishment, perhaps to smooth things out with leaders so suspicious of Him. Jesus was really getting popular and notorious. He had performed many miracles by this time...just the kind of thing that impressed people...the “right” people. Jesus always visited Lazarus when in Bethany, and all those attending the feast were excited that, perhaps, Lazarus would accompany Jesus. Again, permit me to pick the story up here by referencing my favorite author on subjects such as these:

“...At the table the Saviour sat with Simon, whom He had cured of a loathsome disease, on one side, and Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, on the other. Martha served at the table, but Mary was earnestly listening to every word from the lips of Jesus. In His mercy, Jesus had pardoned her sins, He had called forth her beloved brother from the grave, and Mary’s heart was filled with gratitude. She had heard Jesus speak of His approaching death, and in her deep love and sorrow she had longed to show Him honor. At great personal sacrifice she had purchased an alabaster box of ‘ointment of spikenard, very costly’ with which to anoint His body. By now many were declaring that He was about to be crowned king. Her grief was turned to joy, and she was eager to be first in honoring her Lord. Breaking her box of ointment, she poured its contents upon the head and feet of Jesus; then, as she knelt weeping, moistening them with her tears, she wiped His feet with her long, flowing hair.

She had sought to avoid observation, and her movements might have passed unnoticed, but the ointment filled the room with its fragrance, and published her act to all present. Judas looked upon this act with great displeasure. Instead of waiting to hear what Christ would say of the matter, he began to whisper his complaints to those near him, throwing reproach upon Christ for suffering such waste. Craftily, he made suggestions that would be likely to cause disaffection.

Judas was treasurer for the disciples, and from their little store he had secretly drawn for his own use, thus narrowing down their resources to a meager pittance. He was eager to put into the bag all that he could obtain. The treasure in the bag was often drawn upon to relieve the poor; and when something that Judas did not think essential was bought, he would say ‘Why is this waste? Why was not the cost of this put into the bag that I carry for the poor?’

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Now the act of Mary was in such marked contrast to his selfishness that he was put to shame; and according to his custom, he sought to assign a worthy motive for his objection to her gift. Turning to the Disciples, he asked, ‘why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Judas had no heart for the poor. Had Mary’s ointment been sold, and the proceeds fallen into his possession, the poor would have received no benefit....Mary heard the words of criticism. Her heart trembled within her. She feared that her sister would reproach her for extravagance. The Master, too, might think her improvident. Without apology or excuse she was about to shrink away, when the voice of her Lord was heard, ‘Let her alone; why trouble ye her?’ He saw that she was embarrassed and distressed. He knew that in this act of service she had expressed her gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins, and He brought relief to her mind. Lifting His voice above the murmur of criticism, He said, ‘She hath wrought a good work on Me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but Me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying.’... ‘Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.’ Looking into the future, the Saviour spoke with certainty concerning His gospel. It was to be preached throughout the whole world. And as far as the gospel extended, Mary’s gift would shed its fragrance, and hearts would be blessed through her unstudied act. Kingdoms would rise and fall; the names of monarchs and conquerors would be forgotten; but this woman’s deed would be immortalized upon the pages of sacred history. Until time should be no more, that broken alabaster box would tell the story of the abundant love of God for a fallen race....

Simon the host had been influenced by the criticism of Judas upon Mary’s Gift, and he was surprised at the conduct of Jesus. His Pharisaic pride was offended. He knew that many of his guests were looking upon Christ with distrust and displeasure. Simon said in his heart, ‘This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner.’

By curing Simon of leprosy, Christ had saved him from a living death. But now Simon questioned whether the Saviour were a prophet. Because Christ allowed this woman to approach Him, because He did not indignantly spurn her as one whose sins were too

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great to be forgiven, because He did not show that He realized she had fallen, Simon was tempted to think that He was not a prophet. Jesus knows nothing of this woman who is so free in her demonstrations, he thought, or He would not allow her to touch Him.

But it was Simon's ignorance of God and of Christ that led him to think as he did. He did not realize that God's Son must act in God's way, with compassion, tenderness, and mercy. Simon's way was to take no notice of Mary's penitent service. Her act of kissing Christ's feet and anointing them with ointment was exasperating to his hard-heartedness. He thought that if Christ were a prophet, He would recognize sinners and rebuke them.

To this unspoken thought the Saviour answered: 'Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee... There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.' And He said unto him, 'Thou hast rightly judged.'

As did Nathan with David, Christ concealed His home thrust under the veil of a parable. He threw upon His host the burden of pronouncing sentence upon himself. Simon had led into sin the woman he now despised. She had been deeply wronged by him. By the two debtors of the parable, Simon and the woman were represented. Jesus did not design to teach that different degrees of obligation should be felt by the two persons, for each owed a debt of gratitude that never could be repaid. But Simon felt himself more righteous than Mary, and Jesus desired him to see how great his guilt really was. He would show him that his sin was greater than hers, as much greater as a debt of five hundred pence exceeded a debt of fifty.

Simon now began to see himself in a new light. He saw how Mary was regarded by One who was more than a prophet. He saw that with keen prophetic eye Christ read her heart of love and devotion. Shame seized upon him, and he realized that he was in the presence of One superior to himself.

'I entered into thine house,' Christ continued, 'thou gavest Me no water for my feet;' but with tears of repentance, prompted by love, Mary had washed His feet and wiped them with the hair of her head. 'Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman' (whom you despise) 'since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet.' Christ recounted the opportunities Simon had to show his love for his Lord, and his appreciation of what had been done for him. Plainly, yet with delicate politeness, the Saviour assured His disciples that His

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heart is grieved when His children neglect to show their gratitude to Him by words and deeds of love.

The Heart Searcher read the motive that led to Mary's action, and He saw also the spirit that prompted Simon's words. 'Seest thou this woman?' He said to him. She is a sinner. 'I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

Simon's coldness and neglect toward the Saviour showed how little he appreciated the mercy he had received. He had thought he honored Jesus by inviting Him to his house. But he now saw himself as he really was. While he thought himself reading his Guest, his Guest had been reading him. He saw how true Christ's judgment of him was. His religion had been a robe of Pharisaism. He had despised the compassion of Jesus. He had not recognized Him as the representative of God. While Mary was a sinner pardoned, he was a sinner unpardoned. The rigid rule of justice he had desired to enforce against her condemned him

Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart. Stern denunciation would have hardened Simon against repentance, but patient admonition convinced him of his error. He saw the magnitude of the debt which he owed his Lord. His pride was humbled, he repented, and the proud Pharisee became a lowly, self-sacrificing disciple...

When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.

Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every

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trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration.

The Desire of Ages, pages 557 – 568.

Now you have a hint as to why this person is one of my favorite authors! What a revealing and tender story! Come on now, don't you just love these stories? Aren't you amazed by what they reveal about God? How compelling! Let's briefly analyze this one some more.

Notice Simon's attitude at the beginning of this story. He was grateful to Christ, in a sense...in a political sense. But, as you can plainly see, a sense of obligation is simply not good enough.

How about the deal with Simon and Mary...did you know about that one? Theologians agree: Mary was the woman taken, and Simon was the perpetrator! Imagine him despising her the way he did...such unfathomable hypocrisy! Such a double standard! But note how Jesus, the "representative of God" handled this whole sensitive affair. Sense the feelings and knowledge that Mary and Simon had of each other! Did Jesus blow the lid off and take Simon down at his own party? You can bet Simon would have done that to someone if he had the opportunity. No, Jesus awakens Simon's awareness gradually, in a subtle way, with tenderness, with a parable! When Simon understands, he is converted! Then he has the right attitude. Then he has the right motivation to go on living a right life for the right reasons!

So, look at the evidence one more time. Notice the methods God uses. What does it say about Him? Does God publicly humiliate people...sinners? And isn't He supposed to be our example?

OK, we'll look quickly at two more stories. First, THE PARALYTIC AT THE POOL – You can find this one in the Book of John, Chapter 5, verses 2 through 15. Read it and come back.

It's a strange story in a way, and revealing again about the times Christ lived in. How perverse were the teachings of His church that poor, diseased people thought God sent an Angel once in awhile to stir the waters of the pool at Bethesda. The first one to make it into the pool after that was healed. What an arbitrary, severe picture of the way

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God works. Further, the church taught that God was punishing the diseased for their sins...that’s why they were sick. Again, what a vengeful and exacting picture of the way God works. Jesus came to straighten out these erroneous perceptions. And so, this story.

Thirty-eight years this guy was in this spot! Can you even imagine that? And how did Jesus handle the situation? Did he lecture the guy on the youthful self-indulgence that caused his condition? (That’s what you get when you smoke and drink and dive into premarital sex with every skirt you see!) No, there was no derision, no condemnation or contempt. Jesus shows us a key in working for those whom He would save:

- How can you expect someone down and out to recover dignity and self-respect when you deprive that self-respect?

Jesus recovered the man first! Later he told Him to stop sinning:

“Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said, ‘Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.’” John 5:14 (GNB)

What, in essence, was Jesus informing that man? Was Jesus saying: “You’re lucky Bud. I got you out of that jam with my Father. But if you keep upsetting Him by carrying on that way, heaven help you!” Is that what Jesus was saying here? I think NOT! Jesus was informing him that what he experienced was a consequence of his actions...what naturally occurred as a result of how he was living. If he continued living that way, his body wouldn’t be able to handle it.

Another story: THE UPPER ROOM...THE NIGHT BEFORE – The part of this story that I want you to focus on is Jesus’ treatment of Judas. The story is in all the gospels, but I refer you to John chapter 13. The whole chapter is good to read, but you can start at verse 18 and go through verse 30. Now before you start reading that, I want to set the stage a little. I want you to notice the mindset of this group of followers...those Jesus chose to carry on His mission after He went back to His Father. Only Luke records this:

“But, look! The one who betrays me is here at the table with

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me! The Son of Man will die as God has decided, but how terrible for that man who betrays him! Then they began to ask among themselves which one of them it could be who was going to do this. An argument broke out among the disciples as to which of them should be thought of as the greatest.” Luke 22: 21 – 24

Notice the order in which this all happens...how they go from “Who’s going to do such a thing...is it I?” to “Not me...I’m Jesus’ best buddy. I’m the most dedicated of all of you!” Great group Jesus picked out here, a real humble bunch, aren’t they? OK, now go read the story.

Does Jesus expose Judas here? It almost seems like it...but it also seems like the disciples just didn’t “get it”, don’t you think? It causes me to want to ask another question: Just why does Jesus bring up His betrayal anyway? It took me a little while to catch this:

*“I tell you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe the I Am Who I Am.”
John 3:19 (GNB)*

Jesus knows His group well. They are not of a frame of mind for any of this. But after it would all be over, the Holy Spirit would bring to mind those things He said. The Holy Spirit would comfort and encourage them, leading them into the truths Jesus was teaching that night:

“I have told you this while I am still with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you. John 14:25, 26 (GNB)

THAT’S why He brought it up!

Notice how tenderly Jesus treated His group of disciples:

- Did He hassle them over their childish and selfish behavior?

NO!

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- Did He berate them for not planning to have a servant present to wash feet...or to pick up on the job themselves?
NO!

Think about what He did in the Upper Room...How He did it and Why...and What this says about our God!

- Jesus said a LOT in the Upper Room that night...John records five whole chapters of it, from Chapter 13 through Chapter 17
- Some things were said in words...some done in deeds, but all of them revealing a grave misunderstanding on the part of the disciples about the Father. Read Chapter 14 and see for yourself.
- This was Jesus' last chance to influence those He'd tried to train to carry on His work...and you could sense the urgency of His words.
- What a revelation this was of God! And what fools the disciples were! Do you think we would have done any better than they?

Let's go back to the part about Judas a minute. There's some real "meat" in this story of how Jesus tried to reach His betrayer. Look at the "cover" that Jesus was able to use

- To prophecy for their encouragement and insight later on;
- To make a last appeal to Judas!;
- To blow the whole thing by the group for yet another lesson they would think long and hard about later:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you have to do.’ No one at the table understood what he meant by this. Some supposed that, as Judas was in charge of the common purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to make some gift to the poor.”

John 13: 27 – 29 (GNB)

Of all people...Judas deserved to be exposed! So...why didn't God do that? Well...if you think it over for awhile...the same question could be asked of God concerning Lucifer and the great rebellion so very

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long ago in the heavens. Why didn't He expose Lucifer right then and there? We've studied the answer to that over all of these chapters. Recall in chapter eight that it was not until the death of Christ that the character of Lucifer was clearly revealed to the angels and the unfallen worlds. Lucifer, or Satan (the accuser) had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not seen the nature of his rebellion. So, perhaps, would events have been misunderstood had Christ exposed Judas for the character he was. Besides, that's not God's way! God knows that eventually the truth comes out. It always does. Judas exposed himself just like Lucifer did!

Remember the story of the time when Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus was going through some genuine agony and temptation concerning His following through on His mission. He was praying into the night asking for help and He asked His close friends to pray for Him as well. Remember what they did? They fell asleep! When Jesus found them that way, did He scold them? The story is in Matthew 26, verses 36 through 46. You'll find, in verse 41, that Jesus didn't scold. He even made excuses for the three of them. What a memory Peter, James and John could have had...for eternity! Look at what their memory of the event will be instead.

Speaking of Peter, his case is well worth examining in the context of the subject of this chapter. Just a few hours after making His great declaration of following Jesus into the jaws of death (Mark 14: 27, 29, &31) he was cursing and swearing that he didn't even know this Christ! That story is also in Matthew 26, right after the praying incident in the garden. By the time the rooster crowed, Peter was immediately reminded of the words of Jesus. He was thunderstruck by the incident! It happened just as Jesus said it would only a few hours before. His first reaction was one of shock. He was stunned that he had stooped to such weakness for he thought himself a much stronger person. At the crowing of the rooster, Jesus turned around and looked straight at Peter. You can read about it in Luke 22:61 and 62. Peter was taken aback as he looked up at Jesus and saw Him looking directly back. Peter saw on His battered face such a look of compassion and forgiveness. It pierced his heart like an arrow. He realized with bitter

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grief how well his Lord knew him and how accurately Jesus read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself. It was too much to bear, so Peter rushed, heartbroken from the hall. We could go into this story in such depth, but this is sufficient enough for our purpose in this chapter. Remembering John 14:9: *“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father...”*, ask yourself this question: What does this story say about our God? What does it reveal about the way He treats His erring children?

Note the difference between Peter’s reaction to “being found out” and Judas’ reaction. What do you suppose made the difference? One let his pride take over to intentionally do what he set out to do. He trusted in his own judgement, especially about himself. He rejected the goodness, mercy and opportunity offered him. He was emboldened by his opinion of himself and thought he could “force Jesus out of the closet” to become the king and conqueror over Rome. He set himself above the one he purported to serve. The other was shocked and appalled at what was revealed to him about himself. He was broken over it. He was humbled by it. He questioned his self-sufficiency and found a truth to guide him safely for the rest of his life. He knew now not to question the judgement of his Lord. He learned how much he needed Jesus.

Let’s not leave Peter and his experience yet...there’s so much more to learn. Put yourself in his place that weekend:

- He’d made a colossal fool of himself, and John was there to see it! Suppose John told the others?
- He did get back together with the others, whether John told them what happened or not. He didn’t forsake the group nor did they forsake him. Maybe John didn’t say anything!
- Peter was eager to learn whether Jesus really rose on Sunday...Why...do you suppose? Do you think he was worried about his position in the group? Or was he merely curious? Or was he sorry...maybe he wanted to apologize? Or was there any other motivation?
- Who was the first to see Jesus though? Oh NO! Why her?

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Mary the whore...Mary the demon-possessed...Mary the embarrassment of the group! Would we have elected her for that honor? God did! What's that say about Him? We need to remember this too: *Mary had to care enough about Him to be there to accept that honor!*

The story inside this story of Mary discovering the resurrection is beautiful. You can read it in John chapter 20. Verse 17 is often so misunderstood here. "*Don't touch me! Don't touch me or I cannot ascend to my Father!*" A traditional teaching in many churches is that Mary could literally have prevented Jesus from going to His Father for approval had she touched Him. Her sinful touch would have tarnished Jesus so that its offense could not have been tolerated in the presence of the Father. What would that say about our God? It doesn't make sense, does it? One should read other versions of the Bible here that show the true meaning of the Greek. Jesus said:

"Do not hold on to me because I have not yet gone back up to the Father." John 20:17 (GNB)

"Don't hold Me up any longer" in other words! Mary was touching Him, she was embracing Him in disbelief and overwhelming joy! Isn't that more consistent? Doesn't that make a lot more sense? And also notice here what Jesus calls those "disciples" who let Him down so hard in His hour of need and abandoned Him:

*"...go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to Him who is My Father and their Father, My God and their God."
John 20:17 last part (GNB)*

How about the message that Mary was to bring from the angels in the tomb? Remember how she found it empty, and the angels asked her what she was looking for? They said something special to her in Mark 16: 7:

"Now go and give this message to His disciples, including Peter: 'He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'" (GNB)

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And Peter! Did you ever stop to think what this experience says about the angels and the way they feel toward us? Can you see the smile on their faces when they added the words: “Including Peter”!?!

There are so many other examples to look at...but ask yourself now:

**Is this not the kind of God with Whom we may spend eternity...
If we learn to trust Him?**

If we spend eternity with Him, will we ever have to be concerned about His memory? You see He’s promised not only to forgive us but to forgive and forget!...to treat us as though we’d never sinned!

*“For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back”
Isaiah 38:17 (RSV)*

“You will trample our sins underfoot and send them to the bottom of the sea!” Micah 7:19 (GNB)

There are many more references to this in the Bible! Here are a few favorites:

“If you kept a record of our sins, who could escape being condemned?” Psalms 130:3 (GNB)

“Our message is that God was making all mankind His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how he makes them His friends.” 2nd Corinthians 5:19 (GNB)

“There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1 (GNB)

There is no pretense or forgetfulness in any of this! God and the angels have watched our every deed! Just imagine the adjustment the angels have had to make! We’re treated just as though we’ve always been God’s loyal children!

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So then...would it appear from this that God is “soft” on sin? Remember our definition of sin: “separation from God”! Is He soft on that? Don’t be silly! That doesn’t make sense! Look at what it’s cost Him:

- 1) to answer such difficult questions about these issues;
- 2) to meet the emergencies it has caused in His family!

Recall that on some occasions, even “gentle Jesus” had to call sin by its right name and denounce it in strong terms. But let me ask you:

- Did He do this to Mary?
- How about to Judas?
- Peter then?
- Matthew the tax collector?
- Zaccheus the thief?
- Nicodemus or Simon? (If you picked these, you’re warm!)

Jesus rarely spoke what might be termed harsh words...and when He did it was always reserved for the leaders of His church...the teachers of the “truth”...the preservers of the “faith”:

“How terrible for you teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You sail the seas and cross whole countries to win one convert; and when you succeed you make him twice as deserving of going to hell as you yourselves are! How terrible for you, blind guides!” Matthew 23: 15 & 16 (GNB)

That’s pretty strong language, isn’t it?

But even in the final, awesome death of the wicked...God respects the freedom and individuality of His creatures! In all 66 books, He’s made it plain that He doesn’t want to lose ANY...not one!

“The Lord is not slow to do what He has promised, as some think. Instead, He is patient with you, because He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins. 2nd Peter 3:9 (GNB)

“...as surely as I, the Sovereign Lord, am the Living God, I do not enjoy seeing a sinner die. I would rather see him stop sinning and live. Israel, stop the evil you are doing. Why do you want to die?” Ezekiel 33:11 (GNB)

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“This is good and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth....God wants everyone to be saved.” 1st Timothy 2: 3,4,6 (GNB)

Like a physician though...He can't force us to be well. We have to be willing to take the medicine, undergo the cure. It can't happen unless it happens voluntarily in an atmosphere of freedom. Healing will not take place otherwise, and trust will not be restored.

If we press God on this...if we prefer to leave Him (sin)... He will respect our decision and sadly let us go! As we leave Him for the last time though, and reap the consequences of our actions, I think we'll hear Him crying:

*“How can I give you up?...How can I abandon you?”
Hosea 11:8 (GNB)*

OK, we're almost done. Let's look at one more story concerning God's attitude toward His wayward children. It's a familiar parable, one you've heard over and over again. It's in Luke 15 – The Prodigal Son. Read it quickly and come back. Notice the word “Prodigal” is not used in the Bible. “Prodigal” has its origins in the Latin “Prodigus” and comes from the old French “Prodigere” which means “to drive away and squander”. It means “recklessly extravagant; characterized by wasteful expenditure”. Even so, the word is not in the Bible! Have you read it now? It's the ending I want to focus on. I want you to note what it says about God the Father:

*“While he was still a long way off his father saw him and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him and kissed him. The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him...and let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’”
Luke 15: 20-24 (NEB)*

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- What was the father doing...what's the implication?
- Who are the father's servants? (Hint: Luke 15:7)
- Get my best suit! My best one!
- Do you see the "definition of sin" in this passage?

Israel was God's "prodigal" throughout its history, but Israel did not come home. God's feelings toward that people were never expressed better than in Hosea...

*"But come home, Israel, come home to the Lord your God!
Take words of repentance with you as you return to the
Lord...I will heal their unfaithfulness, I will love them with all
my heart." Hosea 14: 1,2,4 (Phillips)*

But they didn't come home. Look at God's reaction:

*"My people are bent on turning away from me;...How, oh how
can I give you up Ephraim! How, oh how can I hand you over
Israel!" Hosea 11:7,8 (Phillips)*

God will sadly let us go...if we insist! I understand that God will miss us if we're lost...but He will miss us for eternity...forever! Just think of the void brilliant Lucifer will leave in the infinite memory of God! It will pain Him always. But there's more. He will cry and mourn the loss of one-third of His family. He will be stricken over the loss of His chosen people who did not choose Him! Will He also grieve for you?...Me?

