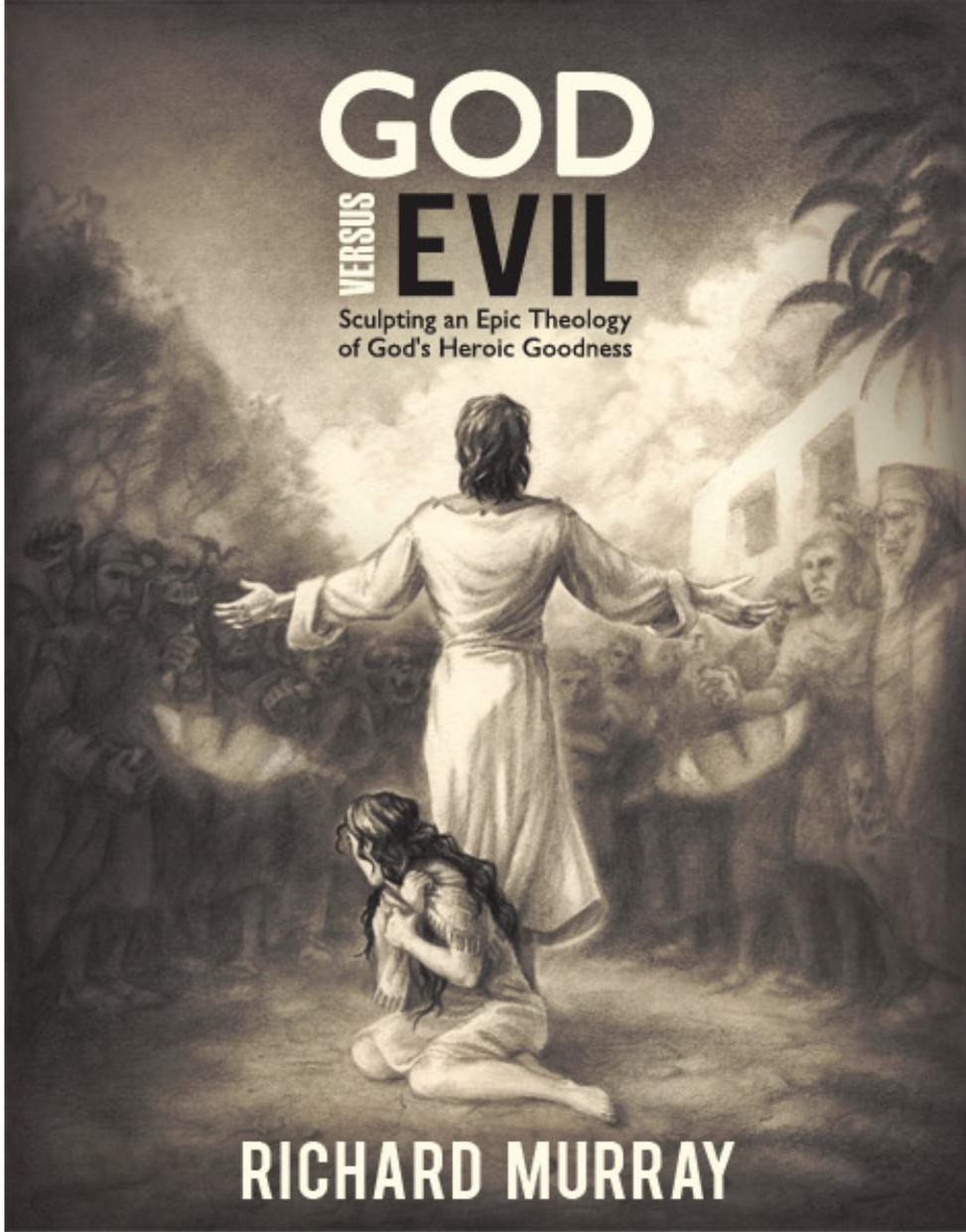


GOD VERSUS EVIL

Sculpting an Epic Theology
of God's Heroic Goodness



RICHARD MURRAY

**TABLE OF CONTENTS--
GOD VERSUS EVIL: SCULPTING AN EPIC THEOLOGY OF GOD'S HEROIC
GOODNESS! -- by *Richard K. Murray***

INTRODUCTION: THE LORD OF LIGHT AND LOVE!