For some of us...I hope all who read this book...this magnificent picture of God...these stories...this evidence...will lead us to turn back and

TRUST HIM!...and thereby become trustworthy!

God is a kind, loving, relentless parent! He is not the God His enemies paint Him out to be! **This is the Good News!**

*"Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to
repentance?" Romans 2:4 (RSV)*

This is the truth to guide us home and set us free!

Chapter # 14:

Perfect? Did you say PERFECT?

There is a teaching in Christianity that troubles many people. It is referred to as “Perfection”. The concept is that we must become perfect if we’re going to satisfy the requirements of “getting into heaven”. Oddly enough, and certainly unfortunately, the idea comes from something Jesus said during His famous Sermon on the Mount. Those who teach this topic quote Christ in Matthew 5:48 –

You must be perfect – just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (GNB)

That’s a daunting thought to anyone...ANYONE! How are you going to be as perfect as GOD?

Recall that, in this book, I am promoting the “trust/healing” approach to examining such questions, as opposed to the “reward/ punishment” approach. A more appropriate way to phrase the whole idea of “perfection” and the questions surrounding it may be to ask: “Can God heal you completely or not?” This chapter will look at the idea of “perfection” from that perspective, remembering the great controversy over God’s character and the way He runs His government. God has been accused of being something less than perfect!

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”(KJV) Is that a threat or a promise? Whether these words from Jesus are forbidding (as in threat) or encouraging (as in promise) depends on our picture of God again, doesn’t it? But we’ve read thirteen chapters already to get to know our physician Father. It’s been apparent so far that He longs to make His children well, hasn’t it? Our part is not to heal ourselves, but to cooperate. Remember what Jesus asked the paralytic at the pool in the last chapter? In the KJV Christ asks, “*Would you like to be made whole?*”(John 5:6). Well who wouldn’t...right? Perfection, in this context, is a generous offer, not a burdensome command!

Perfect? Did you say PERFECT?

How could we turn such an offer down?!? On the other hand, how do we cooperate?

Alright...consider this: when Jesus was here He demonstrated the truth about His Father and the plan of salvation. Know how He did it? He spent most of His time HEALING rather than preaching. That's true! Christ longs to and will heal us if we let Him.

Let's try to bring this up to date a little. Suppose you're diagnosed seriously ill with lung cancer...you've spent most of your life smoking. You're sitting in your physician's office having just heard this startling news. What would you rather hear from your doctor?

1) *I forgive you for smoking* – Does that cut it? Would this heal the damage that's been done? You would die forgiven. Would that help? **Or**

2) *I can make you completely well...if you'll cooperate* – That's despite your lifetime of error...completely healthy again!

How would you respond? That seems like a dumb question, doesn't it? Surely you wouldn't say: "Nahhh...really Doc. All I want is forgiveness." Does that make sense? Wouldn't you say, "Doctor...if that is true...how can I cooperate? What do you want me to do?"

Let's go on with the analogy...the doctor continues: "This will require some changes...but if you trust me *enough* to follow my instructions, I can absolutely guarantee that you will be perfectly restored!" Would your response be:

"Wait a minute!...I thought cooperate meant to let YOU do it all. How about a miracle then? If I have to work to get well...I'm gonna look for another physician!"

“Oh My God!”

I know we're encouraged today to get second opinions... but would you do this? Wouldn't you want to cooperate? Sure, medicine tastes icky...and some procedures are painful and, at best, inconvenient. But this is YOUR LIFE you're talking about here. Wouldn't you be willing to do anything?

As Christians, we need much more than physical healing. The greatest damage has been done to our

- ability to live together in peace & freedom;
- ability to trust & be trustworthy and loving.

Once again, is it enough to die forgiven? Is that how the neighborhoods are going to be in heaven...filled with pardoned criminals? Like that idea? If the universe is to be safe again...mustn't we be somehow changed as well? I suppose if you think that God threatens His children with eternal torture as a penalty for sinning...then forgiveness is a pretty good enough goal, isn't it?

Consider what a hellish shadow this belief has cast upon God and the true plan of salvation!

Heaven will be peopled with healed, changed, trustworthy saints! God proposed to set right everything that has gone wrong. Can you blame Him? Would you want Him to do anything less?

The word “Salvation” means, essentially, healing. The concept does, at least. You have to go back to the original Hebrew and Greek to get this. The Hebrew word translated “salvation” is *Yeshuw'ah*. That means delivered to health. It comes from the root word *Yasha* which means “to be safe or free!” David sometimes used the word *Yasha* which meant “Liberty”! Fully 70% of the references to salvation are in the Old Testament. The Greek word translated “salvation” is *Soteria*. That word means “to rescue to health, healing.” It comes from the root word *Soter* which meant “a deliverer”. *Soter* also comes from *Sozo* which meant “to heal or make whole”. **To be saved is to be healed!**

What do you think...do you like where this is goin'?

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In the legal or reward/punishment picture of God, you see, to be saved is to be forgiven. In the trust/healing picture of God, salvation is the healing of the damage done. Which makes more sense to you? The trust/healing view is truly made plain in scripture if you study. Luke 18:42 has Jesus' comment to a blind beggar. Let's examine it with the trust/healing view:

"Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." (KJV)

"Receive your sight: your faith has healed you." (NIV)

Both versions refer to the Greek "Sozo" as defined above!

So, back to that knotty little comment from the sermon on the mount:

"You must be perfect." (GNB)

"Ye therefore shall be perfect."

(American Standard)

"You are to be perfect." (Goodspeed)

All of those are versions of Matthew 5:48. You can't tell if it's a promise or a command! It's just a future statement. Its interpretation definitely depends upon your knowledge of God! Is this a terrifying statement? Or should it thrill you to pieces? How do we find out which is the right way to look at this? By now you should know! As in the chapters before, we should be looking for illustrations (or stories!) in scripture to reassure us about the One who said we are to be perfect!

Let's look at a father and son illustration: the cases of David and Solomon. I'm going to pick on several little passages here where God describes David:

"If you will serve me in honesty and integrity, as your father David did, and if you obey my laws and do everything I have commanded you, I will keep the promise I made to your father David when I told him that Israel would always be ruled by his descendants.

(1st Kings 9:4,5 GNB)

“Oh My God!”

*“I took the kingdom away from David’s descendants and gave it to you. But you have not been like my servant David, who was completely loyal to me, obeyed my commands, and did only what I approve of.”
(1st Kings 14:8 GNB)*

*“And by the time he was old they had led him into the worship of foreign gods. He was not faithful to the Lord his God, as his father David had been....He sinned against the Lord and was not true to Him as his father David had been....If you obey me completely, live by my laws, and win my approval by doing what I command, as my servant David did, I will always be with you. I will make you king of Israel and will make sure that your descendants rule after you, just as I have done for David.”
(1st Kings 11: 4,6,38 GNB)*

“If you serve me faithfully as your father David did, obeying my laws and doing everything I have commanded you, I will keep the promise I made to your father David when I told him that Israel would always be ruled by his descendants. (2nd Chronicles 7:17,18 GNB)

Now these passages don’t say that David was perfect, but they sure imply that he was! Look there at 1st Kings 14:8 where God says that David did only what He approved of! How much do you know about David? He was a bloody man. Nothing got in his way! He made love to another man’s wife and then had the man (Uriah the Hittite) put in the front lines of a battle so that he would be killed! What would your church do with David? How on earth could God describe him that way? Because David let God completely heal him...that’s how!

What was the difference between David and Solomon? Many of the passages above were directed at Solomon, chiding him for not being like his father David. Solomon lived in relative peace. God permitted Solomon to build the Temple...a privilege He denied David! But Solomon slipped. The pagan women in his life gradually took him down...farther and farther into paganism

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until he was sacrificing his own children to the god Molech! Near the end of his life, though, Solomon stuffed his pride and repented. He truly broke down before the Lord, heartbroken and despondent that he could sink so low. Did Solomon get treated like a second-class citizen after all that he did? Hardly. God honored him by permitting him to write another book in the Bible! That's right! He wrote Ecclesiastes after his almost terminal folly. What kinds of people wrote books in the Bible?

“For no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.”
(2nd Peter 1:21 GNB)

See how you have to put this stuff together? How could God describe Solomon this way? Because Solomon let God completely heal him...that's how! The record doesn't speak that well of David or Solomon or of many others like them...but what does that record say about our God? Were David and Solomon perfect? No...this is just more evidence that God treats us as though we had never sinned!

That's the kind of God that wants us to be perfect! Is there any need to be afraid of Him? For that matter, is there any need to be afraid of being

PERFECT?

Depends, huh? What does it mean to be perfect? How perfect does one have to be? Looks like David and Solomon kept the bar pretty low! Surely we could hurdle THAT one? If you're asking that question, you're still not getting it!

OK...describe someone perfect. Now don't get physical. You know I don't mean a "10" man or woman...you know what I mean. Have you ever come across anyone "perfect"? I heard of a physician offering this analogy: "Visit any medical college and view a cadaver once. They never do anything bad!" Of course they never do anything good either...but that's a popular view of perfection! Does it make sense?

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In the days of the early Greeks, there were philosophers of every persuasion. In their golden era, the highly educated had the time to contemplate perfection...“the honest man”. Among them was one called Simon Stylites. He wanted to make sure that he didn’t harm anyone or do any wrong, so he perched himself atop a pillar. That’s all he did was sit up there day and night. His story became famous and he was admired for his passion to purpose. He actually had a following! Those people were really of no use to anybody...but they never did anything wrong! They were called the “Stylites”...or the order of the “pole sitters”.

The actual Greek word that is interpreted “perfect” throughout the New Testament is “*Teleios*”. It meant “complete; whole; mature”. So why was it interpreted “perfect”? Well, some interpreters even got the two concepts interwoven. Consider Norlies translation of Matthew 5:48:

“You must become spiritually mature, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

When a person is converted...won over to trust God again...and the whole marvelous procedure of healing begins...the change is so great that it’s like being born all over again! Jesus tried to get this idea through to Nicodemus that night they met:

“Jesus answered, ‘I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again!’”
(John 3:3 GNB)

That’s why Paul interpreted baptism the way he did in Romans 6:4:

“By our baptism we were buried with Him in death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we also should live an entirely new life.” (Weymouth)

A couple of Catholic scholars added a wonderful footnote to this passage: “St. Paul alludes to the manner in which baptism was

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ordinarily conferred in the primitive Church, by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the descent of the body into the grave, and the ascent is suggestive of a resurrection to a new life.” (Kleist and Lilly). Could it be said any better than that? So, even at this beginning stage of the Christian life, God treats us as if we had never sinned!

We often refer to new church members as “babes in the truth”. Sometimes we even do this when converts have some considerable Christian background in one denomination and convert to another (tsk, tsk). The point to be looked at here is...does God desire that we stay children in the faith...or does he desire that we grow and mature? (Hey! Isn’t “mature” one of the substitutes for “perfection” in interpreting the Greek word used there – *teleios*? See above.) Christ said something interesting that *seems* to be on point here...at least it is often offered in response to this question:

*“...I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 18:3 GNB)*

St. Paul had some things to say about this! I love the way he went after these kinds of issues! He was disturbed to find that, after only a few months, converts were still “babes in the truth”. He had some hard words for the converted Jews in the church whom he held responsible for knowing more than others because of their background. He said they were mentally, physically and spiritually retarded! Actually he got stickier than that:

“Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truth of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity!” (Hebrews 5:11 through 6:1)

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In other words: “It’s time to grow up and become perfect!” Whoa! What does that mean again? It means complete; whole; mature!

Given the end times we live in prophetically, is there *time* for new converts to “grow up”? One of my favorite authors on spiritual matters stated: “Some of us have had time to get the truth and to advance step by step, and every step we have taken has given us strength to take the next. But now time is almost finished, and what we have been years learning, *the newly converted* will have to learn in a few months. They will also have much to ‘unlearn’ and much to learn again.” What do you think about that concept: having to “unlearn”? Have you ever had that experience...in your secular life...where you discover that “things just don’t seem to work the way you were taught”? I find that true in economics, for instance. The political environment and the dynamics of technology have changed so much that the economy functions in a manner quite different from the way I was taught in graduate school. I’ve also discovered that religion “works” much differently than I was taught. Somehow I missed the simplicity that is the beauty of an individual experience in search of God. I’m glad I finally discovered it!

Getting back on point...St. Paul gave loads of advice to those he introduced to the Gospel. He wrote the following to the Ephesian followers:

“His gifts were made that Christians might...arrive at real maturity...We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching, and of the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to speak the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ.”
Ephesians 4:11, 13-15 (Phillips)

The whole letter he wrote to the Ephesians says that the purpose of church is: To help people grow up to perfection/maturity. The Bible tells us, in various places, why this is necessary. In Daniel 12, for example, that prophet explains that the time of the end will be one of such confusion, beyond that ever encountered. Only

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those who have established a relationship with God will understand what is happening. The book of Revelation corroborates Daniel. Christ, in Matthew 24 and other places, also said the same thing. St. Paul explained this concept to all his converts. The deception that will try mankind will come within as well as without the church! If we're still "babes in the truth", we'll never survive this trauma. We'll be wandering after "teachers" and "gurus" without any personal direction...without any personal knowledge...without the personal certainty we'll need to sustain our faith in the God who loves us so. Take a look around you. Don't you notice that in your environment?

The Lord, in mercy, is waiting for us to grow up...and be settled in the truth about Him as Job was. Think about this now: It's not an arbitrary requirement that we grow up...*it's absolutely necessary if we're to survive!* We can't afford to be satisfied as "babes in the truth", led to the water to drink every weekend, relying on our minister or priest or teacher to remind us "what we believe in". We must grow up and be able, ourselves, to distinguish between right and wrong.

So, then, what should we be working on together?

- How to "say" prayers?
- How to participate in the church service?
- What kind of music we should have in church?
- The "proper" order of the church service
- Sermon Topics?...The pastor's/priest's ability to entertain?
- How our children should behave in church?
- What day we should really come to church?
- How to "memorize what we believe" so that we can regurgitate it to someone else?
- How to dress...what to wear?
- How to eat and exercise?

WHAT...of these things above...will help us grow and mature in Christ? What do we have to perfect?

“Oh My God!”

There is another way of looking at perfection...as *perfect obedience to God’s law. The perfect person is perfectly obedient!* That scares the daylights out of most people. Another way to say the same thing, so that it is much better understood, is: *The mature person recognizes his privilege to learn at the feet of an all-knowing, all-loving God!*

Perfect obedience can come out sounding pretty arbitrary unless you take a deep look at God’s Law...as we already have in this book...and recognize that it is not a threat to our freedom. Quite the contrary! All God asks from us is love and trust. That’s easy, isn’t it? Well...that depends on what all is meant by “love and trust”. St. Paul had a definition for it:

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.”
1st Corinthians 13: 4,5 (GNB)

Oh yeah...sure. That’s easy. Well...it is the description of a grown-up person though, isn’t it?

So...here’s the heart of perfection then: *To really obey God’s Commandments is simply to grow up...to act like a grown-up...to be a safe and pleasant person to live next door to.* C’mon...how bad is that? The big remaining question is: How does one grow up like this?

As we’ve studied in so many scriptures already, it starts with a faith in God again. Some say that we’re saved by that faith! Well, it does help heal us. You may have noticed that the view of the role of faith in this book is just a little different than what is traditionally taught. If you want to review it again, go back to Chapter 3, specifically pages 26 & 27. Faith, as we’ve studied, means trust...it means love...it means admiration... and that all leads to a willingness to listen to God!

Typically, discussions about laws are so singular...so focused on our human experience...empirical evidence produced

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and reproduced so many times and so often that we recognize an immutable pattern in them:

PHYSICS – “Whatever goes up must come down”...”For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”

NATURE – “Carnivores have to eat too”...”Four seasons in Wisconsin...only one in southern California.”

MEN – “If you live, you pay taxes”...”An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”

In like manner, there is a law (fact) in this orderly universe as God has designed it: that we will inevitably become like the person we worship and admire. Don't you see this in yourself and your friends? When I was a bit younger, I wanted to be like Elvis. At my ripe old age, I still play in a Rock and Roll band...and I still get accused of being an “Elvis Wannabe”. I thought he was “cool”, so I mimicked his movements, his voice, his hairdo, his sneer...you know the drill. People do it all the time. It can have a very negative affect on you...if the one you admire is a negative model. It can have a very positive affect on you if the one you admire is a laudable model. St. Paul noticed this nineteen hundred years ago:

“And then with unveiled faces we can all behold, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. And we become changed into His likeness from glory to glory, through the Spirit of the Lord working in us.” 2nd Corinthians 3:18 (Norlie)

We examined previously how the Spirit works. The Spirit brings us the truth...the true picture of God...the evidence in Scripture and in life! Do you get it? We like what we see and we become changed! Of course, as I noted, this works two ways:

“Those who make (idols) will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” Psalms 115:8 (NIV)

Parents...you've experienced this...and you've seen your children experience it. Ever have your daughter come home dressed like Madonna? Who is it today? Britney Spears? I'm dating myself here...but you get the idea. If you don't know who Madonna is

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anymore, look her up in history on the Internet. She was an oversexed pop singer. Grandparents...you've seen this operate on two levels now...that's even more confirmation!

So...what about those of us who admire God? We're gonna be just fine aren't we? Whoa now...that depends! What do you think God is like? Do you buy the “Arbitrary, Exacting Vengeful, Unforgiving and Severe” picture that is painted by, not only God's enemies, but many who call themselves His friends? If that's the God you love and admire...and you become like that...I don't know that I'd want to live next door to you in heaven! History has born out how people with this picture of God conduct themselves. Go study the “Dark Ages” once, and see how those pious, dedicated, zealous followers of God conducted themselves. You don't even have to take such pains...just go to a little province in Serbia called Kosovo. The Catholics, Protestants and Muslims there each have a concept of God that they believe in and kill for.

Your picture of God is SO important!!

Remember Saul's experience on the road to Damascus? He was zealously defending his religion when God struck him blind. The episode had a drastic effect on him. After his sight was restored, he became a follower of Christ. Before he could be used in spreading the gospel effectively, he was whisked off to Arabia for three years (Gal 1:17)...to “unlearn”. When he came back, he was a changed man. But what changed?

- He wore the same clothes, ate the same food
- He read the same Bible
- He worshipped on the same day

OK, ok...his name changed...from Saul to Paul. Was that it? NO! His understanding of who God was...what God was like...what God wanted... how God conducted Himself...**HIS PICTURE OF GOD CHANGED!** He admired it and became changed into its likeness. That's the kind of change I want in my life! It can only happen when you see God as He really is...as His Son revealed

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Him to be...as all the testimony of Scripture has shown. *If you like what you see*, then, the LAW is that you'll become like Him!

We just talk too much about perfection...and not enough about God. We're preoccupied with our performance instead of the truth about our God. It took him awhile, but St. Paul sure got it right! Here's what he learned and the counsel he had for us:

*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”
1st Corinthians 11:1 (RSV)*

That's perfection for you!

Chapter# 15:

PRAYER: Talking to God as to a Friend!

It should come as no surprise to anyone, at this point, that the concept of prayer might be a little different in truth than that to which we have become accustomed. I can't believe I constructed that sentence. Let me try again: It shouldn't surprise you that prayer is a misunderstood concept, especially after what you've read so far! Just what is a prayer anyway? Webster says that a prayer is "an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought". Another definition used is "a set order of words used in praying". Yet another definition that applies is "the act or practice of praying to God or a god". All of these definitions miss the mark by a wide margin, because they infer that prayer is a "one-way" conversation. Uh-oh. Do I mean to tell you that you can actually talk with God...that God responds? Always? I think so. At least, that has been my experience. Yes, I'm serious, and yes, you can experience this too. It's not "magic" and it has nothing to do with tricks or semantics. Are you at least curious about this? I hope so. I want to make one very broad statement that I think you'll understand after all that you've studied to this point:

The way we pray depends on the kind of person we believe our God to BE!

What is the meaning and purpose of prayer? A leading expert on the subject of prayer...one called Jesus...had this to say about it:

"Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him." Matthew 6:8 (GNB)

Well, if that's the case...why even bother praying? This comment from Jesus begs the question: "Is the primary purpose of prayer to lodge our request with God?" I suppose the place to go to get that answered is right back to the expert! In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus said:

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven: may your holy name be honored; may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need. Forgive us the wrongs we have done,

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*as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the evil one.”
(GNB)*

Many of you know this “prayer” well. It has been entitled “The Lord’s Prayer” and it has even been put to music. It’s a beautiful passage, a lovely saying...don’t you think? That’s about all it means to so many. It’s been analyzed again and again for its content and preached and preached about in sermon after sermon...to make sure that we get every kernel of meaning out of it. That’s nice, if this is all you think we’re meant to say to God. That’s appropriate if you think that this is the ONE AND ONLY address Jesus set forth for us to bring to His Father. For some of us it becomes a “modus operandi” to get God’s attention and appease Him. I remember when I used to get this saying as a penance for being naughty. I’d have to say 10 “Our Fathers” and 10 “Hail Marys”. I was taught that repetition was the proper way to pray to God:

“Now I lay me down to sleep.....”
“God is good, God is Great....”
“Bless us O Lord, for these Thy gifts...”