**CHAPTER 1--
BEWARE OF THE ISAIAH 5:20 INFECTION!**

**CHAPTER 2--
DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL?**

**CHAPTER 3--
SATAN: OLD TESTAMENT SERVANT ANGEL OR NEW TESTAMENT COSMIC
REBEL?**

**CHAPTER 4--
A NEW WAY TO READ THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE BRACKET OF TRUTH!**

**CHAPTER 5--
APPLYING "THE BRACKET" TO PHARAOH AND THE TEN PLAGUES!**

**CHAPTER 6--
THE JESUS HERMENEUTIC: THE GLORY OF ALLEGORY!**

**CHAPTER 7--
JESUS CHRIST IS THE REVEALED WRATH OF GOD!**

**CHAPTER 8--
FOUR THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS WHICH WILL ROCK YOUR WORLD!**

**CHAPTER 9--
WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SATAN AND HIS EVIL TO EXIST?**

**CHAPTER 10--
DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT JUST "STAND THERE" AND LET THE DEVIL DO HIS
THING?**

**CHAPTER 11--
WHAT IS THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURES?**

**CHAPTER 12--
ARE "LUCIFER" AND "SATAN" THE SAME PERSON? AND IF SO, WHERE WAS HE
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?**

**CHAPTER 13--
IS "JUSTICE" AN ESSENTIAL PART OF GOD'S NATURE?**

**CHAPTER 14--
WHAT DO WE TELL OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE KILLING GOD OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT?**

**CHAPTER 15--
THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF JOB: BEWARE THE "JOB-
STROBE!"**

**CHAPTER 16--
FOUR REASONS THE EARLY CHURCH DID NOT BELIEVE "HELL" LASTS
FOREVER!**

**CHAPTER 17--
THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD: "CHRISTUS VICTOR!"**

GOD VERSUS EVIL # APPENDIX: ANSWERS TO 70 TOUGH QUESTIONS

INDEX TO QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SATAN'S FAVORITE DISGUISE?

QUESTION 2: IS THE "LESS EVIL" OPTION STILL EVIL?

QUESTION 3: WHO IS THE ONE JUDGING US "HERE" ON EARTH---GOD OR SATAN?

QUESTION 4: ARE THE LAWS OF NATURE ALWAYS FROM GOD?

QUESTION 5: WHY IS IT "REALLY" BETTER TO TURN THE OTHER CHEEK?

QUESTION 6: WHAT IS RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING?

QUESTION 7: WHY DID GOD PUT THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THE GARDEN?

QUESTION 8: WHAT IS THE ONE THING GOD CAN'T DO?

QUESTION 9: DID JESUS JUST STAND BY AND LET LAZARUS DIE?

QUESTION 10: HOW DOES GOD VIEW SIN?

QUESTION 11: IS JESUS THE LION OR THE LAMB?

QUESTION 12: DOES OUR IMAGE OF GOD NEED "DECLUSTERING?"

QUESTION 13: WHAT DOES JESUS' BLOOD AND SPIRIT EACH REPRESENT?

QUESTION 14: IN WHAT SENSE IS JESUS OUR HEALER?

QUESTION 15: DID JESUS NEED TO DIE ON THE CROSS TO SAVE US?

QUESTION 16: JESUS VERSUS MOSES: WHO WOULD WIN AN ARM WRESTLING MATCH?

QUESTION 17: WHAT SHOULD WE NEVER TELL THE CHILDREN OF DISASTER VICTIMS?

QUESTION 18: DID GOD EXECUTE KING HEROD?

QUESTION 19: WHAT IS THE ONE THING JESUS SAYS WE ARE NEVER TO FORGET?

QUESTION 20: DID JESUS DROWN ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE WORLD WITH A KILLER FLOOD? OR WAS IT SATAN?

QUESTION 21: DID JESUS ENDORSE VIOLENCE BY HIS CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE AND HIS CURSING OF THE FIG TREE?

QUESTION 22: "CSI" JERUSALEM: WHO MURDERED ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA?

QUESTION 23: DOES THE BIBLE SAY WE ARE TO "FEAR GOD WHO IS ABLE TO DESTROY BOTH BODY AND SOUL IN HELL?"

QUESTION 24: IS SATAN INVOLVED IN EVERY EVIL OCCURRENCE?