This was referred to as “saying grace”. What’s grace? That’s a whole topic in itself, but it isn’t prayer!

Now don’t get upset with me here. I’m not making “fun” of anybody. The above prayers were ‘ok’ for me to learn as a child...to get me started. That’s nothing to be ashamed of or shy about. Even the Disciples were slow to begin with! Jesus taught that famous prayer to many in the Sermon on the Mount. At that time, only four of the Disciples had been “called” by Jesus (Peter, Andrew, James and John). Later on, they asked for the same lesson. After many instances of observing Jesus in prayer, they asked him to teach them again:

*“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples’. Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say this:
‘Father: May your holy name be honored;*

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may your Kingdom come. Give us day by day the food we need. Forgive us our sins for we forgive everyone who does us wrong. And do not bring us to hard testing’.
Luke 11: 1 – 4 (GNB)

This is milk! It’s a nice prayer and it has real sentiment...but it’s MILK! You know what I’m talking about when I say it’s “milk”? I mean there will come a time in your growth process when you will be “weaned” from it.

Let’s turn back to the “expert” again. Jesus is our example. Peter told us that in his first letter:

“Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in His steps.” 1st Peter 2:21 (GNB)

It would seem logical, then, that Jesus would’ve left us some examples of what prayer is. The one He initially taught the disciples was just getting off the ground! The Bible records lots about Jesus in prayer. There are dozens of references. We’ll just look at two here:

“He went up into the hills by himself to pray.”

Matt. 14:23 (GNB)

“All night He continued in prayer to God.”

Luke 6:12 (GNB)

So, He went by Himself and prayed to His Father...sometimes all night! Wow! What do you suppose He was saying all night long...multiple reps of the “Our Father”? I’m not being facetious or disrespectful here. Some people actually think that this is what Jesus was doing and they teach this! Whatever could lead to such an understanding? Here are some possibilities:

- A literal interpretation of the Bible as “word inspired” instead of “thought inspired”;
- Legalism...a method of getting or earning something from God;
- A lack of growth...not searching any further in the Bible for other possibilities.

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WHAT WOULD KEEP SOMEONE AT THIS CONCEPT LEVEL?

Or...

Were Jesus' conversations with His Father so real that the night hours simply slipped away? Have you ever had this experience with a dear friend or family member? Do you see where I'm going with this?

We've been here before, making a point and reinforcing it. That kind of repetition is good because you have to read it and think about it a few times before it sinks in (at least for me!). When you've been taught to think "one way" about a practice in your life, you have to "unlearn it" in order to change and improve. That's a challenge all of us face in whatever our endeavor. The older we become, the more we get classified as an "old dog". You know, the kind you can't teach "new tricks"! The key to getting this concept about praying with God is to understand the true relationship He wants with us. To repeat it:

"...I call you friends." John 15:15 (GNB)

Everything depends on whether or not GOD IS OUR FRIEND! You might think that to be an exaggeration, but I stand by the statement! The way we pray reveals to others and ourselves the kind of person we believe and understand our God to be.

Let's do some "sanctified" imagining for a minute. Imagine you are with me here in my study. I have a nice room with carpet, a desk and a sofa in it. As you and I talk, imagine God walks into the room and sits down on the sofa to visit with us for an hour. C'mon, do it!

- Would we invite anyone else over? How about our close friends and relatives at least? ("Hello Mom? You're not gonna believe who dropped in!")
- Would we ask God to talk with us? Or would we interview Him? Who would talk first?
- When He got up to leave...would we have prayer?
- Would it matter to you if it were the Father or the Son?

Remember that it did to Phillip...and the rest of the 12 Disciples. They had some pretty sorry teaching about who the Father was and what He was like. This led Jesus to emphasize a point that seems to be missing in most Christian theological teaching:

“Oh My God!”

*“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well...
Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”
John 14:7,9 (GNB)*

*“I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, for
the Father loves you Himself.” John 16:26 (Goodspeed)*

Remember the early days of the “Emergency Measures” (chapter 11) when everyone (of His chosen people) was afraid of God? Yet we know that Abraham and Moses achieved the ultimate friendship! It’s recorded here:

*“The Lord would speak with Moses face to face, just as a
man speaks with a friend.” Exodus 33:11 (GNB)*

*“ You are our God. When your people Israel moved into
this land, you drove out the people who were living here
and gave the land to the descendants of Abraham, your
friend, to be theirs forever.” 2nd Chronicles 20:7 (GNB)*

*“But you, Israel my servant, you are the people that I have
chosen, the descendants of Abraham, my friend.”
Isaiah 41:8 (GNB)*

All those centuries before...Moses knew that you don’t have to be afraid of God! After God gave the emergency measures at Mt. Sinai and all His children were fearful, Moses said:

*“...Don’t be afraid! God has only come to test you and
make you keep on obeying Him, so that you will not sin
(separate from Him).” Exodus 20:20 (GNB)*

Nearly a century after Christ appeared on Earth, John expressed this great truth in a very clear way:

*“There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear...
fear has to do with punishment.” 1st John 4:18 (GNB)*

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Paul continued this eternal thought in his letter to the Romans. You recall that famous question he asked in chapter 8:

*“If God is for us, who can be against us?
...not God...not Christ Jesus”!
Romans 8:31,32,34 (GNB)*

If you were ushered right now into the presence of God...would you be afraid He might hurt you? Hit you? How about being consumed by His blazing power? Do you trust Him with that POWER? Is He trustworthy?

Truly, the way in which we approach God some day (and we ALL will!) will reveal the kind of person we've been persuaded that our God really is! It's important for you to consider the forces that are influencing you in this regard. All right then, knowing all of this...let's go back to my study and continue our imagined visit with God seated in our presence.

- Would it dawn on us that angels...perfect as they are... stand in awe of this person?
- Could my study...my house, contain His glory? Would it burst out of the windows and seams in the construction and flood the entire neighborhood? Would others be drawn over out of wonder?
- When we started talking...would we never stop? But isn't that what we do when we pray? When we were done speaking, would we say "amen" and then go about our business...or eat...or sleep? Again, isn't this what we do when we pray? Would that make sense if God were here? Would it be polite?
- Would we have a conversation? We would wouldn't we? And doesn't that mean at least two people speaking?

So, how do you converse with a God you cannot see? And why doesn't He appear anyway? What accusations do you suppose the evil one would make if God did appear to us in person? Doesn't it strike you a little ironic that the evil one doesn't appear either? Oh, sure...in the movies. But that's not Him...that's not the beautiful

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angel once stationed at the very side of God perfect in beauty and still very beautiful, intelligent, talented and powerful!

Think this out now...how could we have a two-way conversation with our God? Didn't He provide for that somehow? What other “emergency measure” has He provided for us to have that would enable 2-way? C'mon...we even call it “God's Word”, don't we?! If we wish to hear God speak...very clearly in our minds...He usually does so through the Bible! If you're not reading, you're missing out! We commune with God through the study of the Scriptures kept over the milleniums. Don't you find prayer more meaningful while reading your Bible? I talk to God in those times...really. I read something that scares me because I see myself in it and I say to God: “Oh Father...I'm weak here...just like David was. Help me to be faithful and to learn the hard lessons David did without going through all the mess he was in.” God responds in ways shown in the last chapter, showing me that He'll treat me the same way He treated David, if I'm as true as David was. Think about the standard that David set once. It doesn't mean that I can “get away with a lot”. It means that I'd have a hard time going so far that God couldn't reach me with His love, if I was willing (like David) to respond to God. It means that I could fall in love with God, admire Him and become changed just like David did! God and I talk about that, I can assure you. Read the Bible and listen for the impressions of the Holy Spirit, then respond!

So...back to my study. God's on the sofa. What do we say to Him...what language do we use? Do we speak in tongues or some angelic language because that's what God prefers...even though we don't understand it? Does that make sense? Ok, then how about this:

*“We prithe Lord...that thou woulds't bestow upon us
unctions from on high”*

What do you suppose His reaction would be? Is that the way we usually speak? Then why do we use language like that when we pray? Did the Disciples talk that way maybe...or Moses or David or Abraham? I don't think so. And what's an unction anyway?

PRAYER: Talking To God As To A Friend!

OK, ok then...let's try again. How would/should we talk to God? Well, how do you talk to a friend? How did Jesus address Him: "Sir! Father Sir! Jesus here, at your service, SIR!" I'm afraid not. Jesus said "Abba, Father", or Dear Father. It was an endearment! Paul supports this in Galatians 4:5-7 (GNB):

"...we might become God's sons. To show that you are His sons, God sent the Spirit who cries out "Father, my Father!" So then, you are no longer a slave but a son. And since you are His son, God will give you all that He has for His sons."

So...back to my study. God's still on the sofa. What would we talk about? We're face to face with Him! Would you say:

- Thank you, God, for my groceries! And by the way, here's my list for tomorrow...Amen!
- Thank you for the house and the nice study! Did it have to come with payments though?
- Bless the missionaries in the far flung corners of the earth...and the evangelists and those who take our message from door to door.
- Go ahead...you put in the well worn phrases.
- Would you write something down and recite it for Him?

All right, let's step out of my study then. Have you ever gone to the Boerner Gardens in Whitnall Park? (Oops! I hadn't thought that you, as a reader, may not live near here) Have you ever been to some beautiful park or garden area near where you live...or some other such place in nature? Isn't it appropriate, especially if you're alone, for you to comment to God about the aroma of the roses or the sound of the warblers...the strength and stateliness of an oak tree, the handsome ruggedness of a mountain range...how wonderful to create this way! I've done this riding a chairlift up the mountain when I've been skiing. The beauty and majesty made me feel so near God. Isn't that great, motivated, candid conversation with God? Or would you say:

"We thank thee for the beauties of nature that surround us"

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and then move on. We’ve got our own pat phrases to cover this stuff! But if we were truly friends with God, wouldn’t we take the time to discuss these things candidly...and get more specific? Might we even question: “Why thorns on roses anyway?” “Why the horrific smell of that cute little animal with the white stripe down its back?”

Job did this! He questioned God and his friends were so afraid for him! But he honored God by his confidence in Him! That’s one of the primary themes of the whole book!

*“If only my life could once again be as it was when God watched over me. God was always with me then...and the friendship of God protected my home...I call to you, O God, but you never answer; and when I pray, you pay no attention!”
Job 29:2-4 and 30:20 (GNB)*

It was statements like these that worried Job’s friends. They fretted: “Who in blazes are you...Job...to question God!” Remember the hard time they gave him, all the representations about God that they made. But remember also how the book ended and how it turned out for Job. God was a little upset with Job’s “comforter friends” and the way they represented Him:

“You did not speak the truth about me the way my servant Job did!” Job 42:7 (GNB)

Job went after God, as one would a friend who had for some reason turned away. We could do the same. There are tough questions we could all ask God about accidents that happen to His own people...to innocent children. You know yourself many instances of these circumstances that have either happened directly to you or to someone you’ve observed. You can’t live in this war zone Earth and not have come across it. Have guardian angels dropped the ball? Did God order them out of the way? God welcomes the questions. He also asks for the patience and faithfulness of a friend. I believe the God we have come to know in these chapters might very well say to us:

“Trust Me,...please! I can’t explain it all to you just now, but I hope you trust Me enough to be willing to wait ‘til that day that I can make it plain to you. I hope you found enough evidence and enough reason for trusting Me that much.”

PRAYER: Talking To God As To A Friend!

We'll take this kind of comment and entreaty from friends...from relatives...but not from GOD! Why? Why not trust the God who goes on to tell us...to promise us:

"You know I would NEVER allow you to be tried and tested beyond what you are able to bear!" 1st Corinthians 10:13 (GNB)

Goodspeed's interpretation or paraphrase of this verse is so precious:

"God can be depended on not to let you be tried beyond your strength."

You see, if you read and study your Bible, you may realize that God could and does go on to say:

"You also know that in ALL things...I work for your good!" Romans 8:28

When you come to know God well...you'll see that He even provokes questioning! A good example of this...a story that illustrates it is contained in Genesis 18 verses 16 – 33. The story is that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read it once! Can you believe God's friend Abraham would speak to Him this way? Note verse 25:

"Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that. If you did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is impossible! The Judge of all the earth has to act justly!" (GNB)

That takes a little familiarity with God, doesn't it? Would you ever dare say something like that to God...right to His face? Was God offended at Abraham? Well, if He was, He sure got over it because thousands of years later He impressed James to write these words about Abraham:

"Abraham was called God's friend." James 2:23 (GNB)

God and Moses were pretty direct with each other too. Remember when God said: "I'm sick of these people...I've had it! Step aside Moses. I'm going to destroy this bunch and start all over with you and yours." That's my paraphrase of Numbers 14: 11-12. Now notice how Moses responds to this right afterward:

"But Moses said to the Lord, 'You brought this people out of Egypt by your power. When the Egyptians hear what you have done to your people, they will tell it to the people who live in this land. These people have already heard that you, Lord, are with us, that you appear in plain sight when your cloud stops

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over us, and that you go before us in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill all your people, the nations who have heard of your fame will say that you killed your people in the wilderness because you were not able to bring them into the land you promised to give them. So now, Lord, I pray, show us your power and do what you promised when you said, ‘I the Lord, am not easily angered, and I show great love and faithfulness and forgive sin and rebellion.’” Numbers 14: 13-18 (GNB)

So, is this bold or what? Moses showed his jealousy for God’s reputation! Again...was God offended? If so, He got over it because He spoke face to face with Moses as a man speaks with a friend (Exodus 33:11, GNB).

Even Peter once dared to say “NO” to God! Do you remember that story? It’s in Acts 10, you should take the time to read it. Actually Peter told God “NO” three times in this story. Given his experience in denying the Lord three times before...this is pretty amazing. Can you catch the quiver in Peter’s voice as he objects in this story? Once again, did God get on Peter’s case for this? NO! This is just the kind of relationship God wants to have with us! When you reach this point,...prayer can’t be just a trite formality...but rather honest conversation about the things that matter to us the most!

Above all,...conversation with God must be Honest! God can’t help you until you’re honest with Him and bring Him the real stuff! Probably no one in Bible history did this any better than David. When he was depressed, he sure said so:

*“Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at
an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?...
And I say, ‘it is my grief that the right hand of the Most
High has changed.’” Psalm 77:7-10 (RSV)*

There’s lots of this out of David! This is only half way through the Psalms. Near the end of the Book you begin to see how David resolved his depression:

*“O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God...Do I not hate
them that hate thee, O lord? And do I not loathe them that
rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count
them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart!*

PRAYER: Talking To God As To A Friend!

*Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”
Psalms 139: 19,21-24 (RSV)*

He’s pretty honest here, isn’t he? He wants vengeance because he hates! He knows that God knows His thoughts, so he lets it out! In the very next breath though...he invites healing! He knew he needed a new heart and a right spirit...truth in the inner man!

If you should watch a loved one die and cry out to God: *Why...God, WHY?”* Would God be offended? Or would He put His arm around you and say:

“I know what you’re going through, I understand how you feel. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t feel that way. Some day, I’ll make it plain to you. I wish I could right now, but please trust Me...enough to be willing to wait.”

You have to know God well to achieve this in your prayer relationship...the Spirit takes you there (Romans 8:26 RSV). The Spirit helps us know the truth about God and about ourselves...so we can tell the truth to God. It comes through practice and experience.

“Never stop praying”. 1st Thessalonians 5:17 (Norlie)

Chapter# 16:

GOD'S LAST PLEADING WITH HIS CHILDREN

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, contains what many believe are mysteries concerning the last days of the earth. A great deal of fascination and intrigue surrounds this book and its contents. A great many “scholars” have benefited from the attraction of this book. Bible studies or evangelistic meetings are usually well-attended if the topic happens to deal with the “mysterious” book of Revelation. Theologians heatedly debate the interpretation of its verses. Religious TV personalities each seem to have their own “slant” on what this book is about.

A “key” to this wonderful book lies in the final warning messages brought by three angels in the fourteenth chapter. As one might expect, they are referred to as the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:

1. The first is an eternal message of Good News...about the Everlasting Gospel: “Honor God and give Him Glory...the hour of His judgment has come! Worship the Creator.”
2. The 2nd message is: “Satan’s empire has collapsed...his rule is over!”
3. The 3rd is: “Be finally warned! Make your choice and reap the consequences.”

Now if you read these messages in verses 6 through 12, you’ll see some different wording. But this is the meaning of those messages.

MUCH has been said, written, taught and preached about these messages. The third or last message is a final warning...an awesome warning. It’s no wonder it contains some pretty fearsome wording...awful things about drinking the “wine” of God’s fury poured full strength into the cup of His “wrath” such that it brings eternally burning torment! Whoa! Given all the background we have by now...how are we to understand this?

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This isn’t our first brush with the book of Revelation. We dove right into it in our very first chapter, remember? We talked about the war in heaven. In Chapter 12 of Revelation, St. John talked about the conflict of distrust that took place in God’s family. Fully one-third of them sided against God! This same book of Revelation that talks about the beginning of the war also talks about its end...and its resolution. It includes a wonderful prediction of the second return of Christ and the restoration of the planet! There are some pretty awesome events that will transpire before it all ends! One thing we know for sure by now: we can trust the God we’ve come to know, worship and admire not to leave His children unwarned. So we’ve got these three angels...each bringing a special message of warning and invitation. Let’s look at them in detail in Revelation 14: 6-12:

“Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice: ‘Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas and the springs of water.’ A second angel followed and said: ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon The Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’ A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” (NIV)

Wow...huh?!? Doesn’t this seem to fly in the face of our previous deliberations over a friendly God? One who doesn’t torture or use force? What do we do with this? How do we explain these hellfire and brimstone terms? Well, the fact of the matter is that this stuff has

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been discussed elsewhere in the Bible. We’ve examined quite a lot of it in previous chapters. But we need the previous 65 books of the Bible in order to understand the 66th book!

Well...let’s look more closely at the messages then. We’ll start with Revelation 14:7...with that intriguing language that says: “Fear God”. Just what does that mean? I know, I know...I can just hear you thinking: “What do you mean by ‘what does that mean?’” Looks pretty black and white doesn’t it? But what did we learn about being afraid of God? Didn’t we learn, starting with Abraham and Moses, that there is no need to be afraid of God? Why, all of a sudden, are we supposed to “fear” Him at this point...at the very end? Remember how important we said it was to examine such statements in the context in which it is put? How else might “Fear God” be put anyway? Is there another way to say it? Or is there something we’re not getting here?

Let’s not forget our use of logic. Before we get to the language of “fear”...we’re told something else about the first angel’s message. The first angel has the everlasting gospel to proclaim to the earth. That’s the “good news” right? Would it be “good news” to be terrified of God? That doesn’t make sense does it? But if this is God’s last pleading with us...couldn’t it have been better said? Why not the first part of the first angel’s message combined with the very last part of the third angel’s message? Why was it necessary for God to use such fearsome language?

It helps to back up a little in the book of Revelation, to consider what’s been said already. In Revelation chapter 12, we’re taken back to the war in heaven and all of Satan’s effort to deceive both angels and men. Chapter 13 goes on to point out Satan’s final effort to deceive. This time, though, Satan’s focus is primarily the earth. Revelation here describes Satan’s almost complete success...except for a few. It describes the powers and the organizations that work with him...they’re symbolized. It describes Satan’s final campaign...when everyone loyal to him receives a mark. We’ll examine this in some detail in our next chapter.

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In Revelation 14, then, we have God's last pleading with his children! Given what is contained in chapters 12 and 13...doesn't it make sense...isn't it logical and fitting that God would warn against these things?

Ok...lets' back up one more time to the first message again...the one that brings Good News (the everlasting gospel)! Is there anything new here...anything different? THIS news has always been the truth; will always be the truth and will always remain the truth. It will also always remain the basis for our freedom and trust throughout all eternity! What could such an important message be? What IS the eternal gospel...this eternal Good News?

Probably the best way to answer this question is to turn to an expert, none other than St. Paul. Probably no one thought he knew the Gospel better than St. Paul thought he did! Some believers in his own church with his own background disagreed with his version of the Gospel. They went around to the various other churches Paul had raised up and confused the members. Actually, that's the main reason he wrote his letter to the church at Galatia. Look at what he had to say to the members there:

“If anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. I now repeat what I have said before; if anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast!”
Gal. 1: 8,9 (NEB)

That seems pretty stiff, doesn't it? He says it once, and then he repeats it! He really meant it! Other versions of the Bible use words other than “outcast”:

- Phillips – “a damned soul”
- Greek – “Anathema”
- Good New Bible – “Condemned to hell”
- Living Bible – “Let God's curse fall upon him”
- NIV – “eternally condemned”

Wow! Was Paul convinced of the rightness of his position or what? He was also convinced of the dire consequences of perverting this

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truth! The concept of turning to *another* gospel was abhorrent to him. He talked about the deadly consequences of turning from the truth in the very first part of his letter to the Romans where he points out that God’s wrath is finally letting those who resist Him have their way. It results in the kind of world we live in, full of selfishness and depravity.

Paul was literally stunned to see so many Christians, after being set free from the meaningless requirements of false religion, so willing to go backward. He could not believe their willingness to go back to the *indignity; fear; bondage and ignorance* they experienced while they were misinformed about God! So he gets right into it with the Galatians:

*“I am surprised at you! In no time at all you are deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ, and are accepting another gospel. Actually, there is no ‘other gospel’, but I say this because there are some people who are upsetting you and trying to change the gospel of Christ!”
Galatians 1: 6,7 (GNB)*

He goes on to ask how they could be so foolish...when they compared the *Good News* he had just given them with what he had led them to give up:

“You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus on the cross!” Galatians 3:1 (GNB)

Now note something pretty interesting here: the Galatians had swapped their previous paganism for the truth that set them free. Then they swapped that precious truth right back for yet another form of paganism...a paganism practiced and taught in “the church”! The false teachers taught them that there was a need to appease an angry god...a teaching central to all forms of paganism! We’ll see that in a moment. There’s another kernel to get from Galatians 3:1 above: Paul there relates the cross to the gospel. These terms recur in Paul’s speech for the purpose of bringing out vital truth about what the gospel is.

Paul continues in Galatians 4:8 and 9:

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“In the past you did not know God, and so you were slaves of beings who are not gods. But now that you know God... how is it that you want to turn back?” (GNB)

Here is something that I find most important in Paul's teaching: Paul relates the knowledge of God to the cross and the gospel. They're all about the same thing!

Paul sympathized with the poor Galatians. What could be expected of new converts when some of the leading Christians in Jerusalem themselves were contradicting and compromising the Gospel of Christ?!? You can read about this in Acts 21, and I so urge you to do so. Stop a moment here and read Acts Chapter 21 to get a historical feel for the battles that took place among the “works-oriented” Jews who were converted to Christianity in Jerusalem. The Jews, after all, were formerly “God's Chosen People”. It was expected that they would have an “edge” in this new faith... and they should have had one! Read that chapter and come back. You might also note, after reading this, that the same behavior is still going on in God's church today. Even Peter reverted to some of his narrower views... and Paul was moved to correct Peter! That's right, you can see that in Galatians 2 verse 11 and onward. He did this to Peter publicly! In his face! How could Paul do this? How could he feel right about it...this same Paul who wrote in 1st Corinthians 13 that “love is never rude...love never insists on its own way”? The same Paul who wrote in Romans 14: “Don't judge... “let everyone make up his own mind”...”who are you to criticize another?”

When it came to the Gospel and those who would suppress it or pervert it...gentle Paul spoke with awesome power and frightening conviction. Man! Did he get upset when agitators and legalists tried to get new members to adopt circumcision:

*“I wish that the people who are upsetting you would go all the way; let them go on and castrate themselves!”
Gal. 5:12 (GNB)*

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That’s pretty intense! The portion of the letter that this was written in was about preserving freedom! Paul, like his God, was a real fanatic about that! The letter to the Galatians is a real eye-opener. When you have the time, I would also encourage you to read it in one setting. It’s only six short chapters, but it’s chock full of the strongest statements about truth you’ll ever read!

So, what is this truth, this gospel, this good news that Paul guarded with such fervor? I keep asking that. Through the centuries it has been so misunderstood and caused such controversy! What did Paul consider to be such a contradiction and perversion that he could be so strongly moved to speak such language? It’s time for us to do a little exercise here. What do YOU think the Good News is? Write it down below in the space provided.

That should have been enough space. If you need more than that it’s time to go back to square one and review it again. Here’s what most people write:

*God has forgiven my sins
Jesus is coming again
I am saved by grace
Jesus died for me, I don’t have to die*

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These are all true statements...**but!** Don't you hate that when someone agrees with you or agrees with what you said and then adds: "but..."? This is important to get, though, so please hang in there. It's time to think this through:

If God is as His enemies have made Him out to be – **arbitrary; exacting; vengeful; unforgiving and severe** – eternal life would be misery...would it not?

We'd be walking on eggshells all the time, worrying about what would set God off and when it would happen! So whether God has forgiven your sins; whether Jesus is coming again; whether you're saved by grace; or whether Jesus died for you or not...whether any or all of these are good news depends upon the kind of person we believe our God to be!

I regard the most fitting, appropriate and truest answer to that question about the Gospel as this:

The Good News is: God is not the kind of person that Satan and his minions have made Him out to be!

That the Good News should be related to the issues in the Great Controversy over God and His Character and the way He runs His government is perhaps suggested by Paul's reference to include angels in Galatians 1:8. Wasn't it an angel from heaven that began the circulation of misinformation about our God? Will it not be an angel from heaven masquerading as an angel of light that will seek to deceive us at the end and turn us against our God? See 2nd Corinthians 11:14 for evidence of this.

From the time this "Great Controversy" got started, God Himself was accused and brought to Judgment! That's right! God Himself! What kind of God would allow Himself to be judged by His creations? A very special, unique, one-of-a kind God...that's what kind. And the Good News is, once again, that God has won His case against all these false allegations regarding His character and the kind of God He is!!

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Saint Paul said he was proud to be a bearer of this Good News:

“Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the Good News...For the message about Christ’s death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God’s power.”

1st Cor. 1: 17, 18 (GNB)

Paul felt that he knew what the Gospel was all about...and the above passage is the substance of his version of the Good News:

*Christ’s death on the cross = **Power***

Now, combine this with Romans 1: 16 and 17 where Paul says this **salvation power** that is the Gospel has a *revelation* as its source:

Notice how

- Good News
- Power
- God’s Righteousness
- The Cross

are all tied together! Read Romans 3: 21 – 26

There is nothing at all new in this...the Everlasting Gospel...it is all over the Old Testament too. Here’s an example to illustrate:

“Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 9:24 (NIV)

All right then: Let’s combine all of this – The Good News is about God, His righteousness! It cost the death of Christ to prove it...and it has great power to move people to repentance and faith!

It has such Great Power because it is:

TheTruth!

It has such Great Power because it is:

Such GOOD NEWS!

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That's the meaning of Romans 3: 25 and 26:

“For God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation...This was to demonstrate God's own righteousness...to show that He Himself is righteous and that He sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus” (Maxwell)

I can't leave this alone without bringing out what Paul said in Rom. 5:10:

“We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life?”

Paul confessed with shame that he had formerly misrepresented God even to the extent of believing Satan's lies...so that he'd use force and persecution...even stoning to compel people to obey! After Paul learned and accepted the Good News, he devoted the rest of his life to telling the

TRUTH!

about God! Who has written more eloquently about freedom and truth than Paul? WHO? He had come to learn, know and live Jesus' words:

*“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!”
John 8:32 (Williams)*

With Jesus, the truth has always been about His Father. If God were the person His enemies have made Him out to be, there would be no freedom! There would only be the bondage of fear!

Yes, Paul knew and felt so strongly about this truth! He took it everywhere he went. The documentation to Galatia is such a precious, revealing record of this. He took freedom to them. They loved it at first and then they got “blown away”. Paul told them to stand fast in their freedom!

“This is the freedom with which Christ has made us free. So keep on standing in it, and stop letting your necks be fastened in the yoke of slavery again.” Gal. 5:1 (Williams)

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Paul once thought that God wanted the obedience that springs from law and fear. But he came to know that God wants much more than that! God wants obedience all right...but He wants the obedience that comes from trusting in His righteousness! This can only come from people who are free! Free to choose that they agree with God about the right way to live. And these agree so fully that they don't even need to be told to do so! It becomes a way of life with them. Look at Paul's understanding of his commission in Romans 1: 4 and 5:

“Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom I have received grace and a commission for His Name's sake to win men to the obedience that springs from faith.” (Weymouth)

This theme runs throughout the entire letter to the Romans. What produces this kind of obedience? Isn't it the Good News about our God...the kind of “person” He is? The Good News about:

- What He really wants from us
- How worthy He is to receive this
- How highly He values our freedom

These all lead us to a willingness to listen (obey). These all lead to loyalty. These all lead to what we started this chapter with in Revelation 14:12 –

“Here are they who keep God's commandments and maintain their loyalty to Him.” ...and to His Son!

So...the 1st Angel comes with the Everlasting Gospel...the Everlasting Good News...what is it, do you remember?

God is not the person His enemies have misrepresented Him to be! So there is nothing to fear!

This is winning, loving news about God. Other versions of the Bible interpret “Fear God” in a more appropriate context, as: “Honor God” or “Have reverence for God”.

I can be dogmatic...adamant and immovable about this. You never hurt anyone with this view!! God values nothing higher than the freedom of His children...that's the essence of the 1st Angel's

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Message. The 2nd Angel simply says: “*the opposition has collapsed in corruption and defeat!*” The 3rd Angel, then warns of the consequences of preferring Satan’s lies over this magnificent **TRUTH!** Now the language in here is tough, the words are indeed fearsome! But Satan would have us believe that they came from an *angry* God. That is a gross misunderstanding, which Satan specializes in. Consider what we’ve studied - all the previous words of Scripture have prepared us to understand the terrible consequences of sin:

- We watched Jesus die on the cross
- We’ve seen the lengths God goes to...
to spare those who reject Him
- We’ve looked at story after story

And here, in Revelation 14, we have God raising His voice one more time... one last time. Can we trust it? I would hope so by now! The real question is: are we going to listen? That God raises His voice in such an important, drastic, last ditch effort to warn can’t be held against Him any more than one can hold it against a parent warning a child at the edge of a cliff...or a school teacher warning the kids to get out of a burning school. Remember those stories?

These messages are an invitation as well as a warning. God can’t let us pass through this danger unenlightened as well as unwarned! We’ve been prepared to understand these words... remember the words in Hosea? “Oh...how can I let you go?” The God that wrote Revelation 14: 9 – 11 also wrote 1st John 4: 16, 18:

“God is love...There is no fear in love.” (Williams)

He used St. John to write both!

So then, those of you reading this that already are Christians, remember your commission given in Matthew 24:14 to preach and teach this good news about God and His Kingdom (especially the way He runs it) throughout the world. Then the end will come.

“And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world...and then the end will come.” (GNB)

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Can you think of a greater honor than joining with the loyal angels to do this? God’s last pleading with us is to do exactly this:

“This calls for endurance on the part of God’s people, those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying: ‘Write this: Happy Are those who from now on die in the service of the Lord!’ ‘Yes indeed!’ answers the Spirit. ‘They will enjoy rest from their hard work, because the results of their service go with them’.” Revelation 14: 12 & 13 (GNB)

Chapter # 17:

Satan's Final Effort to Deceive!

This chapter takes another look at the enemy's last, greatest and most subtle attempt to mislead God's loyal people into joining his side. The student of history will remember the evil one's previous attempts at this. The book of Revelation is replete with scenarios past tried and yet to come. Satan is described there as "the Dragon". He is furious and frustrated with his past repeated failures. In Revelation 12 we see that he was not strong enough to take heaven (verse 8). He also failed to destroy the Man-Child of the woman (verses 3-5) and he failed to destroy the woman herself (verse 16). What is left to him is the waging of war against the remainder of her descendants (verse 17). It's interesting to note that "the Dragon" goes away instead of confronting the situation here. Now Satan is no "dummy". He has enough feedback to know that he doesn't have the strength to defeat the purposes of God. He has used force, trying to persuade people through intimidation and persecution. Force has its limits and persecution has often backfired. Some people's faith even became stronger under threat. In the face of violent opposition, people have turned to efficient prayer charged with importance and fervency.

Given the above, it should come as no surprise that Satan will bring in deception refined almost to perfection so that people will not be able to tell which side is right whether they are dealing with Christ or Satan. In the very last days, things will not be as they seem to be. Revelation 13 talks about these deceptions in some detail, describing the dragon as a counterfeit of God the Father; the "sea beast" as a counterfeit of God the Son; and the "land beast" as a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. It is not the purpose of this book to present the deceptions and develop the symbolism. We will instead attempt to expose Satan here and try to discover how mere humans can hope to resist his most cunning persuasion.

What is this final effort to deceive all about? It's simple, really. It's about what it's always been about: choosing sides. So...how do we prepare ourselves to resist Satan's last and best shot to convince us of the truthfulness about his lies about God? Just as important, how do we prepare ourselves to resist Satan's efforts to

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persuade us to join his side as the great controversy comes to an end? “Impossible, I’d never do that!” you say? Might I remind you that history also warns us of over-confidence. Even God’s chosen people in the Promised Land were misled into crucifying their Lord and then hurrying home to keep the Sabbath holy! They read their Bibles, paid their tithe, watched their diet – and hated Jesus’ picture of the Father! Is it possible we could be similarly deceived?

The book of Revelation indeed covers much of what happens at the end of time. In the last chapter, we discovered God’s last pleading with us in Revelation 14, right after the telling of Satan’s miraculous deceptions in Revelation 13. That chapter tells us not only about Satan’s efforts, but also about his success in persuading (almost) the entire world to believe his lies about God. It’s hard to conceive of such insanity, although we have had some pretty recent vivid human examples (Hitler and Stalin, for example). Satan’s plans and purpose for us are identical to that of the “crazies” he has sponsored over history. But the announcement of Christ: “It is finished” sealed Satan’s ultimate failure long ago. That was no easy task for Christ! Consider the temptation to call the forces of heaven to His side...or even to just plain assert His power as God and kick Satan’s behind a good one! Since the day Lucifer accused His Father, these two had become enemies engaged in a great battle. Jesus was true to His Father’s character...demonstrating the truth about Lucifer with evidence and giving all involved the freedom to choose whom they would recognize as right.

Indulge me here, as I quote from one of my favorite authors on the origin of evil. It will be well for us to pause here and get a good feel for the struggle between Christ and Lucifer...how it began...what it blossomed into and the importance of Christ’s actions.

“To many minds the origin of sin and the reason for its existence are a source of great perplexity. They see the work of evil, with its terrible results of woe and desolation, and they question how all this can exist under the sovereignty of One who is infinite in wisdom, in power, and in love. Here is a mystery of which they find no explanation. And in their uncertainty and doubt they are blinded to truths plainly revealed in God’s word and essential to salvation....

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Others, however, fail of a satisfactory understanding of the great problem of evil, from the fact that tradition and misinterpretation have obscured the teaching of the Bible concerning the character of God, the nature of His government and the principles of His dealing with sin....Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion....

“Before the entrance of evil there was peace and joy throughout the universe. All was in perfect harmony with the Creator's will. Love for God was supreme, love for one another impartial....

“The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love – homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

“But there was one that chose to pervert this freedom. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and who stood highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven....

“Lucifer might have remained in favor with God, beloved and honored by all the angelic host, exercising his noble powers to bless others and to glorify his Maker. But, says the prophet, ‘Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.’ (Ezek 28:17KJV) Little by little, Lucifer came to indulge a desire for self-exaltation. ‘Thou hast said, ...I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation....I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.’ (Ezek. 28: 6 and Isaiah 14: 13, 14KJV) Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of His creatures, it was Lucifer's endeavor to win their service and homage to himself....this prince of angels aspired to power which it was the prerogative of Christ alone to wield.

“All heaven had rejoiced to reflect the Creator's glory and to show forth His praise. And while God was thus honored, all had been peace and gladness. But a note of discord now marred the celestial

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harmonies....The heavenly councils pleaded with Lucifer. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker, and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance. Lucifer allowed jealousy of Christ to prevail, and he became the more determined.

“Pride in his own glory nourished the desire for supremacy. The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as the gift of God and called forth no gratitude to the Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation, and aspired to be equal with God. The Son of God was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father. ‘Why?’ questioned this mighty angel, ‘should Christ have the supremacy? Why is He thus honored above Lucifer?’

“Leaving his place in the immediate presence of God, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. Working with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealing his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God, he endeavored to excite dissatisfaction concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that they imposed an unnecessary restraint. Since their natures were holy, he urged that the angels should obey the dictates of their own will. He sought to create sympathy for himself by representing that God had dealt unjustly with him in bestowing supreme honor upon Christ. He claimed that in aspiring to greater power and honor he was not aiming at self-exaltation, but was seeking to secure liberty for all the inhabitants of heaven, that by this means they might attain to a higher state of existence.

“God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, nor even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission. Such efforts as only infinite love and wisdom could devise were made to convince him of his error. The spirit of discontent had never before been known in heaven. Lucifer himself did not at first see where he was drifting; he did not understand the real nature of his feelings. But as his dissatisfaction was proved to be without cause, Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong, that the divine claims were just, and that he ought to acknowledge them as such before all

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heaven. Had he done this, he might have saved himself and many angels. He had not at this time fully cast off his allegiance to God. Though he had forsaken his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office. But pride forbade him to submit. He persistently defended his own course, maintained that he had no need of repentance, and full committed himself, in the great controversy, against his Maker....

"The fact that Christ had warned and counseled him was perverted to serve his traitorous designs. To those whose loving trust bound them most closely to him, Satan had represented that he was wrongly judged, that his position was not respected, and that his liberty was to be abridged. From misrepresentation of the words of Christ he passed to prevarication and direct falsehood, accusing the Son of God of a design to humiliate him before the inhabitants of heaven. He sought also to make a false issue between himself and the loyal angels. All whom he could not subvert and bring fully to his side he accused of indifference to the interests of heavenly beings. The very work which he himself was doing he charged upon those who remained true to God. And to sustain his charge of God's injustice toward him, he resorted to misrepresentation of the words and acts of the Creator. It was his policy to perplex the angels with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah....

"God, in His wisdom permitted Satan to carry forward his work, until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed; that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. Lucifer, as the anointed cherub, had been highly exalted; he was greatly loved by the heavenly beings, and his influence over them was strong. God's government included not only the inhabitants of heaven, but of all the worlds that He had created; and Satan thought that if he could carry the angels of heaven with him in rebellion, he could carry also the other worlds....

"His power to deceive was very great, and by disguising himself in a cloak of falsehood he had gained an advantage. Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character or see to what his work was leading.

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“Satan had been so highly honored, and all his acts were so clothed with mystery, that it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work. Until fully developed, sin would not appear the evil thing it was. Heretofore it had no place in the universe of God, and holy beings had no conception of its nature and malignity. They could not discern the terrible consequences that would result from setting aside the divine law. Satan had, at first concealed his work under a specious profession of loyalty to God. He claimed to be seeking to promote the honor of God, the stability of His government, and the good of all the inhabitants of heaven. While instilling discontent into the minds of the angels under him, he had artfully made it appear that he was seeking to remove dissatisfaction. When he urged that changes be made in the order and laws of God’s government it was under the pretense that these were necessary in order to preserve harmony in heaven.

“In His dealing with sin, God could employ only righteousness and truth. Satan could use what God could not – flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government before the angels, claiming that God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. Therefore it must be demonstrated before the inhabitants of heaven, as well as of all the worlds, that God’s government was just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper, and his real object, must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works.

“The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the law and government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah. Therefore it was necessary that he should demonstrate the nature of his claims, and show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked.

“Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan.... The inhabitants of

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heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear rather from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated....

“For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might forever be placed beyond all question.

“Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects upon both men and angels would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority.... Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin and suffering its consequences....

“When it was announced that with all his sympathizers he must be expelled from the abodes of bliss, then the rebel leader boldly avowed his contempt for the Creator's law. He reiterated his claim that angels needed no control, but should be left to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right. He denounced the divine statutes as a restriction of their liberty and declared that it was his purpose to secure the abolition of law; that, freed from this restraint, the hosts of heaven might enter upon a more exalted, more glorious state of existence.

“With one accord, Satan and his host threw the blame of their rebellion wholly upon Christ, declaring that if they had not been reproved, they would never have rebelled. Thus stubborn and defiant in their disloyalty, seeking vainly to overthrow the government of God, yet blasphemously claiming to be themselves the innocent victims of oppressive power, the archrebel and all his sympathizers were at last banished from heaven.

“The same spirit that prompted rebellion in heaven still inspires rebellion on earth. Satan has continued with men the same policy which he pursued with the angels. His spirit now reigns in the

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children of disobedience. Like him they seek to break down the restraints of the law of God and promise men liberty through transgression of its precepts. Reproof of sin still arouses the spirit of hatred and resistance....

“By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, causing Him to be regarded as severe and tyrannical, Satan induced man to sin....

“In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.

“In the contest between Christ and Satan, during the Savior’s earthly ministry, the character of the great deceiver was unmasked. Nothing could so effectually have uprooted Satan from the affections of the heavenly angels and the whole loyal universe as did his cruel warfare upon the world’s Redeemer. The daring blasphemy of his demand that Christ should pay him homage; his presumptuous boldness in bearing Him to the mountain summit and the pinnacle of the temple; the malicious intent betrayed in urging Him to cast Himself down from the dizzy height; the unsleeping malice that hunted Him from place to place, inspiring the hearts of priests and people to reject His love; and at the last to cry, ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’ – all this excited the amazement and indignation of the universe.

“It was Satan that prompted the world’s rejection of Christ. The prince of evil exerted all his power and cunning to destroy Jesus; for he saw that the Savior’s mercy and love, His compassion and pitying tenderness, were representing to the world the character of God. Satan contested every claim put forth by the Son of God and employed men as his agents to fill the Savior’s life with suffering and sorrow. The sophistry and falsehood by which he had sought to hinder the work of Jesus, the hatred manifested through the children of disobedience, his cruel accusations against Him whose life was one of unexampled goodness, all sprang from deep-seated revenge. The pent-up fires of envy, malice, hatred and revenge burst forth on Calvary

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against the Son of God, while all heaven gazed upon the scene in silent horror....

"The guilt of Satan stood forth without excuse. He had revealed his true character as a liar and a murderer. It was seen that the very same spirit with which he ruled the children of men, who were under his power, he would have manifested had he been permitted to control the inhabitants of heaven. He had claimed that the transgression of God's law would bring liberty and exaltation; but it was seen to result in bondage and degradation.