QUESTION 25: WHAT ABOUT ALL THE WRATH IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

QUESTION 26: HOW DO WE TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PAUL'S "PHILOSOPHY" AND PAUL'S "EPIPHANIES" ?

QUESTION 27: RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

QUESTION 28: WHAT WAS THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

QUESTION 29: WHY DIDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT PATRIARCHS EVER MENTION SATAN?

QUESTION 30: DID GOD VIOLENTLY BREAK JACOB'S HIP DURING AN ALL-NIGHT WRESTLING MATCH?

QUESTION 31: IF SATAN HAS "ALREADY" BEEN DEFEATED BY JESUS, WHY IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE STILL GOING ON?

QUESTION 32: DID GOD "REALLY" TELL MOSES TO STONE A POOR MAN JUST FOR PICKING UP STICKS ON THE SABBATH?

QUESTION 33: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW THE BIBLE TO BE SOOO MISUNDERSTOOD BY SOOOO MANY?

QUESTION 34: DID GOD SEEK TO KILL MOSES FOR FAILING TO CIRCUMCISE HIS SON?

QUESTION 35: WHAT IS THE IDOLATRY OF LANGUAGE?

QUESTION 36: DOES GOD GIVE PERMISSION SLIPS FOR EVIL?

QUESTION 37: WILL EVIL ALWAYS BE POSSIBLE, EVEN IN ETERNITY?

QUESTION 38: WHAT IS THE ABSOLUTE BEST BIBLE TRANSLATION EVER?

QUESTION 39: WHY DOES PRAYER FOR HEALING SOMETIMES FAIL?

QUESTION 40: WHAT ABOUT THESE TWO TOUGH PASSAGES ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

QUESTION 41: WHY SHOULD WE READ THE OLD TESTAMENT?

QUESTION 42: WHY WAS THE MAN BORN BLIND IN JOHN 9? IS THIS A BLESSED QUESTION?

QUESTION 43: HOW DOES THE LORD "SCOURGE" US AS HIS SONS?

QUESTION 44: WHY WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST THE GREATEST "OLD COVENANT" BELIEVER?

QUESTION 45: WHAT IS THE SEVERITY OF THE LORD?

QUESTION 46: DOES THE VIOLENCE IN THE PARABLES SUGGEST THAT GOD IS ALSO VIOLENT?

QUESTION 47: JUST WHO IS THE "GOD OF THIS FALLEN WORLD?"

QUESTION 48: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S BLINDNESS? WHAT ABOUT ELYMAS' BLINDNESS? WHAT ABOUT ZACHARIAH'S MUTENESS?

QUESTION 49: DID GOD ACTUALLY TELL ABRAHAM TO SLIT ISAAC'S THROAT AND BURN HIS CORPSE IN THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE?

QUESTION 50: DID ABRAHAM, MOSES AND DAVID REALLY "TALK GOD OUT OF" KILLING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE?

QUESTION 51: TWO KEY QUESTIONS: 1) IS GOD AGAINST ALL VIOLENCE? 2) IF SO, WHY DID HE SEEM TO FAVOR VIOLENT MEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

QUESTION 52: WHO "REALLY" DESTROYED SODOM AND GOMORRA? WHERE WAS GOD? WHERE WAS SATAN?

QUESTION 53: WHAT MAKES US "VULNERABLE" TO SATANIC DISASTERS?

QUESTION 54: DOES GOD REALLY HATE ESAU'S GUTS?

QUESTION 55: WHAT IS THE "FEAR" OF THE LORD?

QUESTION 56: DOES GOD HAVE SOME "PURPOSE" IN "PERMITTING" SATAN TO AFFLICT US?

QUESTION 57: IS THERE ANY REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "CAUSING EVIL" AND "ALLOWING EVIL?"

QUESTION 58: WHY COULDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS HANDLE THE TRUTH ABOUT SATAN?

QUESTION 59: BUT AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO READ THE BIBLE "PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT AND LINE UPON LINE?"

QUESTION 60: ARE WE ALLOWED TO WITHSTAND PETER TO HIS FACE?

QUESTION 61: RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

QUESTION 62: DID JESUS TELL US TO BUY AND BEAR SWORDS?

QUESTION 63: WHAT IS FREEWILL?

QUESTION 64: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH?