"Satan's lying charges against the divine character and government appeared in their true light. He had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, and had declared that, while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice. Now it was seen that for the salvation of a fallen and sinful race, the Ruler of the universe had made the greatest sacrifice which love could make; for 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' (2nd Corinthians 5:19)

"God had manifested His abhorrence of the principles of rebellion. All heaven saw His justice revealed both in the condemnation of Satan and in the redemption of man. Lucifer had declared that if the law of God was changeless, and its penalty could not be remitted, every transgressor must be forever debarred from the Creator's favor. He had claimed that the sinful race were placed beyond redemption and were therefore his rightful prey. But the death of Christ was an argument in man's behalf that could not be overthrown. The penalty of the law fell upon Him who was equal with God, and man was free to accept the righteousness of Christ and by a life of penitence and humiliation to triumph, as the Son of God had triumphed, over the power of Satan....

"But it was not merely to accomplish the redemption of man that Christ came to the earth to suffer and to die. He came to 'magnify the law' and to 'make it honorable'. Not alone that the inhabitants of this world might regard the law as it should be regarded; but it was to demonstrate to all the worlds of the universe that God's law is unchangeable.... The death of Christ proves it immutable.... The sacrifice to which infinite love impelled the Father and the Son, that sinners might be redeemed, demonstrates to all the universe – what nothing less than this plan of atonement could have sufficed to do –

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that justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God....When the Judge of all the earth shall demand of Satan, ‘Why have you rebelled against Me, and robbed Me of the subjects of My kingdom?’ the originator of evil can render no excuse....

“The whole universe will have become witnesses to the nature and results of sin.... A tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested before them as fathomless love and infinite wisdom.”
Taken from “The Great Controversy”, pages 492 to 504.

Thanks for bearing with me there. The above dialogue certainly lends perspective to what we’ve been studying and the nature of the one who would deceive us now at the very end doesn’t it? All the questions about God and how he runs His universe have been answered! The loyal angels got the message long ago and they’ve been celebrating ever since! Think of how Satan feels each time he hears the angels’ incessant singing about God’s righteousness! It’s recorded right there in that book of Revelation in Chapter 4: 8 and 11; chapter 5: 9 through 14 and chapter 15: 3 and 4. Look at this praise! This is what the book of Revelation is truly about: God’s own righteousness! Sure it contains prophetic details and references to our entire history on earth. But the purpose for it all is therein revealed, and that is its import! That’s why it’s called “REVELATION”! Paul knew this when he wrote his letter to the Romans:

“God offered him, so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that He is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.” Romans 3: 25, 26 (GNB)

This is about who God is as opposed to what He has done. It’s a “revelation” of God’s character. Satan has to listen to this praise all the time and it drives him into a rage!

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Even before the victory at the cross...as Jesus watched His disciples grow...learning the truth about His Father...Jesus said that He saw Satan fall upon the earth like lightning. It's true, these were Jesus' own words:

*"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."
Luke 10:18 (RSV)*

Imagine Satan listening as Jesus told this to His disciples! It was so insane for him to start this war so long ago in heaven. It's even more insane, however, to continue it...now that he knows he's lost! No one in the universe is willing to listen to his charges about God anymore...the universe beyond us is convinced. It appears we're the only ones yet that need convincing! Satan therefore concentrates his destructive efforts on us! Only here on earth are any of us willing to listen...many of us even willing to agree with Satan!

So...the great warning was given us about the great war that has continued here:

"Be glad, you heavens, and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left." Revelation 12:12 (GNB)

That warning sounds familiar to Bible readers. Compare it with the warning Peter gave in his letter:

"Be alert! Be on watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him. 1st Peter 5:8,9 (GNB)

The apostle John warned that Satan's final efforts to deceive will apparently be rewarded with complete success...because the whole world is described as worshipping him...the very thing he has wanted all along:

"The beast was allowed to make proud claims which were insulting to God...It was allowed to fight against God's

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*people and to defeat them...All people living on earth will worship it, except those whose names were written before the creation of the world in the book of the living...This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God’s people.”
Revelation 13: 5,7,8 and 10 (GNB)*

That business about endurance and faith on the part of God’s people sounds familiar too, doesn’t it? That’s because it’s contained in the third angel’s message that we read about in the last chapter:

*“This calls for endurance on the part of God’s people, those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to Jesus.”
Revelation 14:12 (GNB)*

So...you can see above that those remaining loyal to God, then, are the special targets of Satan’s final deceptions! Revelation 12:17 describes these loyal people in much the same language as in Revelation 14:12:

“All those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to the truth revealed by Jesus.” (GNB)

Again, note that these are the special objects of Satan’s wrath! The remnant, the ones left over...the few.

Logic would seem to dictate that if we would count ourselves among “the few”...those loyal to God no matter what, disbelieving the lies of Satan and his system of forced worship...we would do well to:

- Notice Satan’s successes over the centuries in deceiving people;
- Especially his success in deceiving “Saints”!

We’re not talking here about deceptions that may concern the usual “gross” sins people commit...those *things* that “saints” would never think of doing! We need rather to focus on the insidious methods Satan has used to turn even the saints and angels against our Heavenly Father...even while they profess to be His chosen and loyal followers:

- Recall Lucifer’s success in heaven...right in the very presence of the Father!

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- There's lots of stuff recorded in the Law and the Prophets and the Writings about Satan's deception of God's chosen people on this earth...in the promised land!
- After the "discipline" of Babylon...God's people never worshipped graven images again. Oh, how they read their Bibles...paid their tithe...watched their diets...and were so very careful not to be contaminated by association with unbelievers!
- Oh, how they awaited the coming of the Messiah! The Christ! Yet when Christ came to live among them:
 - They denounced His picture of the Father
 - They said it was heretical and unbiblical;
 - They even said He had a demon!
 - And, of course, they crucified Him!

Think of telling God that He has a demon! Yes, they did that:

"The Jews answered Him, 'Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?'" John 8:48 (NIV)

Such gall...such temerity...such arrogance! All because of the way He described Himself! While they said this, they (the teachers of the law, the leaders of the church) seemed so devout! They seemed so eager to be known as God's true people...even working so hard to win others to the "truth". Their truth! Let's look at the debate in John 8:31 – 48:

"So Jesus said to those who believed in him, 'If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!' 'We are the descendants of Abraham,' they answered, 'and we have never been anybody's slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying, "you will be free"?' Jesus said to them, 'I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever. If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me, because you will not accept my teaching. I talk about what my Father has shown me, but you do what your father has told you.' They answered him, 'Our father is Abraham.' 'If you really were Abraham's children', Jesus replied, 'you would do

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the same things that he did. All I have ever done is to tell you the truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me. Abraham did nothing like This! You are doing what your father did.’ ‘God Himself is the only Father we have.’ They answered. ‘and we are His true sons.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God really were your Father you would love me because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to listen to my message. You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow you father’s desires. From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is only doing what comes naturally to him, because he is a liar and the father of all lies. But I tell you the truth, and that is why you do not believe me. Which one of you can prove that I am guilty of sin? If I tell the truth, then why do you not believe me? He who comes from God listens to God’s words. You, however, are not from God, and that is why you will not listen.’ They asked Jesus, ‘Were we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon in you?’” (GNB)

See how that set up? These “guardians of the faith” were the only people Jesus had any harsh words for when He walked among us. There were, of course, good reasons for this! Jesus went on to comment on their evangelistic efforts in Matthew 23:

“How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You sail the seas and cross whole countries to win one convert, and when you succeed, you make him twice as deserving of going to hell as you yourselves are!.... You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill and cummin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice, mercy and honesty....Blind guides! You strain a fly out of your drink but swallow a camel!” verses 15, 23 & 24 (GNB)

Notice His “praise” for the way they kept the law here! They had accepted Satan’s picture of God...and missed the whole point of God’s

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use of these emergency measures...and what God really wanted from them! In all their care for the law (The Mishnah (a commentary) and the Gemarah (a commentary on the commentary!) and the Cabala (a secret numeric interpretation of events to come)) they were so concerned to be God's obedient saints!

The above caused a very serious problem for them on Crucifixion Friday! It all started at the beginning of that day:

*"Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman Governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover."
John 18:28 (GNB)*

All that lying and torture and kangaroo court justice of the night before...and they were concerned with "being clean" for the Passover! What did the Passover mean to them? "Deliverance from the oppressor!" But what was it supposed to point to? "Deliverance by the lamb!" They just didn't get it, did they? Since it was also Friday, these "paragons of virtue", these "protectors of the faith" were presented with yet another problem:

*"Now it was the day of preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down."
John 19:31 (NIV)*

To have bodies hanging on a cross was a defilement of the Sabbath, in their estimation. Therefore they wanted the soldiers to break the legs of those crucified so that they couldn't support themselves to get their breath. They would suffocate and die. Then the bodies could be taken down. "So let's kill 'em quick because those bodies up there will offend God on His Sabbath Day. Can't have that!" My...such deft understanding of the God of love! And after the bodies were taken down, the church leaders hurried home to keep the Sabbath Day holy! Think about this now...perhaps one of the most glaring ironies in

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history: Having nailed their Savior to the cross, they ran home to keep the Sabbath in honor of the very One they crucified!

Were they deceived...or what?

These same people watched Jesus' behavior as He suffered the torture of the cross...they literally heard Him say:

- “I forgive you”!
- “John...please look after mother”
- “Yes, thief, you’ll be with Me in the Kingdom

Jesus behaved precisely as the Old Testament prophecies said He would! These teachers...these guardians of the faith...these preservers of the chosen read the Old Testament all the time! They were **so deceived** by Satan's lies, that they were totally unmoved by this! Instead, they understood that Jesus was the One who had accepted Satan's lies about our God! Subtle...huh? Don't think that could happen again, do you?

At first, Saul (later Paul) shared the same picture of God that his Pharisee brethren had. His evangelistic methods showed that he, too, had been deceived. He saw nothing wrong with using force or fear, incarceration or stoning to win converts to the kind of God he worshipped. But remember what happened to Saul?

Jesus had very serious words for hard-working evangelists and soul-winners who were actually convincing people of the false picture of our God:

“Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do. When the Judgement Day comes, many will say to me “Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God’s message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!’ Then I will say to them ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!’” Matthew 7: 21 – 23 (GNB)

“We were never really friends...you never really knew the kind of person I am!” What a sad realization that will be...to be so deceived!

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If that kind of thing happened the first time Jesus came here...don't you think we'll get a repeat performance? The act will really be good this time! God has tried in many and various ways to get us to see this truth about Himself. Likewise, however, Satan has also in many and various ways sought to keep us from this truth...coming to know this truth that is so essential to our making intelligent and right choices! Remember that God could only use righteousness and evidence to demonstrate the truth, whereas Satan could employ flattery and deceit; pomp and circumstance; coercion and torture; smoke and mirrors; outright miracles and bribery; claims and lies; etc., etc.

Satan is a being to fear in terms of his ability to influence us unduly. What really scares me about his methods is that he has demonstrated that :

He will seek to deceive us into turning against the truth about God even as we might be claiming to believe it!

History reveals this to be true; the "chosen" fell into this trap! Think about that as you review your experience and that of your interaction with other members you attend church with! It's so perverse, isn't it?

Recall, now, that the special target of Satan at the end of time will be the "remnant"...those left over...the loyal saints. History also records that one of Satan's most successful deceptions has been leading God's people into a certain grateful satisfaction that:

"The Lord has blessed us with so much light that we really don't need to pursue it any further. We have enough!"

Well, indeed "WE" wouldn't call this pious self-satisfaction! We'd probably condemn it (as you are in your mind right now)! We would rather hear this more along the lines that:

"We are so thankful that God has so favored His remnant with so much truth."

We become conservative and seek to discourage even further inquiry and further investigation.

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I once knew a devout Christian man (no need to mention the denomination he belonged to...what difference should that make?) who had an interesting approach to the topic of religion and spiritual concerns. He was a partner in the world-renowned (and now world-notorious) accounting firm of Arthur Andersen & Co. I was a lowly “staffer” at the time. One day we had to travel by car to a client to make a presentation. The trip took two hours and the conversation varied all over the place. One of the other staff people in the car eventually steered the discussion to the topic of religion. Everyone but the partner had an opinion on a question raised. When he was “pinned down” for an answer he finally said: “I have finally settled on what I believe and follow. I don’t want to hear anything else because it will just confuse me!” Do you sense the “oxy-moron”-like sentiment of that statement? If he had really settled on what he believed, why would anything confuse him? Indeed, that is the test of whether you have truly settled on what you believe!

In the same vein of thinking, one of my favorite authors wrote:

“God intends that, even in this life, truth shall be ever unfolding to His people....Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion....When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in times past, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what.”

Gospel Workers, pg.297-298.

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Rattle that around in your head awhile! It's powerful! It's convicting, isn't it? YOU are responsible for your own knowledge; your own relationship with God; your own salvation. How much time do you spend reading and understanding the Bible? It is another of Satan's prime, subtle and successful deceptions that regular Bible study is not necessary! "If you don't use it...you lose it!"

The Bible has such a serious message for saints who might become so falsely secure, and it's found in that "mysterious" and prophetic book of Revelation:

*"I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth! You say 'I am rich and well off; I have all I need.' But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked and blind."
Revelation 3: 15 – 17 (GNB)*

This is a particular message given for the "Laodicean Church" (one of seven mentioned in the first part of the Book). It's translated here in English, but it was written in Greek. The word translated "spit" in verse sixteen is "*emeo*" in Greek. It's the word from which we get "emesis basin" and "emetic" in English and it means "vomit"! You see, this condition doesn't make our heavenly Father angry...it makes Him sick! There is another good lesson to take from this passage. The word translated "miserable" in verse seventeen is "*eleinos*" in Greek. It means "worn out from hard work". What hard work would that be? That of trying so hard to please the Lord..."working" so hard at it!

We are in such grave danger of underestimating Satan's ability to deceive and confuse with respect to proper knowledge and use of the Bible. We are so willing to permit our understanding to be formed and molded by others...those who are "expert"...priests, bishops, Mdivs and Doctors of Divinity! We handle our spiritual lives just like anything else in the world we live in. Yet, when we read scripture, we are constantly warned and instructed that the way to spirituality is exactly the opposite of that taken by the "world". That's because this

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world is still under the rule of the evil one. It's **so important** that we embrace such reading, study and relationship with God *ourselves!*

Many people think that they've memorized two or three things stored away from study from which they will elude deception. When Satan comes as an angel of light, as we're told he will in 2nd Corinthians 11:14, some think that they won't be taken in by it because he will roam the earth and appear in several places with this deception. These take comfort from the admonition Christ gave in Matthew 24:26 and onward as well as the clear description of Christ's second coming in 1st Thessalonians 4 where Paul makes it clear that Christ will not touch the "ground", but we all will be caught up in the air with Him. It would be wonderful if Satan's deceptions would be so clear-cut. Given what we already know about him, however, it is doubtful that he will treat us that gently!

History is replete with examples of intellectual over-confidence:

- *Already* in the first century, a group formed calling themselves the "dositists". The word means "seemed" and their premise was that "Jesus faked it"...the whole thing with Jesus and his 12 was a conspiracy.
- *Such* theories continued throughout the centuries. In the 1970s a book was published called "The Passover Plot" in which the premise regarding Christ was exactly the same as the "dositists". Jewish scholars uncovered "proof" that the whole thing was a magnificent conspiracy on the part of Jewish rebels. The book was made into a movie in the 1980s.
- *Jesuit* thought and intellectual debate today covers the concept that God doesn't even exist! Such thought is not limited to Jesuits either. The United Church of Christ and others teach it.
- *My* sister-in-law took a course at DePaul University in which she was taught that a valid diary existed of the writings of one who called himself "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth" in which he confessed that he was put up to the whole thing. He describes how he escaped off the cross. The diary was found at the site of Massada. Television "documentaries" have "revealed" this.

So, you see, the evil one will attempt to even do away with the evidence we have concerning the great controversy between him and

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Christ. Such attempts were already spreading in the Apostle John's later years...and he warned us against it:

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." 1st John 4:1,2 (NIV)

John took pains to write his gospel in a way that would show that the One who came was really

GOD

Satan has long known about the way in which God would appear as a man, to demonstrate that the race of men were really safe to save. That's why he hounded poor Jesus throughout His life...to tempt Him to cave in or slip up.

Long before Christ even got here, Satan was at work undermining the evidence...confusing it...counterfeiting the first coming of Christ. It's true and it's documented history. It is so much so, as a matter of fact, that scholars use it to argue that Christ's actual coming was fable and legend just like that of Tamuz and other pagan tales. Satan did this through the "mystery" religions. It's almost hard to believe if you've not been exposed to it. Long before Christ, for example, there was always a figure central to the salvation of the human race portrayed in the following manner:

- A dying, rising savior
- Supernaturally born
- Died a cruel, violent death
- Exalted up to the heavens...there to mediate and supernaturally help his followers
- Later to return, resurrect his followers and annihilate all the forces of evil

How about that!?! Doesn't that sound familiar? That's not all, either. In those "mystery" religions like Mithraism, etc. they had:

- Celebrations of last suppers (Lord suppers)

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- Baptism and washing in the blood
- A day to give honor to recognize a god as Creator and Lord
- The cross as a symbol of death/rebirth
- Sacrifice...”Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin” Hebrews 9:22
- Abstinence from eating pork
- And many others dealing with
 1. Hell
 2. Being Born Again
 3. Rapture
 4. Millenium
 5. More

If you’re curious and want to explore the paganism that exists in our Christianity and the Christian practices that exist in paganism, permit me to offer you a short Bibliography:

- **The Antichrist 666** – compiled by an organization called Repairers of the Breach. The last known address I have for this organization is P.O. Box 4267 in Brownsville, Texas, 78520. The reason I list it first is because it was compiled from 48 different works that are well referenced for further study.
- **The Two Babylons** – Alexander Hislop, Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, N.J. 1916, 1943, 1959.
- **Encyclopedia of World Mythology** – Rex Warner, reproduced by arrangement with Phoebus Publishing Company, BPC Publishing Limited, 1970, 1971, 1975.
- **The Origin of Christian Supernaturalism** – by Shirley Jackson Case. I believe that’s the correct spelling. It’s all I have currently, but you should be able to find it with the author as reference.

This last reference in particular shows the counterfeits of true faith that gentiles had which now run rampant through all of Christianity.

“Mystery” religions were full of “initiations into the mysteries”, designed to produce the desired emotional agitation as a substitute for personal relationship based upon reason. A good friend of mine who had the good fortune to retire young and donate his time to working with charitable organizations told me recently that he

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believes we ought to go back to these initiation rites for our young. He is a born again Christian and the church he goes to is promoting this concept once again.

I believe we will certainly see brilliant counterfeits of Christ's second coming. What with "New Age" thought and technology, this is already realistic thinking. You can already have "virtual" experiences in Las Vegas and a host of other Theme Parks in Florida and California. It won't surprise me when these technologies are seized upon to further the deceptive practices of the evil one.

Even the most important beliefs and teachings of Christianity are now being bent to support Satan's position against our God! Consider these and the special way they've been presented to show that God is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---|----------|
| - | Faith | - | Sin |
| - | Atonement | - | Cross |
| - | Law | - | Judgment |
| - | Christ' Intercession | | |
| - | The Destruction of the Wicked | | |

All of God's emergency measures are being skewed and twisted just enough to obscure the real truth about our God!

Are you ready for this? I said:

Are You Ready For This?

Have we over-simplified here? Are we in danger of being over-confident? Are we actually interpreting these truths so as to leave ourselves vulnerable? Are we leading the people we win to be vulnerable with us? What do you think? That's the real question...what do **YOU** think?

Chapter # 18:

What is God Waiting For?

The controversy in the heavens about Lucifer has been over for about 2,000 years now! When Jesus died on the cross, the character of Lucifer was exposed to the universe. Why the wait?! Why doesn't God come for us now and end all this suffering and confusion? We've seen that Lucifer doesn't fool anyone in heaven anymore. All of His lies have been met with evidence to the contrary. Jesus secured the freedom of the universe. The deal is done...let's go home! I'm ready for this all to end, aren't you? Or are you waiting for someone you know to wake up to what's really going on...a child; a spouse; a relative; some other loved one? What about yourself? Aren't you glad God waited at least long enough for you to "catch on"? Hmm. What does that say about God and why He tolerates rebellion yet in this one "little spot" in the universe? Good question! We'll come back to that at the end of this chapter and the next one.

We know, from our brief looks into the Book of Revelation, that Jesus will return for those who have experienced Satan's last and best shot at deception and destruction. Here's a heavy thought: Those that Jesus returns for who are alive to meet Him in the air will have accomplished what fully one-third (1/3) of the heavenly host had not: They will have refused to be turned against God by Satan's lies. Think about that one for a minute. Heavenly beings that dwelt in the very presence of God for...what...eons?...were persuaded by Lucifer that God was arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe (A.V.E.U.S). One-third of God's family, who knew through personal experience what He was like, were taken in by the persuasive power of the evil one. Hopefully this puts in perspective what we're about to go through. **Please** don't underestimate its magnitude!

There are very vivid and accurate descriptions of this experience to come in both the Old Testament and the New Testament:

“There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered...Those who are wise will shine like the

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brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”
Daniel 12: 1,3 (NIV)

Notice the reference to “the book” in this passage. It is used elsewhere in Daniel as well:

“There were many thousands of people there to serve him, and millions of people stood before him. The court began its session and the books were opened.” Daniel 7:10 (GNB)

Daniel, here, was using language he could understand when he wrote his book. John the Revelator did the same thing:

“And I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and then another book was opened, the book of the living. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.”
Revelation 20:12 (GNB)

We have to use a little realism here, and give God His due. Do you really suppose there are “books” in heaven? If we have computers to record and store data on, don’t you think they have at least such technology in heaven? Daniel and John couldn’t have put that into the language of their time. The point is, however, that the Bible is thought-inspired and that there is some means of record-keeping there. Please notice one other thing from the passage in Daniel 12: 1,3. See what the wise are doing? They’re not running around trying to survive persecution or the havoc to be experienced in the last days. They aren’t fleeing from it or phased by it in the sense that those who worry about “end times” and the “tribulation” are. Daniel says that they are “leading many to righteousness”. That’s right! They’re giving Bible studies and reaching all they can before that frightful end of probation for all mankind. When the great pronouncement of Revelation 22:11 is made...all will have made their decision as to whom they will serve. That’s the end of it all and Christ will come. But right up until that time, the “wise” will be trying to persuade people to make the right choice! Analyze that one for its implications...for the kind of people we are to be at the end! Will we just be involved in a battle for

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survival? Is that what it's all going to be about? Many teach this and do so erroneously. Those that go through this will trust God just like Jesus trusted His Father to get Him through everything. People will be attracted to them because they will bear such an encouraging witness to the truth about our God! They won't be concerned in the least about themselves...about being raptured or about building shelters in the country. They will only be concerned about others...those that don't know what's coming.

OK, ok...let's look at a New Testament description of this experience now:

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.”

1st Tim. 4: 1-3 (GNB)

There's a lot to consider in this little passage. Let's analyze it a bit more: Will those who “abandon the faith” leave the church then and become atheists? Nope. That's not what St.Paul's first letter to Timothy tells us. He says they'll follow other deceptions, succumb to false teachings about God and then force others to follow traditions that God has nothing to do with. Timothy indicates here the kind of things that will be done in the last days to misrepresent our God. Recall the accusations of Lucifer concerning God's character as A.V.E.U.S. (see above). Note these arbitrary things:

- Forbidding to marry
- Abstain from food for ceremonial reasons

Wouldn't Satan love for us to forget how and why we were given the sacrament of marriage in the Garden of Eden? Or that great lie of his in the same Garden that was later answered by Jesus' death? Wouldn't he love for us to forget the practical health reasons for abstaining from certain foods?

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Look at Paul's description of Satan's purposes and methods in 2nd Thessalonians 2: 1,3,4,6,7,9,10:

“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed... He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God...And now you know what is holding him back...For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way...The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” (NIV)

Notice the continual warnings against deception here. This was written in the 50s AD!! What insight to the future...what a key to one of the reasons that God waits! He wants everyone to have the chance to make an intelligent choice about who is right in the great controversy: God or Lucifer. Satan uses lies and deceit; God uses evidence and demonstration. It's not really that hard to see the contrast between truth and deception...God's ways and Satan's ways. “Counterfeit miracles...signs and wonders” Paul says. Are you impressed with how much of this is actually going on at the present time? Have you seen a “Psychic Channel” lately?

Could people who survive these deceptions possibly be babes in the truth? “Babes in the truth” is a term commonly used to describe new believers...those first acquainted with Christianity as a way of living. Perhaps it would be better if we had one more look at what we mean by the “truth” again...what we mean in this book by that expression. The “truth”...the truth referred to in this book concerns God the Father and the fact that He is not the hard-nosed, cold-hearted deity His enemies have made Him out to be. The survivors of the end-time deceptions meet the Biblical description of Christian maturity and perfection: *They have their faculties trained by **practice** to distinguish*

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between good and evil. Though their faith be severely tried...they will never let God down! These, like Job, can stand firm and alone!

God is waiting for such firm believers! Are you one? Don't you want to be one? Will God be able to take people of any other persuasion into His kingdom? Would that make sense? Would it even be fair to those who want nothing to do with God? Those who think that other “things” will save them; those that think that other “things” are more worthwhile; those who think they are gods unto themselves? Those whom God will reap from the earth will take the place of the family that left Him so very long ago...long before this globe was made! Is it any wonder that Satan has such hatred for them? That they will be so harassed at the end? These will demonstrate to the universe that they choose and believe in the God that the rest of the universe does. They will provide evidence of it just like their God provides evidence of what is truth. They want the Father to be their God and they want to be His people...in the truest sense that those terms were ever intended.

There is another reason that God waits. It's merciful, and He is a merciful God. He doesn't want to lose anyone!

“The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.” 2nd Peter 3:9 (GNB)

In order to make it past Satan's last gauntlet, people will have to be prepared...ready...really ready! Those not so prepared will be confused and deceived. Remember God's promise in 1st Corinthians 10:13 which is there for your choosing also:

“Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.” (GNB)

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The Bible's last book pictures angels holding back the winds of strife until God's children have been unshakably sealed and settled into the truth:

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels.... ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.’”
Rev. 7:1-3 (RSV)

Isn't this just like our God to do this? Notice the “holding back” language used here and compare it to the same language used in 2nd Thessalonians 2 above. It's clear here that the closing events of Earth's history are being held back because we have not yet become “sealed”.

What does that mean?

You have to ask what “sealing” meant to the early Christians when they heard this read aloud to them. Had *they* received any help in understanding the meaning of the term “sealing”? As likely as not, many of those who heard from the scroll of the book of Revelation written on Patmos were in Ephesus (Ephesians). Paul wrote them letters, warning of false teachers & urging them to hold fast to the truth. He had a lot to say about the concept of being sealed:

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Ephesians 4:30 (NIV)

Now this raises the question: How is the Holy Spirit involved in our being sealed? Paul goes on to tell us:

“In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” Ephesians 1:13 (RSV)

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Note the emphasis on “truth”...“the gospel”...the “Good News”. What is that again? Paul clarifies that the gospel is the good news about GOD just a few verses further in that letter:

*“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.”
Eph. 1:17 (GNB)*

Now what truth does Jesus want us to know? Jesus clarified it in the book of John:

*“ When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth....”
John 16:13 (GNB)*

This passage is from the experience in the upper room...Jesus’ last desperate effort to strengthen His children before they underwent incredible deception and trial. John the Beloved devotes five solid chapters to this experience in 13 through 17. He had a lot to say about the Spirit and the truth about His Father. Take some time to look up the following:

- John 14: 16, 17, 23, 26
- John 15: 23 – 26
- John 16: 12-13, 25-28

I’ll quote a little from the above so that you get the flavor here:

“The Holy Spirit...will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you...When the helper comes, that is, the Spirit of Truth...he will speak plainly about me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about me...he will guide you into everything that is true.” (Phillips)

Note that John...the same John who wrote about sealing in Revelation 7, also wrote the above verses from Christ about the work and role of the Holy Spirit. John knew about Paul’s work with the Ephesians. He was not banished until much later. He knew Paul prepared his charges and they would have some background into what it means to be sealed:

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“To be so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved from it.”

Given the importance of being sealed, shouldn't we focus more on this **TRUTH** into which we must become so settled? So sealed that, despite Satan's intense efforts to the contrary...we cannot be moved? Forgive me for pounding on this...but I want so to make a critical point:

- Is it the truth that God exists and is all powerful? *Well...yes. Certainly!*
- Is it the truth that the end is coming soon? *C'mon already, Satan and his followers are settled into these truths!*
- Is it the truth that the 7th Day is the Sabbath? *Yes, ok.*
- Is it the truth that we should obey all 10 commandments? *Of course, who would dispute that?*
- Is it the truth that we should read our Bibles faithfully? *Uh-huh.*
- Is it the truth that we should pay a careful tithe? *Yes.*
- Is it the truth that we should be very careful about what we eat? *Sure, but aren't you starting to get picky here?*
- Is it the truth that we should be very careful about how we associate with “sinners” who might lead us astray? *All right...that did it! Where are you going with this?*

I'll tell you where. A great many Christians would answer very affirmatively to every one of those “truths” above; some more vehemently than others. I don't mean to minimize those “truths”, but are they enough? If following the above truths “to the letter” got you your “ticket into heaven”, would you be happy living with a God that could go ballistic on you at any moment? A God that is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe? Would you expect to live happily ever after with a God like that?

Throughout the Bible...the all-important **truth**, the saving **truth** is, above all else, the **truth** about our God! Jesus came to this earth to bring us this truth about His Father so that we might be “won back” to Him, in love and trust! God can only save and heal those who love and trust Him!

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Remember all that Jesus said concerning His Father in the upper room...and what He said about the Spirit bringing to remembrance those things He said about the Father. Also in Ephesians 1:17 above, Paul points out that the Holy Spirit comes so that we may know God better. It seems to me that an obvious deception of Satan's would be to pervert and counterfeit what it means to experience the Holy Spirit! There are those that believe that unless you speak in tongues, you do not have the Holy Spirit. Is this consistent with the picture of God given in the Bible? Is it consistent with what Jesus said the purpose of the Spirit is when He instructed His disciples in the upper room? The Spirit unlocks the truth contained in scripture. Pray to God and ask for the Spirit to accompany you every time you open the pages of His Book. It's the only safe course. Only the Spirit can lead you to the consistent picture of the truth about God; the fact that God Himself is the object of that truth; and the essence of the truth that runs throughout all of scripture in all its stories!

Now...I want to ask you seriously – Do WE (you, me, our fellows in Christianity) really accept Jesus' picture of His Father? Do we truly accept Jesus' testimony about His Father? Think about that a moment in the context of all you've been taught and all you've experienced in Christianity. I want to get very specific concerning something Jesus said about His Father. He was talking to His disciples in the upper room. It was a final briefing for them. There were no parables, no figures of speech. The time had come for Jesus to be plain and clear with His lieutenants. Here's what He said to them:

“When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, for the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you love me and have believed that I came from God.”

John 16:26 & 27 (GNB)

That was Jesus testimony about His Father...that was what Jesus came to reveal to us all: **That the Father Himself loves us...just like Jesus does!** Do you accept that? Is it an integral part of your whole way of looking at religion and the way you practice it? Is it basic to your understanding of the plan of salvation? Or are you still unable to accept what Jesus described as a plain, clear statement of the **truth**

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about His Father? There is no need for the Son to plead with the Father on our behalf...because the Father loves us just as much as the Son does. Jesus said this many times: “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father”. Whoever you are, reading this...please make this a part of your Christian theology. It needs to be...it must be...because

IT’S THE TRUTH!

We must become so settled in this truth that we cannot be moved from it. I don’t mean that we must become pig-headed; stubborn; closed to ideas or anything of the sort. Being grounded in truth means not to be afraid to test it, time and again. It also means, that when other ideas don’t stack up, they shouldn’t be accepted! That’s what “not being moved” means. Otherwise we become easily swayed “to and fro” by every wind of doctrine:

*“We are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes. No, let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ.”
Ephesians 4: 14, 15 (NEB)*

The time has come for us to ask ourselves: are we such “babes” in this truth that we need *emergency measures* to be reverent toward our God...to do what is right? If we still *need* those measures...then we’re still “babes” or “babies”! The Apostle Paul had some pretty “direct” things to say on this subject, especially to those who had strong church backgrounds:

“There is much we have to say about this matter, but it is hard to explain to you, because you are so slow to understand. There has been enough time for you to be teachers – yet you still need someone to teach you the first lessons of God’s message. Instead of eating solid food, you still have to drink milk. Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right and wrong. Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil. Let us go forward, then, to mature teaching and leave behind us

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the first lessons of the Christian message. We should not lay again the foundation of turning away from useless works and believing in God; of the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment. Let us go forward!”
Hebrews 5:11-14 and 6:1-3(GNB)

What are the elementary teachings? What are the rudiments of our beliefs? Typically they are the doctrines that comprise the hundred-odd different flavors of Christianity that people sample until they find one in which they are comfortable. More often than not the choice is made on the basis of what we’re “raised” in...what our mothers and fathers believed and lived. Is it enough to accept what our mothers and fathers believed? Can we be saved by accepting that? Or is there more to the Christian experience? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if it was something that challenged our intellect and being throughout our lives instead of just some “body of beliefs”...a mantra of doctrine that gets recited over and over and memorized so that we’re sure what it means to be a solid member of the “true” Catholic faith...or the “true” Lutheran faith...or the “true” Methodist faith...or the “true” Baptist faith. Uh-oh...I’m starting to step on some toes, aren’t I? Fact is, though, that true Christianity requires those who would follow it to examine how it was revealed through Christ! He showed that doctrine was just the foundation to a way of life! A way of life, by the way, led by all the citizens of heaven! Let me illustrate the point here. Let’s challenge ourselves a minute concerning the rudiments of our beliefs. Let’s pick some...no. Let’s pick just one that’s common to all Christianity and ask:

Do we still need THE LAW in order to love God and love each other...and not hate and desire to murder our enemies? Would we murder them if there were no law that says we must not do it?

If we’re still at this point, we’re still “Babes” and we’re not ready for Satan’s last attack...his final great deception! Do you prefer the thunders of Sinai? Or would you rather hear the “still small voice” of truth...which Satan cannot duplicate because the truth is not with him?

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Ask yourself this: Why DO you obey? Is it because God has the power to reward and the power to destroy? Is that good enough? Or is it because you want to please God? That seems like a good and proper thing to do, but does it satisfy you? Will it last you throughout eternity if you're not in harmony with God? Or do you obey God because you've seen the results of the choices made against Him...because you have enough experience behind you now to see that all God has asked of us is for the good of the universe...because you see that He is right and agree with His judgments and admire His wisdom and His love for His creatures?

God is waiting for us to get this right! At least...He's waiting for those that will be able to stand alone at the end of days to get it right! Why is it that this is so hard to see? What makes us complicate it so? Are we still so pre-occupied with what God has done for us...with our own salvation...that we think the whole thing is about us? Are we missing the understanding of the plan of salvation in its cosmic proportion...in the context of the great controversy between God and Lucifer, involving the entire universe...and the only way to safety? I think so.

If you wonder whether you've grown in Christianity or not, ask yourself this: Do you still demand vengeance on your enemies? In order for justice to be served to your satisfaction...do you require "tit for tat" so to speak? An "eye for an eye" and a "tooth for a tooth"? Is that your idea of justice? Do you suppose it's God's idea too? Do you demand that your enemies suffer all that they deserve in the "final fires at the end of time" or you (or God for that matter) will not be satisfied? Is that what you think justice "demands"? **OR** are you ready to join the Father as He CRIES when all this happens: as He watches His children reap the consequences of their own rebellious choice? God does NOT turn His back on these rebels. He watches...in anguish...as they die...as their light goes out! Yes, He cries over the loss of Lucifer and the rest of the family. Does this astound you? Should it? Doesn't that little admonition from Jesus just "ring" in your ears right now: "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the sons of your Father in heaven." That quote comes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:44 and 45.

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If you still desire vengeance, though you call it justice, you're acting like a little child in this faith! Hard to take, isn't it...but accurate? What do you think? What makes sense to you now after all we've examined? The Apostle Paul was like this in his adulthood. Remember? When he was called Saul and he ran around persecuting Christians, putting them in jail or to death because they didn't believe as he did and he regarded them as enemies? But he grew up! And he put away childish things:

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” 1st Corinthians 13:11 (RSV)

There's a time in life when it's appropriate to be a child: to believe what we're told and to do what we're told. But...while the enemy is still abroad...while we're still children, we need protection! We need the emergency measures to help us believe and do what is right! God's been willing to give them to us and we should thank Him for it. HOWEVER...in the last days, there will be no protection! Satan will twist (has already) the emergency measures to support his own position...to put God in a very bad light. He will cause the scriptures to be sifted, rifled and abused such that meaningful passages and stories will be passed off as preposterous legend. He will even be able to convince a great majority that he doesn't even exist! Ask around...who believes in Satan anymore? Can't you just hear Dana Carvey as the “Church Lady” on Saturday Night live? SATAN?

We need to “grow up” to handle this. Job was grown up! Consider the ways the adversary tried to break him down and undermine his trust in God! First his assets were taken away; then his family; next his reputation and finally his health. Consider this! All of it was with a view toward affecting his theology...his picture of God! For many of us, any one of these attacks would've done it! We'd have been whining: “Why, God? WHY ME? What did I do to you?” Our faith would've been severely tried. But Job lost it all. You know what his greatest trial was in it all? It was the great stress he went through when his friends came to comfort him with “their theology”! Suppose it could get to be this way in the last days to come? You can bet it

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will...and we'll be defenseless unless we truly know God the way Job did: as a true Friend and Father, as well as a Sovereign.

It seems to me that a great deal of Christian theology today is pre-occupied with our "legal" standing before God. God's relationship with us is anything but "legal"! Could it be **that** is the reason why God waits? Is He waiting for us to grow up into a much larger understanding of the **truth**? Without that understanding, we'll never survive the time of trouble we're told is coming in the book of Revelation. So, the Apostle Paul gives us this rock-solid counsel:

"Put on all the armour which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. Stand firm, I say, Fasten on the belt of truth..." Ephesians 6:11-14 (NEB)

Come on, now. We know what the truth is! It's the GOOD NEWS ABOUT OUR GOD! Let's share that with everybody we contact that has an interest! God is waiting for us to do this, and He can't wait much longer!

Chapter # 19:

How Soon Will This All Be Over?

Pay attention to this question now: I'm not asking "when" will this all be over, but "how soon?" There's quite a difference if you think about it. Our last three chapters have talked about "when":

Chapter 16 – We studied about the messages of the three angels: God will come when His children on this planet have fully responded to His last pleading;

Chapter 17 - We studied that God will come when His children are so settled in the truth that they can resist Satan's final effort to deceive; and

Chapter 18 - We studied that God will come when His children are such grown-up believers that they can not only survive the time of trouble (or tribulation), but, like Job, speak well and truly of our heavenly Father.

OK...all right then. That's when He will come. So...how soon is that going to happen? Do you think, maybe... in your lifetime? Why would you think that? Why wouldn't you think that? Go ahead; take the quiz! These are not new questions! More than 1900 years ago, the disciples put this question to Jesus:

"Tell us, when will this be and how can we tell when You're coming back and the world will come to an end"?
Matt.24:3 (Beck)

Jesus responded by sharing a lot with His disciples. You can read about it further in Matthew chapter 24. But Jesus admitted that, in His humble human form, even He didn't know "when" His Father was coming...the day and the hour. Here are His own words:

"But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father."
Matt. 24:36 (NEB)

Now these very words raise an interesting debate. Was Jesus saying that, at the time He was speaking, no one knew the day or the hour? Or was Jesus saying that, forever and ever until He got the secret word

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from the Father to return, no one would ever know the day or the hour? Fundamental churches teach the latter concept, and I was taught that from my youth. I'm not so sure I believe it today, because I came across passages in the Bible that seem to indicate otherwise. Look at this one, for example:

“...If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” Revelation 3:3 (KJV)

John the beloved wrote the book of Revelation when he was exiled on the Island of Patmos. He, himself, heard Jesus say years before that no one knew the day or the hour of Jesus' coming. But in his vision on Patmos, He heard Jesus tell him that “if he didn't watch”, the coming would be upon him like a thief. The implication for him and for us is that if we do keep watch, we will know the day or the hour. That's heady stuff isn't it? There's no “magic” referred to there...no requirement of being a minister or priest or saint or anything other than a plain believer, eager, working for the coming of the Lord, watching and hoping for it!

Jesus indicated that there was something much more important than knowing the exact time of His coming again. He indicated that it was *more important* to trust Him and *be willing to wait!* Remember Chapter 3 – “All God Asks Of Us Is Trust!”? If only we would trust Him enough to be willing to wait...to be ready for His coming no matter when that might be! We really don't need to know the exact time...all will be well with the God we have come to know and trust!

“Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me...I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.” John 14: 1, 3 (NEB)

THIS is truly the perspective to have! Don't you agree?

So, let's admit the truth about ourselves now, anyway. We're intrigued about the “time” thing, aren't we? It shouldn't make us anxious or fearful...but it sure is interesting! Well, Jesus did give us

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some details about it. You could certainly “ballpark” the time of His coming:

“Then, if anyone says to you: ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ – do not believe him. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear. They will perform great miracles and wonders in order to deceive even God’s chosen people, if possible....Or if people should tell you, ‘Look, he is out in the desert!’ – don’t go there; or if they say: ‘Look! He is hiding here!’ - Don’t believe it. For the Son of Man will come like lightning which flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west...And all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other.” Matt 24: 23,24,26, 27,30,31 (GNB)

Wow! He gave some more signs in Matthew 24 too:

- Disturbances in earth and sky
- Growing distrust between nations
- The rise of false religious leaders
- False prophets and imitators will perform miracles
- The false teaching that His coming would be in “secret”, that He would hide out.

Does anyone today believe that Jesus came back already in secret? This may surprise you, but it is one of the teachings of our Jehovah Witness friends. As you can see from Matthew 24 above, it is not exactly Biblical. There is no place in the Bible that you can find this teaching. On the contrary, John’s vision in the book of Revelation clearly says otherwise:

“Look! He is coming in the clouds! Everyone will see Him, including those who pierced Him. All peoples on earth will mourn over Him. So shall it be.” Revelation 1:7 (GNB)

How is that going to happen? Some think that, through the technology of television, every eye shall see Him. Others believe the earth will be

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“peeled” like the skin of an onion so that all can see the east from where He comes. No matter the means, it will be quite an event.

Let’s look back to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 some more. In verse 30 He says: “all people of earth will weep at His coming.” Why would that be? Long before Jesus walked the earth, Isaiah talked about his vision of the end. Isaiah seems to contradict Jesus in chapter 25, verse 9:

“In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’” (NIV)

So...what’s that all about? Was Jesus wrong? We know He read Isaiah, because Luke records a special and tense scene in the synagogue one day when Jesus read from Isaiah (Luke 4: 16 – 20). By now we ought to feel pretty confident that Jesus surely wasn’t wrong! There does appear to be a conflict that’s confusing here though...and we should be able to resolve it because God is not the author of confusion (1st Corinthians 14:33). Let’s draw on what we’ve studied.