QUESTION 65: IF GOD IS ONLY GOOD, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THESE FIVE PASSAGES?

QUESTION 66: DID JESUS EVER APPEAR TO CONTRADICT OR CORRECT THE PLAIN "ON ITS FACE" MEANING OF OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES?

QUESTION 67: IS IT WRONG TO CALL JESUS "SUPER-HEROIC?"

QUESTION 68: WHAT ABOUT THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS?

QUESTION 69: HOW DO WE PUT ON THE MIND OF CHRIST? USE "ABDUCTIVE REASONING!"

QUESTION 70: WHAT DOES THE MOVIE "PINOCCHIO" TEACH US ABOUT FREEWILL?

INTRODUCTION: THE LORD OF LIGHT AND LOVE!

"This is God's unchangeable disposition towards the creation; He can be nothing else, but all goodness towards it because He can be nothing towards the creation but that which He is and was and ever shall be in Himself . . . an eternal unchangeable will to all goodness, and which can will nothing else to all eternity, but to communicate good, and blessing and happiness and perfection to every life, according to its capacity to receive it. Had I one hundred lives, I could with more ease part with them all, by suffering one hundred deaths than give up this lovely idea of God." William Law

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

Jesus is the key. As God in the flesh, He revealed the character, nature and power of His Father. God is good. Only good. Always good. God didn't create evil. He doesn't allow it. He won't use it. No exceptions. No qualifications. No loopholes. It is a truth, perhaps the ultimate truth, that Jesus came to reveal - - God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. This is a truth too good not to be true.

Yet, this truth is something the Body of Christ doesn't know that it doesn't know - - and it is the mother of all blind spots. Of course, there are many things the Body does know - - like salvation, forgiveness and Spiritual gifts. Then, there are other things the Body knows that it doesn't fully know yet - - like Heaven, eternity, and the length, breadth, depth and height of God's love. Yet, there is something crucial missing from the Body that it doesn't know that it doesn't know. This blind spot is the source of all Spiritual failure - - failed faith, failed healings, failed joy, failed relationships and failed love.

What is this blind spot that we don't know that we don't know? It is the perpetually perfect goodness of God. Certainly, the Body of Christ has given lip-service to the concept of God's goodness. We may often say, pray or sing, "God is good." Yet, we thoroughly contaminate and cripple the reality of God's goodness by what we really think and believe about Him. Even though we call God good, we still tragically believe God creates, causes or allows evil.

Disasters are called "acts of God," the "judgments of God" or the "allowances of God." Fallen man chooses his poison from these three options, but all three are deadly and dead wrong. If evil happenings are "acts of God," then we have labeled God as the author of evil. If we label evil events as the "judgments of God," then we have cast God as violent, wrathful and vengeful. Lastly, if we fall back to the position that while God doesn't actively cause evil, He still certainly allows it for His own purposes, then we paint God as a callous or indifferent bystander who refuses to save those in need. The point is that any of the above views of God is entirely inconsistent with the goodness of God. If we are trapped in one of these three wrong views of God, then we truly don't know that we don't know the true goodness of God.

The renewing of the mind is our deliverance from ignored ignorance. The Fifteenth Century Christian writer Nicholas of Cusa called this renewal “learned ignorance,” because the Holy Spirit must first teach us what we don’t know before He can teach us what we need to know. As we repent, we first realize that we haven’t known that we haven’t known God’s true nature. From this place of humility, we are now empty sponges ready to begin absorbing the fullness of God’s goodness.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Rom. 12:2.

THE BLAME GAME

As a criminal defense attorney, I am sensitive to the nature of any accusation. Police accuse citizens. Citizens accuse police. Lawyers accuse everybody except their clients. Judges and juries are often brought into the fray and are accused of improper or impure motivations. There seems to be something in the fallen human psyche that must blame another for current misfortune and evil. The prophet Isaiah called this Satanic “yoke the putting forth of the finger and speaking vanity.” Is. 58:9. He also prophesied that we would again hear the voice of God when this yoke of blame-shifting was put away from our midst. Consider how blame-shifting pervades every aspect of our society. From family squabbles, to strife at work, to politics, to sporting events - - finger-pointing is king.

This blame-shifting began in the Garden of Eden when Adam blamed his fall on “the woman you (God) gave me.” Thus, Adam blamed both God and Eve for his fall. Eve herself blamed “the serpent” for her fall. Nobody in the situation took the responsibility for themselves.

Today, it is no different. God is blamed for evil. God caused or allowed the 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers. God caused or allowed Hurricanes Rita and Katrina to destroy millions of lives. God causes or allows birth defects, sickness, rape, molestations, divorces, kidnappings, genocide, war, terrorism, murders and disaster. While Satan is sometimes seen as a contributing factor, he is always portrayed as a dog on God’s leash. In other words, Satan only and always does what God permits him to do.

The sad irony in all this is that God is the only party who is totally innocent. He had nothing to do with Adam or Eve sinning. His only desire was for them to be blessed and protected. Adam and Eve pressured out and rejected God’s manifest presence out of their “now.” The moment they pushed God away was the moment Satan filled the vacuum with his wrathful deceptions. Yet, in a real way, Adam and Eve both wanted to be lied to already. Augustine rightly believed that a step of preconditioning must be present prior to any act of obedience or disobedience. This precondition is the heart’s allowance or disallowance of God’s participation in the “now.” When God is allowed to

participate, there is freedom and true good. Where God is “quenched” or “grieved” out of our “now,” evil and Satanic oppression rushes in to fill the vacuum. Adam and Eve were prepared to hear and believe a lie the moment they stopped recognizing and trusting God’s immediate presence and goodness. Oswald Chambers said, “The origin of all sin is found in the mistrust of God’s character.”

Just consider the immediate effect of their sin on their perceptions of God. Before the fall, Adam and Eve weren’t terrified of God. After the fall, they were cowering fugitives. Before the fall, they were unashamed to be wholly open and naked with the Lord and each other. After the fall, they sought fig leaves to cover and insulate themselves from God and each other. The major fig leaf they used was blame-shifting. They verbally hid behind their accusations toward God. They justified their departing from God by attributing harshness and wrath to God.

These fig leaves still cover our hearts today. We insulate ourselves from evil by blaming it on God. We may or may not be overt in our language. We may boldly say God creates all evil for His own mysterious purposes. Or, we may say that God may not create evil, but He expressly allows evil. Or, we may say that God may not cause or allow evil, but He certainly uses evil to work out a good end. One purpose of this book is to show that all of the above assertions are really -9- the same lie - - namely, that evil can be traced back to God. This lie, in any form, is a fig leaf of mistrust behind which we hide from God’s immediate presence. The lie here is always the same - - God’s heart for me is not totally good because He ultimately will send or allow evil to come my way.

The book of James is crystal clear that God has no relationship to or with evil: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Jas. 1:12-17.

The Greek word for “tempt” in the above passage is “peirazo” and means “to test, entice, discipline, prove, tempt and try.” God doesn’t -10- test us with evil, entice us with evil, discipline us with evil, prove anything with evil, tempt anybody with evil or try anybody with evil. God didn’t create evil, doesn’t allow evil and won’t use evil as a sculpting tool for righteousness. It is impossible because evil is not in His divine nature. Just as it is impossible for God to lie (Tit. 1:2) because it is contrary to His nature, it is impossible for God to create, use or allow evil because it simply is not in Him.

Where evil comes from, how it operates, and how it is overcome will be a key theme of this book. However, the heart of this book is the goodness of God - - His perfect character and flawless nature as revealed in Jesus Christ. In the life of Jesus is found the remedy to all the evils of the world - - past, present and future. Jesus is God’s

disallowance of evil. This is the power of the cross - - to absorb evil and swallow it up in victory. God overcomes evil one way and one way only - - with good. How Jesus accomplishes this is the grand theme of this book.

GOD IN SAMURAI ARMOR

Many years ago the Lord quickened an image to my heart. In this vision, I saw God wearing Samaurai armor. I knew the armor was wrong and did not accurately convey who God really was. Yet, I could still feel love coming out from behind the armor. God did not abandon me even though I was projecting wrong images which blocked me from seeing His true nature. I then peeled off the Samaurai armor from around God. But as I stepped back, I could see there was another suit of armor underneath. This armor was medieval in style.

I could see God a little more clearly and truer to form. Yet, the armor still obscured a pure vision of God. I then pulled off layer after layer of this armor until there was nothing man-made left between God and me. There were no more barriers to intimacy. I could now see God in His truest form - - an incredibly muscular shepard. I asked the Lord what the armor symbolized. As I meditated, the Lord revealed to me that the armor represents the wrong ideas of God we project onto His being. These wrong ideas block, hinder, obscure, twist or deform our image of God.