We learned that almost everyone on earth will follow the “beast power” talked about in Revelation 13...the chapter that discusses Satan’s final effort to deceive the earth. In verse 8, John says:

“And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (KJV)

Not all will succumb to the power and demands of the beast then. Those who choose to remain loyal to God and are not deceived by the beast power will stand at the end. When Jesus comes however, even though He’s still in human form, how is the world going to react? John says in Revelation 6:16:

“They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’” (GNB)

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Why are the people of earth going to feel this way toward their God? It's implied in Isaiah 25:9 above. Those that chose the side of God and came to know God through study and experience with Him have come to trust Him, and trust Him completely. They believe Him and His promise to save them! Their tears are tears of joy! The rest of the people on earth have not learned this! And why haven't they? Because they entrusted their religion to the “wisdom of men”. They didn't study and experience for themselves. They let “things” (money, the job, objects, power and influence of various sorts) be their gods instead of the One True God. They, therefore, were led to accept the lies about the One True God as the truth! They never came to know the Gospel...which is the real TRUTH about God! So, indeed, everyone will weep at the second coming of Jesus! Sadly, for most, the tears shed will be for terror and regret. For a small loyal group, however, the tears shed will be for joy!

As I wrote this, we were in yet another election year. George W. Bush and Al Gore seemed to be in a dead heat to win the nominations of their respective parties (as it turned out, it was quite a “heat”!). Each tip-toed around the “Christian right” as that term has been applied to vocal opposition to abortion and other conservative viewpoints. Each needed the support of that group to win the presidency. An independent group, led by Pat Buchanan, seemed to be poised to throw a “wrench” into the political process by splitting the vote of the American people three ways over issues of conservatism and values...values that affected many liberals as well. The prognosis for November was unclear.

Pat Buchanan appealed to “the religious right” with the promise that if he was elected, he would run this country according to the dictates of the Bible. Did that win you over? Were you comfortable with that? Would you be pleased to have laws passed and enforced such that everyone would have to obey and conform to a dictated society? Would you be pleased having Pat or George or Al or anyone else tell you how to believe? What to do? Has legislation ever been successful in changing the hearts of people? Did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 change the hearts of whites toward people of color...particularly toward African American people? Has racism gone away since 1964? I don't want to go too far down this path, for

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the sake of staying on the course of this chapter. But it's important for us to remember the tenor of this entire book, what it says about our God and the way He runs His government. We've learned that God doesn't use force; that it is *not* a successful course to follow with intelligent creatures. Intelligent creatures like us must be convinced through a demonstration of the evidence. The real trouble with us is that the majority of us are not willing and committed to use the intelligence we have been given.

The face of Jesus, when He comes, will cause two reactions. We've seen them demonstrated in the Bible very poignantly: the reaction of Judas and the reaction of Peter. So, what do I mean by this...is Jesus two-faced? No, no. But there are two distinct reactions with one thing in common: each will feel unworthy of welcoming Jesus. One will feel afraid and call upon the rocks to fall on him and hide him from the God he feels will be pretty angry with him...ready to torture and kill him. This "Judas-type" represents those who didn't take the time to get to know their God. In this group will be a large majority who even reject Him, who didn't believe He was real. The other, the "Peter-type" will also feel unworthy of themselves. They, however will have come to know a God who loves them in a way they can barely understand. They will have confidence in this love, in God's promises to them and in God Himself. They trust Him to save them in spite of themselves.

Now let me ask you this very serious question: When Jesus comes, are you gonna be afraid? If your answer is affirmative, you need to take more time with Him. Go back to Chapter One and run through this book a couple of times. Don't give up on God, and He won't give up on you! Give up on Him, and you eventually leave Him no choice. He won't force you.

Some of us can't wait for this world to come to an end! The "old saints" in the church, as well as people who have had a pretty rough time, are more than willing for it all to end. But God waits! I have to tell you...I'm glad He waited for me! I know there are others in the boat I was in! The great God of love waits until they've had the chance to hear the "Truth" and make an intelligent choice. Often Satan, in the great war that exists here yet, interferes with God's

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patience. He kills people through his influence, wars, maladies, famines, “accidents”, “acts” of nature, etc., etc. The victims of this interference ultimately fall into the hands of the loving God we’ve come to know in these chapters. Do you trust Him to make the right judgement about these poor victims? Or do you blame Him for what’s happened to them? If we really want this to be over, we must be prepared and willing to share that “Truth” about God with others who desperately need to know it. There are many looking for this truth, you don’t have to “force” yourself upon them. You may need to lovingly ask...to put aside your pride or your fear of rejection.

Let’s look at a couple examples of God’s patience with people. No where is it more keenly demonstrated than in the Old Testament of the Bible. Consider this passage:

“The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them his messengers, because he had compassion on his people; ...but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against the people, till there was no remedy.”
2nd Chronicles 36: 15, 16 (RSV)

There it is, one of those statements where the Bible seems to say: “God put up with them until they finally teed Him off so bad that He lost His temper. Well that is one way of looking at it, I suppose. But there is another way, more consistent with the patient God of love we all want to believe exists. The Bible clearly tells us, time and again, that our God is a God of love. We need to know that the Bible doesn’t lie, so we need to understand statements like the one in 2nd Chronicles above. The Chronicles are interesting books. They contain what their title suggests: a Chronicle of the happenings to the chosen people of God over millenniums of their history. There are 29 chapters to the first book and 36 chapters to the second book. This quote is more than half-way through the last chapter of the second book!

- Lots of water had gone under the bridge in God’s experience with His chosen by this time!
- We’ll refer to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible this time to get a consistent picture of God.

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- Ask yourself here: what was God to do? What was His wrath?

If you start at the beginning of 2nd Chronicles Chapter 36, you get more of a feel for what was happening here. The turnover of kings of Israel became worse and worse in their behavior and rejection of God. So finally in verse 17 we find:

“Therefore he(God) brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged; he gave them all into his hand.” (RSV)

As we read before (See Pg, 104 of Ch. 8 and Pg. 129 of Ch. 9), God’s wrath was to finally let them reap the results of their choice. They didn’t want Him or His protection, so He let them experience what they thought they wanted. It was clear that they didn’t want Him! Was God anxious to give them up in this way? Did they finally “get His goat” and light off His temper? We should know better by now. Look at verse 21:

“to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

You see, in the ordinances that God gave His people to guide their thinking and their life-style, He said that every 7 years the land was supposed to enjoy a “Sabbath” also. Nothing was to be planted in it. You can find the ordinance in Leviticus 25:4. My point is this: the word of the Lord through Jeremiah was that if God’s children didn’t heed His counsel, they were going to spend 70 years in Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 25:11). They were to spend one year for each “Sabbath” that the land didn’t get. Since the land was supposed to “get a Sabbath” every 7th year, and it had 70 of them coming...God’s children had been ignoring Him on this and other issues for 7x70 years or 490 years!! That’s how long God had been sending messengers and prophets with words of reform and an appeal to loyalty! So this action on God’s part can hardly seem arbitrary, can it? Nor can it seem a fit of temper or rage. It’s clear that Israel simply wasn’t going to listen to God anymore. 490 years is pretty solid evidence of that fact. They

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rejected God! They kicked Him out! He let them experience it. Fortunately for them, this was still “discipline”! God only “seemed” to abandon them. Lots of saints grew up in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends; Ezra; and Jeremiah among them!

Sometimes this patience of God has been misunderstood to mean “*we can go on sinning with impunity*” (without consequences). NOTHING could be further from the truth! Nothing could make less sense. Is God too good or too kind to turn us over eventually to reap the consequence of our choices? There are some “feel good” churches that preach this sort of thing, but the Apostle Paul was pretty straightforward about it:

“Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God’s generosity and patient mercy toward you as weakness on His part? Don’t you realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” Romans 2:4 (Phillips)

God’s patience has sometimes puzzled His trusting children...as in the days of Habakkuk. His words came from near the end of the seventh century, B.C., at a time when the Babylonians were in power. He was deeply disturbed by the violence of these cruel people and asked the Lord, “so why are You silent while they destroy people who are more righteous than they are?” The Lord’s answer was that He would take action in His own good time, and meanwhile, “Those who are righteous will live because they are faithful to God”. Those who consider themselves God’s friends will have faith that He will act and do it timely. They must have patience, however, because God is not like man. His love and mercy endureth forever! So Habakkuk complained a few times to God in his little book. His appeal from Chapter 1, verse 12 through God’s answer in Chapter 2, verse 4 is precious, insightful and worthy of commitment to memory. Read it and come back. Isn’t it wonderful how, if you are a friend of God, you can say just exactly what’s on your mind? Habakkuk sure didn’t have any problems with that! God’s response to Him was “Trust Me...give Me time to work things out. I will, you know, I promise!” That famous response in Habakkuk 2:4, the second part, is often quoted:

“The just shall live by faith!” (KJV)

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You must have heard it many times, for it was a motto of Martin Luther's. It is often misquoted and misunderstood as relating to forgiveness. Paul quoted it in Romans (where Martin Luther read it!) and Galatians:

“The just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1;17 and Gal 3:11 (KJV)

Yup. The same words in all three places. Paul was not talking about forgiveness here, however, he was talking about trusting God and in Him enough to be willing to wait for Him to accomplish whatever in His own good time!

In these last days, God's patience gives His enemies the opportunity to misinterpret His graciousness as *weakness*...to scoff at His apparent inability to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion...to bring many to doubt whether He even exists at all! They certainly have been deceived enough at this point to doubt that Satan exists at all either! I had a serious luncheon with a colleague not two weeks ago in which she asked me about my spiritual life and beliefs. She knew I was committed to it and she wanted to know how I was able to “fit in” at work, being a Christian. She admitted to being a “nominal” Christian herself, but she rejected the picture of God that she got from her church. She proceeded at length to tell me the details of her last confession (about 10 years earlier). She was absolutely taken aback that I could believe that Satan exists.

This would be a good time for you to read all of 2nd Peter Chapter 3, especially verses 3 & 4 which I'll quote here:

“First of all you must understand that in the last days some people will appear whose lives are controlled by their own lusts. They will make fun of you and will ask, ‘He promised to come didn't He? Where is He? Our fathers have already died, but everything is still the same as it was since the creation of the world!’” 2nd Peter 3:3,4 (GNB)

No, nothing has changed...and nothing ever will!! But Peter goes on to explain the real reason for the delay in verse 9:

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“The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.” (GNB)

Do you remember what “sins” are? How we defined them in our introduction? If not, please go back and refresh your memory. This is the kind of definition you’ll want to give to your children. You should remember it yourself too...don’t let it get any more complicated than that!

St. Peter goes on in this Chapter to give the same advice that St. Paul did in Romans 2:4 above. I’ll summarize the thought in my own words. See if you agree starting at verse 15:

“Look on God’s patience with you as your opportunity to be saved! Get to know Him for who He is...be won over as a friend so you can become an admirer and an emulator!”

Sometimes God’s incredible patience and graciousness has even been an embarrassment to some of His people. One of the most interesting illustrations of this is the story of Jonah. It’s just a little book, only four itty- bitty chapters! That’s right, I want you to read the whole thing. You think you know the story...but you only think you know it! That’s because you’ve heard it told so many times. It’s often referred to as one of those “legends” in the Bible. Yeah, the guy was swallowed by a whale because God was teed-off at him. He actually lived in its belly for three whole days! You know the story, right? Wrong. Go read it now, and come back.

Surprised? There was a lot more to it than you remembered wasn’t there? OK, let’s recap. The first chapter tells what we most remember. God tells Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh that their city will be destroyed if they don’t change their ways. Jonah absolutely hates the Ninevites, however, so he bolts for the harbor. He thinks he’s going to hide out in Spain (Duh! Earth to Jonah...anybody home?). While on ship, a storm comes up. The sailors find out that Jonah is to blame and they throw him overboard whereupon Jonah is swallowed by “a large fish”. He stays in there for three days and

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nights to think the whole thing over. The fish vomits him up on a beach, and again God asks him to go warn Nineveh. Under considerable pressure here, Jonah acquiesces (oh all right. He gives in). He was hardly a volunteer...certainly not your typical missionary. Yet he held the honor of being one of God's prophets! He was asked to deliver a dangerous message to a dangerous people...and he finally did it. Jonah stalked the streets of Nineveh shouting "repent in 40 days or else". Then he went up to a hillside to enjoy the destruction, because he really hated those guys! BUT...it didn't happen!! The people of Nineveh listened to God. They were not destroyed therefore! Many people think it was because God changed his mind about those people. The fact is...those people changed their mind about God! In any event, Jonah was pretty miffed. He says something astounding in the very last chapter, chapter 4 verses 1-3:

"Jonah was very unhappy about this and became angry. So he prayed, 'Lord, didn't I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That's why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always ready to change your mind and not punish. Now then, Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive.'"

How about that guy? Think of this man knowing God that well in Old Testament times. Those are words used by Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah...the greats! They knew God!

How often...today...do you hear such words uttered about our God? Hmmm? Is the story of Jonah known for this? Is that the first thing that came to your mind when I said we'd look at this story? Is it one of the first stories that comes to your mind when you think of an illustration of God's love for people? When's the last time you heard that preached?

Back to the story: Jonah was embarrassed! He told the Ninevites that they were gonna get it. Now he looked like a fool! Besides, he wanted to see them "get it"! He hated those "unrighteous" heathens. Look at how God tried to reason with Jonah over this whole thing. The remainder of Chapter 4 tells the story of God's illustration of the truth to Jonah through the creation and death of a little plant.

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Jonah got pretty upset with God all over again because of the death of that little plant that gave him some shade. But look at God’s lesson:

“This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next: you didn’t do anything for it and you didn’t make it grow – yet you feel sorry for it. How much more, then, should I have pity on Nineveh, that great city. After all, it has more than 120,000 innocent children in it, as well as many animals.”
Jonah 4:10, 11 (GNB)

Yes...God even had a concern for the animals! You see, he never wanted that sacrificial system we studied about in Chapter Eleven! His eye is on the sparrow!

Let’s go back now to what some of us would call “contemporary” history! For many, all of American history is contemporary because of the short time the United States of America has existed. Between 150 and 200 years ago, however, there was an interesting phenomenon of spiritual and religious revival in the Northeast as well as in England and large parts of Europe. There was actually a world conviction that the 2nd coming of Christ was very near. Yes! That’s true and documentable! Students of prophecy in a variety of churches (Methodist; Baptist; Lutheran and Anabaptists in particular) became concerned that they might be living very near the end of time as we know it. They were studying Daniel and noticing its similarity to the book of Revelation. In particular, they were pin-pointing what they considered to be the end of a prophecy of 2300 days. They were noticing signs that Christ pointed to in Matthew 24...especially verse 29:

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky.” Matt. 24:29 (NIV)

In May...specifically May 19, 1780, they saw the sun darkened so that you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face! The moon would not give its light either. On November 13, 1833 there was a meteor shower the likes of which have never been seen before or since. People in Mexico and other South American countries were committing suicide in large numbers for fear of what was coming on the world! Students

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and scholars alike were noticing lines in the prophecies of Daniel that seemed to point to events to happen in 1798 and 1844. Such an accumulation of signs and evidence led a great many people to believe that the 2nd advent of Christ was eminent. On a chilly night in October of 1844, thousands awaited on hillsides, having sold their farms and belongings, only to be greatly disappointed that Jesus did not come! Around that period of time a number of contemporary American religions were born: Christian Science; Mormons; Jehovah Witnesses; Spiritists; and Seventh-day Adventists. It wasn't one date...or one event...but an accumulation of events, a combination of a lot of evidence that brought about serious Bible study and re-examination. God has always worked this way with people: not just a little here and a little there...but LOTS of evidence.

A small group of people that came out of this experience decided that it was time to give and spread the last three angels' warnings in Revelation chapter 14. This is all part of religious history! Today, yet, there are literally millions the world over that agree with those insights of well over 150 years ago!

Now the "early ones" didn't read the signs entirely correctly, that's obvious. The signs weren't a signal to "pack up for the trip to heaven". They were, rather, a call from God to prepare the whole world for His coming! That's why we're still here...because we haven't done it yet! Who is the "we" I'm referring to here anyway? It's all those of us who recognize the truth about God and the very great privilege He has given us to participate in spreading the loving message that draws men back to Him in trust. Is that anybody in any particular religion? Well there are certainly those in various religions that seem to think it's their sole job and responsibility! But God's people are in all religions. According to the Bible, they are few. That's sad, isn't it? But also, according to the Bible, the opportunity and hope for many is real! The responsibility for awakening is on the shoulders of those who see and choose. They should be made alive by the challenge before them.

It's true that things haven't happened as quickly as early aspirants to Christ's coming thought they would. Those signs in the sun, moon and stars are now well over 200 year old. Should we be

“Oh My God!”

surprised...or even ashamed that our God would be willing to wait this long? Preaching about the “end of time” has been going on for centuries now. Is it embarrassing to continue? Whose reputation are we concerned about anyhow? Are we concerned about *ours* or God’s? Even Hollywood has been moved that times are a bit more decadent and more worthy of judgment. Hence movies like “The 7th Seal” or, more recently “The End of Days”. But the message of these movies is that somehow, mankind can delay the wrath of God and the destruction of the world. It is a view totally unacquainted with the Good News. That may be due to the fact that a great many “believers” think that the Good News is all about them and what’s been done for them. I just can’t seem to emphasize this enough:

The GOOD NEWS...the GOSPEL...is not about US! We too often make that mistake. The Good News is about Our God! And it’s not about what He has done for us...it’s about who He is! It’s about what He is like...that would cause Him to do for us what’s been done!

GET THIS PLEASE: If, by our failure to complete our task we have contributed to the delay in Christ’s coming, then we deserve to be ashamed. BUT:

The longer God waits, the more gracious He looks! His delay only confirms the Good News. We should look upon it with pride and gratitude! We should not make the same mistake that Jonah made!

God needs better spokesmen than Jonah proved to be! Reluctant teachers of the truth...themselves moved by guilt, fear or obligation...are a very sad denial of the Good News! God is waiting for people who look eagerly for His coming and work to hasten it on:

“Look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on.” 2nd Peter 3:12 (NEB)

So...now again to the question that began this chapter: “How much longer?” Well, you can bet the farm on this:

- God will wait as long as there is hope for anyone!

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- He will not wait forever...He is a God of time and order as well as a God of love and mercy.
- He will wait as long as it makes sense to wait...and not a moment longer.

No one wants more to bring an end to distrust, recreate the earth and give it back to its “rightful” occupiers than God does!

So, again, when will it end? Only God, who knows all our thoughts, will know when all final decisions have been made. That’s why Jesus gave the advice He did in Matthew 24:44:

“So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting Him.” (GNB)

BUT: in case we think we’ll always remain in the dark about this, remember Paul’s counsel in 1st Thessalonians 5:4:

“But you, brothers are not living in darkness, and so the day will not like a thief take you by surprise.” (Kliest and Lilly)

We know what is to come...what must take place. How soon do you think the conflict will be over? Will you work to help make it happen?

Chapter # 20:

Peace at Last!

Well...here we are at the end of our journey to learn the truth about our heavenly Father. Just 19 chapters ago we began this journey by remembering that there once was peace throughout the universe. Yes, yes...but peace with whom? Peace with every existent being everywhere! There was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other, all of them trusted their Heavenly Father, and He in turn could safely trust in them. Is that the definition of peace? It appeals to me, I'll say that for it! But Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says:

Peace – *Pees*, from old French (*Pais*) and that from the Latin “*Pax*”, meaning to agree. *It's a state of tranquility; freedom from civil disturbance; a state of security and order...harmony in personal relations; an end to hostilities!*

Shalom (in the Hebrew) – *Safe...(Well, Happy, Friendly, Health and Welfare)...prosperity, rest, whole.*

Eirene (in the Greek) – meant to join...to set at one again!

Remember the beginning? There once was peace...trust. Then came WAR! With it came:

- Distrust over false charges
- God's long, patient demonstration of the *TRUTH!*
- Confusion over the nature of the conflict:
 1. Mere obedience to the rules?
 2. The character and government of God Himself!

Victory for God in this war is not the destruction of His enemies! Many believe that's how the whole thing ends! God gets good and angry...He absolutely loses His cool and does the unthinkable: He wades into sinners with blind fury, annihilating them left and right. Given all we've studied, does that make sense? Do you think God would do that? Here are a couple of hints:

- Who are His enemies? Those of His own family that no longer trust Him or in Him

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- Who is and has always been most powerful? Well, God always has been. He could've wiped out those who disagree with Him long before. Why now all of a sudden? And why in such a fit of rage?

This is not about Brute Power...it's about TRUTH (real power!). There is no victory for God in this war unless what went wrong is set right again. Think about this a minute: Could there ever be peace again if God really were the kind of being and personality that Satan has made Him out to be:

Arbitrary;Exacting;Vengeful;Unforgiving;Severe?

This reminds me of the old (really old) joke: What do you feed an 800 pound Gorilla? Answer: Anything it wants! Many people, even theologians, see God this way. "God is, at times, arbitrary," they'll say. "but...as the Sovereign of the Universe...He has every right to be!" These same people see God as "getting even" with the bad guys at last. God gets His vengeance, all right, but they refer to it as "justice". They think it's unfair unless God "evens" everything out. They will go to the grave holding God accountable for this. Most people are a little hesitant to call God unforgiving and severe...it usually doesn't quite come out that way. Instead they "couch" the accusation abstractly saying "gentle Jesus is our Intercessor...our friend in heaven...pleading with the Father to forgive us."