The result? A distorted, distant and remote relationship with our Lord. It is no coincidence that one of the Hebrew definitions of "Satan" means "remoteness" or "the remote one." Satan tries to distort our image of God by deceiving us into projecting wrong armor onto God's being. This wrong armor includes chilling ideas about God causing or actively allowing evil.

The end result is remoteness. Like the frozen planet Pluto which orbits the Sun at the most distant point in the solar system, so too does Satan (the remote one) seek to obstruct and distance our orbit of intimacy around the Lord. As we strip the false armor of wrong ideas about God, our orbit around God's goodness and true nature draws closer and closer. Eventually, like the hot planet Mercury, we will burn with the pure fire of God which can only come from unhindered intimacy and holiness. Though God loved us the same when we orbited remotely around Him, we are now the ones who are able to love him more and more as we draw ever closer to Him. As we strip away the armor of misconceptions about God, we are able to embrace Him heart to heart. As we remove all man-made barriers, we are free to see Him as Jesus saw the Father - - pure love, pure goodness and pure strength. We then can be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:48).

This vision of God in Samaurai Armor ultimately led me to the central revelation of this book. God is not guilty of evil. He didn't create it, doesn't use it, and won't allow it. God is guilty of goodness, perfection, light, love and truth. This book is about establishing both the innocence and goodness of God. Distorted images about God will be

corrected. God's glory will be revealed as His goodness. This revelation is expressed in two words - - Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel - - the "good news" of a good God. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Lu. 2:14. The angels heralded that this was the message and purpose of Jesus' life - - to reveal the perfect goodness of God as it always exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. "The goodness of God endureth continually." Ps. 52:1. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." Heb. 13:8.

Unfortunately, just like the SAMURAI vision, we can project false armor onto Jesus which distorts the true essence of His divine nature. In this book, we will address, or I should say, "undress" these distortions so that the reality of Jesus will be manifest clearly. This distortion is not unlike visiting the fun-house mirrors at fairs or carnivals. I remember as a boy when I would go to the fun-house mirrors, I would see my reflection in various degrees of distortion. One mirror would show distortions of length. The next mirror would show distortions of width. Other mirrors would show various warped and often monstrous views. The point is that even though I was physically there in front of -15- the mirrors, the mirrors were not reflecting my true image. So too with Jesus, we are mirrors that are meant to reflect His love and nature. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. 3:18.

The implication of this verse is that to be transformed into the same image from glory to glory, we must accurately seek the proper image. In other words, we must remove all fun-house mirrors which improperly reflect the light of God which lives within us as Christians. Problems arise when we are beholding and being inspired by the true presence of God, yet we have inner distortions which cause us to reflect that image in a warped way.

The men who wrote the Bible were all inspired by the true presence of God revealed to their hearts, yet the writers had varying degrees of distortions that occasionally warped the image of God they expressed. This explains any and all Scriptures which seem to attribute evil to God - - they are fun-house distortions of true images. The purpose of this book is to remove the distortions from our hearts and minds so that we will be a true mirror ready and able to reflect the light of God in a fallen world. Consider the following distortions of God's character prevalent today.

THE FOUR VIEWS OF GOD

There are basically four (4) views of God for those who in fact believe in God:

1. God as Puppeteer. In this view, God pulls all the strings of all the created things all of the time. Man, Satan, angels and demons are all on God's leashes without any free will. WRONG!!!

2. God as Jekyll and Hyde. In this view, God is schizophrenic. He is a lover who may bless us today, but may transform into a wrathful monster tomorrow as He afflicts us with sickness, disaster and death. WRONG!!!

3. God as Good Cop\Bad Cop. In this view, God is the good cop to Satan's bad cop. God plays it nice with us as long as we cooperate. But, when we fail to obey, God leaves the room and loosens the bad cop (Satan) on us to cruelly manipulate, intimidate and dominate us into cooperating with God. In this view, God and Satan are on the same side. They just use different tactics. WRONG!!!

4) God as Superman. This is the correct view. God is super-heroic. He never does evil. He never allows evil when He is called on in faith to stop it. He patrols, rescues and protects all the citizens of His City of Light. He never violates the freedom of men, but He will do everything He can to encourage and strengthen the hearts of men. He fights villainy in every form. He is flawless and fearless. The only thing that can drive His presence away is the kryptonite of unbelief. We must find all the hidden kryptonite in our life and destroy it, or God will not have full access to deliver us from every enemy.

JOHN'S GOSPEL OF GOODNESS

Theologians often refer to the Gospel by different means. For example, Luke's writings are called the Lukan Gospel, Paul's writings the Pauline Gospel, Mark's writings the Markan Gospel, Peter's writings the Petrine Gospel, and John's writings the Johannine Gospel. Different terms are used depending on the particular apostle's writings being discussed. All apostles preached the same essential Gospel in the sense that all centered on salvation through Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God. However, each apostle had a slightly different emphasis. Matthew is often thought to have tailored his Gospel presentation to the Jews, Mark to the Romans, and Luke to the other Gentile nations. Paul received what he called "my Gospel" while he spent years in the Arabian wilderness. Peter indicated that Paul's Gospel was sometimes difficult to understand, but that it was the true Gospel.

The apostle John likewise had a unique emphasis on the Gospel. Listen to how he summarizes the message of Jesus Christ: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." 1 Jn. 1:5. John had unique standing among all the Apostles. He is referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He speaks of life in God in alarmingly simple but profound terms. God is love. Jesus is God. Whosoever is born of God sins not. Whosoever sins is of the devil.

Of all the ways John might summarize the Gospel, he decided that the revelation of God as absolute light with no darkness was the core revelation of Jesus Christ. I heartily agree, and it is this Johannine Gospel view which this book will adopt, detail and develop. The Gospel emphasis of this book then is the revelation of the character of God through Jesus Christ as purely light, love, truth, spirit, life and goodness. There is no darkness, wrath, deception, fleshliness, death or evil in God's nature.

There are many, many questions that have already begun to surface in the mind of each reader. I promise to lay a scriptural foundation that will answer every question according to God's goodness. There are three things I ask of every reader.

First, WANT this to be true. If there was a way to believe that God's nature is good and only good and that He never harms, kills, destroys or tempts us - - would you let yourself believe it, even if it cost you your view of a wrathful and condemning God? A few people have considered this teaching but not wanted it to be true from the beginning. They wanted to hang on to their anger and violence so that they could believe that sooner or later their enemies would be destroyed by their avenging God of wrath. If you will allow it, this teaching will beat your soul's sword into a plowshare and you will learn war no more. Want this to be true!

Second, commit your energy to this project. As you proceed through the book, it will take much mental energy to work through these issues. The answer is ultimately simple, but the process to get there is somewhat complex. I am reminded of a story I once heard about martial arts expert Bruce Lee. When he began studying the martial arts, he simply thought that a fist was just a fist. But as he studied the fist, including the numerous bones, tendon connections and joint-angles involved, he saw that the hand was one of the most complex structures he had ever seen. But there came a day when he had so studied and mastered the intricacies of the hand, that he had another flash of great insight - a fist is just a fist. In other words, Bruce Lee had to cross the field of complexity in order to get to true simplicity. The view of God's goodness today has largely been unexamined. People may say they believe in the simple goodness of God, yet they haven't crossed the field of complexity to truly understand it. Thus, they have no answers for atheists, agnostics, children or even other Christians. These doubts and suspicions about God's nature keep us in fear and doubt towards Him. We admire Him and certainly feel His love from time to time, but there is an inhibition that keeps us from fully releasing our hearts to Him because we still don't trust His nature fully. I expect this book to help us place perfect trust in our perfect Savior.

Lastly, please read all the chapters and don't get ahead of yourself. You may have a question while reading one chapter that has to do with a later chapter. Focus on the current chapter. Your question will be answered in one form or another by the end of the book. Sometimes, we can get ahead of ourselves and allow nagging questions to keep us from hearing the word of the moment. These chapters build on each other and have a rock-solid foundation - - Jesus Christ, who declares that God is light and in Him is no darkness.

The purpose of this book is to purge out all double-minded notions that God may be good, yet He creates, uses or allows evil. Knowing the absolute goodness of God allows us to responsibly, faithfully, accurately and lovingly interact with His true character. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Rom 12:2. In the process, Satan is evicted and evicted from every corner of our lives. Our own iniquity, fear and hatred is also purged away in righteousness and true holiness. This is a glorious concept not too good to be true. Now let the voyage into God’s goodness begin!