Does peace with God constitute a "cease fire"? Have God and His creatures been firing on one another? Has it been that kind of war? Grenades; bullets; rockets; nukes? I think we know better than that. The war has been, and still is, a battle for the mind. A contest over trust...a weighing of the facts and a decision over what truth is.

The Apostle Paul was delighted to bring the message of peace with God to the Gentiles. In Romans 5:1 he said that sinners can indeed be restored to peace with God! The KJV and the RSV use the term "justified" as though the bringing of peace were a legal transaction: Pardon. The real transaction, however, is one of awareness! It's an enlightenment about God! The GNB states it a little more along these lines:

“Oh My God!”

*“Now that we have been put right with God through faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Now that we are aware of the complete, loving nature of our Father...now that we understand it to be no different than that demonstrated by His Son, we can *trust* Him and *trust in* Him! This brings peace!! God forgives and forgets! Remember chapter thirteen? God treats us as though we never sinned...as though we never wandered or ran away from Him! We won't feel uncomfortable around God. We need never worry that He will bring up our past because He won't. He doesn't treat us that way now and He surely won't when this is all over! He treats us just as though we never wronged Him...it's truly amazing. Without going back to chapter thirteen, how do we know this to be true? Was it a promise God made in the Bible, or a claim? Or was it, maybe, a demonstration of the evidence somewhere in the Bible? Of course! A beautiful demonstration story concerns God talking to Solomon about his father. This happened after David was dead, and Solomon was dedicating the temple he had built for God. God is quoted:

*“The Lord said to him (Solomon)... 'If you walk before me
in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your Father
did... '” 1st Kings 9:3,4 (NIV)*

There's God saying that David had integrity of heart, an upright guy! Isn't David the one that saw a gorgeous woman taking a bath...and plotted to “have” her? Uh-huh. It was a family thing for Solomon to understand too, for the gorgeous woman was his mother, Bathsheba! But she was married to someone else at the time David did this, remember? Her husband was a loyal officer in David's army. So David, the “upright” guy, had his generals place the officer at the front of the heaviest battle so that he was killed. It's what you might call a form of “murder” if you read the story through. How can this be? It's not the only instance where the Lord refers to David this way either. There's another major one long after David is gone. As a matter of fact, so many of David's household proved unworthy and disloyal to God that God took the Israeli monarchy away from David's family. The house of Jereboam was in rule. A few chapters down, God is

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speaking to His prophet Ahijah concerning a message He wanted the prophet to give Jereboam:

"...But you have not been like my servant David, who was completely loyal to me, obeyed my commands and did only what I approve of." 1st Kings 14:8 (GNB)

What? How could God say that of David? David was a headstrong, bloody king who did a lot of whatever he felt like doing! He was teachable and repentant though, so much so that God paid him quite a compliment. He said, by way of St. Paul, the following:

*"I have found that David, the son of Jesse, is the kind of man I like, a man who will do all I want him to do."
Acts 13:22 (GNB)*

This sounds even more dramatic in the King James Version:

"I have found David the son of Jesse a man after my own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."

Yikes! There must be some explanation for this! And of course there is. These anecdotes back up the promises given in Hebrews:

"I will forgive their sins and will no longer remember their wrongs....And then He says 'I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer.'" Hebrews 8:12 an 10:17

God did this for David...He'll will do the same for us!! The peace we will have with God will indeed be an intimate friendship!

When Jesus walked among mankind, He came to bring peace with God the Father. He spent a lot of effort trying to get this across to the disciples at the last supper in the upper room. They, as well as most of Israel, wanted a peace enforced by the Messiah as ruler of the world. Jesus specifically denied that as His mission. On the contrary, He said:

*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."
Mat. 10:34 (GNB)*

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Jesus foresaw that belief in Him as the Messiah for the real purpose that He came would cause strife in that nation, even among family members. They were not interested in the Truth, it wasn't what most of them wanted to hear! It wasn't "peace" according to their terms.

*“Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does.”
John 14:27 (GNB)*

Jesus promised peace of mind, peace with the Father...not peace in the form of victory over the Romans. Paul knew this as well. In one of my favorite passages by him he encourages friendship with God through Christ:

“When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into His friends and gave us the task of making others His friends also. Our message is that God was making all mankind His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how he makes them His friends. Here we are then, speaking for Christ, as though God Himself were making His appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into His friends! 2nd Corinthians 5:17 – 20 (GNB)

See the beauty of this? Jesus wants you to be friends with God. He will help you achieve this, but He will not do it by paying some legal penalty so that God will not have to kill you after all! Jesus brought and brings us peace with God by showing the truth about God...that there is no need to be afraid of Him. Indeed, God and Jesus are the same! Jesus said, "...if you have seen me, you have seen the Father!"

Not everyone wants to be friends with God, however. I know that sounds strange, but it's true. The time will come when God will indeed give up those who refuse to trust Him and turn down the truth...those unwilling to listen...to let Him save and heal them. What a tragedy. They are misled into believing that they can survive on their

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own...that they are gods unto themselves. This is Satan's delusion, and they believe it. They will die! Not as a penalty...but as a consequence! God gave us all some of His very power, as the source of our lives! If we choose to separate ourselves from Him (remember, that's the definition of "sin"), we choose to separate ourselves from the source of life. We will cease to run, operate, function. That's all there is to it! God absolutely will not torture to death His dying children. Guess where that idea came from? Who could make up such a lie about God?

Yes, peace with God comes as a matter of choice. Jesus came to reveal the truth about His Father so that the choice could be intelligently made! Jesus worked hard against the prevailing religious teaching of His church! There are times when I think He would still be in that struggle if He were walking with us today! Some churches have found, through Bible Study, that the concept of an eternally burning hellfire that God commits "His enemies" to is just plain false. Yet some of their doctrines still intimate that there is a functional difference between God the Father and Jesus the Son. They teach that we may be assured of our salvation because we have a "friend in court". Jesus is not only our Defense Attorney, He is our Judge! The Father handed the Judgeship over to the Son so that, if anyone believes in Him, the Father won't condemn Him. In this way, before the court of the universe, we are able to "flim-flam" a not guilty! God the Father...the God of Justice...is unable to render such a verdict. He cannot and still be just! But His Son can! Isn't THAT good news? How do we get such reasoning? Jesus showed us that there is no need for Him to plead with the Father...that the Father Himself loves us!

THIS IS THE GREAT TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE!

This is the truth that brings EVERLASTING PEACE!

LIKE IT? WANT IT?

WOULD YOU GIVE UP ANYTHING TO HAVE IT?

The Easter season went by as I was writing this. Mardi Gras came and passed...then Ash Wednesday. Every time this season comes around I long for someone to mention the purpose of Christ's mission. This particular Easter was special to many in the world as their eyes were turned to watch Pope John Paul II worship in the Holy Lands. There was a lot of talk about peace...about us making nice

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with each other because that’s what Jesus would want. But no one talked about the way in which peace occurs and the terrible price that Jesus paid to achieve it! The Apostle Paul mentions it in his letter to the Colossians:

“Through Him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to Himself, making peace through the shedding of His blood upon the cross.” Col. 1:20 (NEB)

That’s a very direct statement about the cosmic nature of Jesus’ experience, including the whole universe!

So then...how successful has God been at restoring peace?

- How about in heaven? Does “peace” prevail there?

Well, Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation would seem to indicate so. Chapter 12 in particular seems to indicate that there is finally peace in heaven, especially in verses 10 through 12. The inhabitants of heaven and the rest of the universe get it now. They’ve thrown Lucifer out!

- How about in the hereafter? Well, sure. Isaiah and Revelation chapters 20 through 22 state that we are in for peace for sure!

OK..ok. But what about “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men”? What kind of progress has God made at restoring that peace? That hits home! That’s where I live! I must say...things don’t look that good here. What’s up with that? Remember, this world is the one place that Satan has had success. He has abused, and caused us to abuse, the blessing of free choice. Under his influence, many have chosen to twist the truth, causing argument, strife and even persecution over it. I cannot resist an over-powering example of this. Before I bring it to your attention, you all need to know that I am a white, reasonably affluent member of suburban America. Here is my example:

At the very base of the construct of the truth about our God is the fact that all men are created equal. This is a simple truth, one our

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forefathers had the wisdom and foresight to incorporate into our country's governance, even though they were not necessarily true to it. That truth, as well as our country's dedication to freedom of choice...those elements of who we are and what we stand for have enabled God to richly bless this country beyond many others that ignore such necessary values. But saying it and meaning it are two different things. Throughout the history of the United States, ethnic groups have had their battles: Slaves; Irish; Chinese; Italians; ad nauseum. In 1964, the plight of "negroes" in this country was so unjust that their cause reached the lawmakers of the land. The Civil Rights Act was enacted. Here we are, almost 40 years later. Is racism gone? Well...at least...aren't things better? After all, for the first time in our history, polls had shown that the American people would elect an African American into the highest office in the land (Colin Powell). So, have we been able to legislate a change of heart? You would have to be terribly dishonest with yourself to answer that in the affirmative. Anna Quindlen provided a heart-rending article in the March 13, 2000 edition of Newsweek Magazine entitled: "LAST WORD...The Problem of the Color Line". In the article she addresses a riddle: "Why is our most important issue the one no one really wants to talk about?" Racism not only exists, it prevails even in churches! And it's not just in these United States of America that this problem exists and rends the peace. It's in Rwanda between the Hutus and the Tutsis. It's in India and Pakistan. It's between cousins in the Middle East. It's in Kosovo and in hundreds of other places the world over. It's in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and similar Muslim countries toward the United States. Satan revels in it. How can Christians tolerate this or even foster it...and still bear the name of Christ? Shame! Blasphemy! How could anyone believe God approves of this? Such misrepresentation breaks His heart!

Well, Jesus knew the kind of world He came into. He also knew the adversary He was up against as a humble member of the human race. He foresaw what His demonstration of the Truth about God would cause and He warned about it:

"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; a man's

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*worst enemies will be the members of his own family.”
Matthew 10:34-36 (GNB)*

Indeed, the Jews of the time did not want to hear any talk of equality among men! They were the chosen! God favored them! They lost sight of their mission to the world given long before to one they revered: Moses –

*“I have taught you all the laws, as the Lord my God told me to do. Obey them in the land that you are about to invade and occupy. Obey them faithfully, and this will show the people of other nations how wise you are. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, ‘What wisdom and understanding this great nation has!’ No other nation, no matter how great, has a God who is so near when they need Him as the Lord our God is to us. He answers us whenever we call for help. No other nation, no matter how great, has laws so just as those that I have taught you today....The Lord your God is supreme over all gods and over all powers. He is great and mighty and He is to be obeyed. He does not show partiality, and he does not accept bribes. He makes sure that orphans and widows are treated fairly; he loves the foreigners who live with our people, and gives them food and clothes. So then, show love for those foreigners, because you were once foreigners in Egypt.”
Deuteronomy 4:6 – 8 and 10:17 – 19. (GNB)*

The Israelites were to be a light, an example for the rest of the world to follow. All nations were to join with them if they so chose. Fat chance for that in the time of Christ’s sojourn here!

Look at what the members of Christ’s own family did to him:

“He came to his home, and his own family did not welcome him.” John 1:11 (Goodspeed)

In fact, they told Him He had a devil...killed Him to silence Him! Remember this: The ones who rejected Christ and preferred Satan’s picture of God were the most pious group of 7th-day Sabbath-Keeping;

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Tithe-Paying; Vegetable-Eating; Health-Reforming; Bible-Studying worshippers the world has ever known!

St. Peter warned that those who accept the true picture of God may suffer as Christ did:

*“Do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering....
Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ’s sufferings...
Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ’s
followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of
God, is resting on you.” 1st Peter 4: 12 – 14 (GNB)*

It seems somewhat incongruous or hard to believe that those who hold such an enduring and loving picture of God will be persecuted doesn’t it? Where will such trouble come from? Oboy...you don’t think the Sabbath-Keeping; Tithe-Paying; Vegetable-Eating; Health-Reforming; Bible-Studying guys could be a part of it again...do you? (Hint, Hint: What does history do over and over?) Could you even entertain that thought just because it happened once before? (Take a look at the world around you...I mean the Christian world...the world of Islam...the world of Buddha and Vishna...these “peace-keepers”)

How about an encouraging word here? I know **I** could use one! St. Paul says that, if the Holy Spirit is with these people, He will bring peace!

*“The Spirit, on the other hand, brings a harvest of love,
joy, peace...” Galatians 5:22 (Weymouth)*

How does the Holy Spirit bring peace? Is it a Divine “Tranq” for our feelings? Does it remind us of the truth? (WWJD?) This is another of those important areas that Jesus got into with gusto at the last supper:

*“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will remind you of every-
thing I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I
give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be
afraid.” John 14: 25,26 (NIV)*

He said a lot there in that upper room! Look at the theme of it:

“Oh My God!”

“I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave; I have conquered the world...Father...eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God...I have glorified you on earth and finished the work you gave me to do.”

John 16:33; 17:1,3,4 (Jerusalem)

Is it possible to be convinced and accept this truth and be willing to give up anything to have this peace and yet still experience some unpeaceful strugglings within ourselves? This whole idea troubles many people. It troubled St. Paul! He wrote a lot about it with great personal experience:

“I see a different law at work in my body – a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of...It makes me a prisoner...What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me?”
Romans 7: 23, 24 (GNB)

But then he goes on with all of chapter 8 in the letter to the Romans. He describes the rescue:

- Right at the start: God does not condemn His struggling children!
- These habits of a lifetime do not change overnight!
- Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all on our side, pleading alongside Each Other for us to a witnessing universe. (vs. 27, 31, 34 of Chapter 8)

Read chapter 8. It's one of the more encouraging passages in all the Bible. It concludes like this:

“If God is for us, who can be against us?...I am certain that...neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers...will ever be able to separate us from the love of God.” *Romans 8:31,38 and 39 (GNB)*

Now if we do need discipline to overcome the bad habits, God will give it to us. But when it comes, we'll understand that God isn't angry with us. He's disciplining us because He loves us!

“Remember that the Lord your God corrects and punishes you

Peace At Last!

just as a father disciplines his children.” Deut. 8:5 (GNB)

“Because the Lord corrects everyone he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a son...those who have been disciplined by such punishment reap the peaceful reward of a righteous life.” Hebrews 12:6 and 11 (GNB)

We won't allow the discipline to disturb our peace with God. We'll recognize it for what it is! Have you been “disciplined” lately? Are you happy about it? Well...are you at least at peace about it? Above all you should be grateful for it! I usually am...once it's over...long over! Fact is, though, I'm always chagrined at ever having placed myself in the need for discipline. It's a growing experience...like the rest of life.

So, here we are...eager to have peace restored in the universe again. If we've been set right with our God; and we've been won back to love and trust,...God can even turn our trials and troubles to our advantage! We started this chapter out with Romans 5, and we've come full circle again:

“We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character...”
Rom. 5:3,4 (Phillips)

To some of us (most I truly hope), these chapters about God have indeed been **Good News**...but they are hardly new concepts! They are centuries old, going back to the time before the 66 books of the Bible were even written! But surely the concept of true peace with God was clearly understood in Old Testament times, as is evidenced by the following:

“You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you.” Isaiah 26: 3,4 (GNB)

Look at how old that is...and so many of the other prophets agreed with him! We have it preserved in Britain somewhere in the Dead Sea

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Scrolls! St. Paul confirms that people in the Old Testament times had this Good News:

“For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith.”
Hebrews 4:2 (GNB)

It's important to get this point: **the Good News can be turned down!** Fact is, many will turn it down. Very many! They will treat God like an enemy and break His heart. I fully expect to see the tears stream down the face of God as He loses Lucifer and that great part of His family at the very end. If we're like God...as we're supposed to grow to be...tears will stream down our faces as well.

So...what will it be for us? Will you be won by the evidence? Will you share the *real* Good News...all of it...with others and so put them at peace with God?

“When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old spiritual, “Free at last, free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last.”

Martin Luther King
August 28, 1963

Conclusion:

The last chapter sort of sounded like a conclusion, didn't it? I'm not sure what this very brief piece should be called...or even exactly why I'm still writing. This book seemed to end pretty well at chapter 20! Yet I have a feeling of unrest...that this work is somehow not yet complete. Maybe it's because it took me so long to write it and edit it and get people's opinions and work some bugs out. Maybe it's because so much has happened since I first undertook to put this all in the form of a book. Writers probably aren't supposed to reveal these kinds of things, otherwise they'd go crazy trying to keep their work up to date! Well, I don't consider myself a writer. That may be apparent! I do think this topic is timely though as well as timeless. I think I know what's bothering me and I feel the need to share it with you.

This book was really pretty well finished about six months ago. Six months ago was September of 2001. You know what happened then. The numbers 9/11 will be forever engraved upon the minds of everyone in the world. As I put these last few paragraphs together, Israel has invaded the Palestinians in the name of the "War on Terror". We refer to the happenings in the Middle East as "unrest". My, my...how we choose our words. "Unrest" indeed! I don't think we've ever witnessed so many people, men and women, willing to blow themselves up in the hopes of taking more of the "enemy" with them. This whole thing is over religion. Has been for milleniums. What kind of picture do the people in the Middle East have of God? How I wish I could share the concepts in this book with all of them. Suppose they'd listen? Or do you suppose they'd "crucify" anyone who brought these ideas to them? The undertaking seems an impossible task doesn't it?

Lest you think I'm prejudiced toward Arabs and Jews, the same observations could be made in Northern Ireland. The situation in the Middle East seems to have taken the focus off the strife in the North Sea, but it rages on. Pick a place in the world and I'll show you religious strife of one sort or another there. Will it ever change? If you read and study the Bible, you'll know that the world will go on deteriorating this way until Christ comes again the second time. It's in the prophecies.

“Oh My God!”

So, what of it? "Insh Allah" as the Muslims say? It is the will of God and we can do nothing about it? To even suggest that is to refute almost every line of type on the previous pages. Our quest must be to make sure that we as individuals become right with God again. If we do (and we certainly can), we've made our contribution to the future of universal peace. To influence change for the better, we must start with ourselves. We must clearly see and admire the God who made us so as to become changed into His friends. It doesn't happen overnight...but if we want it to happen it will. We will relate to God differently and, as a consequence, we will relate to each other differently...the way God originally intended. Don't you want that? Don't you want it for everybody?

I feel the need to confess some failures in this book too. It starts with a claim on the very first page that it's a work that your fifth-grader can understand. That surely was my hope...but I've reread this thing a number of times now. I've failed miserably in that area. Despite that, it is my hope that you've benefited...that the ideas were somehow expressed with more clarity and simplicity. There's power in simplicity you know.

My sister and a few others told me that chapter 5 was, perhaps a bit insensitive toward Mormon and Muslim believers. "It's just not politically correct, if you know what I mean". She said. It bothered me and still does. I feel the need to apologize to any Mormon or Muslim believers for unintended offense. I probably lost any Mormon or Muslim readers by that chapter. They're possibly not here to receive the apology. Others, however, said the examples were informative and useful in making the point that we need to read and discover things on our own rather than take others' word for it when it comes to beliefs this important. It's a dilemma for me. I would appreciate feedback from anyone on how to more tactfully handle this subject matter.

It is my hope that you've caught a "glimpse" of the cosmic/universal nature of what we're all involved in...that these chapters have provided you with some of the answers about God you've been looking for all your life. I don't want much do I? Sincerely though, I want so much for you to realize the privilege you have in participating in this great demonstration. You can play a part

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in vindicating the God that loves you so! You can understand the purpose that God has for you...why you are here...what you're supposed to do...what He expects of you, and where you go from here! Don't tell me those questions haven't crossed your mind.

You might be asking yourself why on earth I should care about what crosses your mind; why I should care at all about what happens to you. I don't even know you. Well, it ought to be apparent that I'm not doing this for the money! It may be the first time I've undertaken anything requiring this much effort without being concerned about money! In the preface I think I told you that I'm a CPA. I know a pretty fair amount about money, how to make it...how to keep as much of it as possible...how to make it grow. But this has nothing to do with money. If you've paid for this book, it hasn't cost you much. You know that too. As I write this, I'm not even sure how this will be priced, except that I want it to be very affordable...even cheap! I'm going to publish it myself because it probably wouldn't happen any other way! It's not copyrighted. You can copy the heck out of it all you want! I said that in the preface too. OK, what point am I trying to make? It comes down to this:

If you've read this book...you've been led to do so!

Please don't misunderstand this. It's not a pompous statement on my part. I'm really not trying to take any credit for anything here. It's such a fluke or so unusual that someone like me would write a book like this. It's probably also pretty unusual that you've taken the time to read it...or that you came across it at all! There is no special overt marketing, it's not being promoted anywhere...I'm not going on Jay Leno or Dave Letterman or even National Public Radio to discuss it. It isn't being reviewed and likely will never be. It's likely you didn't find it at your local Christian Bookstore either! If you have it and you've read it...you've been led to it. The very thought of that thrills me beyond my ability to describe it.

In any event, it is my prayer and desire that you've been blessed by what's been set out in this book. I'd love to hear from you regarding your reaction to it whether negative or positive. You can reach me at pcinquemani@new.rr.com or you can snail-mail me at:

“Oh My God!”

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Ok, this is finally the end. It's no fairy tale, but we can sure say at the end of this one "and they lived happily forever after"!