CHAPTER 1-- BEWARE OF THE ISAIAH 5:20 INFECTION!

“It is quite clear that the whole teaching of Jesus Christ about God, expressed alike in His words and in the whole fashion and mold of His character, implies that God is always nearer, mightier, more loving, and more free to help every one of us than any one of us realizes. This alone is what makes His incessant summons to faith, and to more faith, coherent and reasonable. This again seems to me to imply that mankind is generally under a hypnotic spell about God, which is always contracting and chilling our thoughts of Him and leading to all kinds of depressingly terrifying illusions about Him.”
D. S. Cairnes

I have bad news and good news for you. The bad news is that there is a world-wide Infection which has left its ravaging mark on every man, woman and child who has ever lived, including you and me. The good news is that there is an ongoing cure that we are to continue to take on a daily basis - the spirit and truth of Jesus Christ. What is the Infection? How does it harm us? What are the symptoms?

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” Is. 5:20.

The Isaiah 5:20 Infection causes us to exchange the truth of God for a lie. We confuse and substitute Satan’s cruelty for God’s love, Satan’s oppressions for God’s judgments, and Satan’s will for God’s will. Without being consciously aware of it, we call the evil of Satan the “mysterious” but good will of God. Instead of viewing God as the hero and lover of our soul, we see Him as a wrathful and unknowable puppeteer who pulls all the strings of evil and misfortune for our supposed “good.”

The way to diagnose this Infection is to consider the words it causes a man to speak. The Isaiah 5:20 Infection will cause men to speak this way: God creates evil; God uses evil; God allows evil; God’s wrath kills\destroys man; God puts\allows sickness on people; God judged\allowed America to suffer 9/11 and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; and God causes\allows children to die, throats to be slit, rapes, child molestations, kidnappings, disasters and tortures.

The purest form of this Infection will declare that God directly causes these things, while at the same time trying to give glory to God for His “sovereign” will. The lesser, but still deadly, form of this Infection seeks to lessen God’s responsibility by saying that God merely allows evil rather than causes it. Even though he had a thoroughly infected view of God overall, John Calvin rightly believed that there is absolutely no difference between God causing evil and God allowing evil.

To permit, to allow, to ordain, to will all mean the same thing if you believe in a God who is able to manipulate any and all events at any and all times. In other words, if God can alter any evil event, but He chooses not to, then He has willed it. His refusal to stop an act is in itself an affirmative act of causation, a necessary stamp of approval required for

any event to happen. Thus, if God causes or allows evil, then He is just as guilty for its occurrence.

The Hebrew mind-set on this point is in agreement with Calvin. It is well known that Hebrew language has no proper distinction between an active “causing” and passive “letting.” Morally speaking, there is certainly no distinction. As Martin Luther King said, “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really co-operating with it.”

The Oklahoma authorities prosecuted both those who actually bombed the federal building as well as those who allowed it to be bombed by not reporting what they knew to the authorities. Many of the victims’ families couldn’t understand why all those involved didn’t receive the exact same sentence. They couldn’t grasp any distinction between doing evil and allowing evil. To allow it is to do it.

The point is that we must not and cannot view God this way. This infected way of thinking calls the evil of the world the will of God. No wonder passion for God is so low. G. K. Chesterton said that he was “astonished at how little astonishment” there was for God. The Isaiah 5:20 Infection explains the lack of astonishment.

God is un-loveable if He has anything to do with causing\allowing evil. We can dress up the problem of evil with noble terms like, “God’s ways are higher than ours,” or “God allows evil for the greater good,” or “God had a reason for allowing (fill in your own evil event).”

It won’t wash, not now, not ever. Tortured children, dying parents, crippling sicknesses, mud slides killing whole villages, Tsunamis drowning hundreds of thousands, earthquakes swallowing up whole populations, genocides in Africa, ethnic cleansings in Bosnia, terror bombings, civil wars - - enough! God has nothing to do with any of these. If God were responsible for evil, then Dostoevsky’s character Ivan in The Brothers Karamzov would be right in saying, “I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It’s not worth the tears of . . . one tortured child.”

Although Job sounded piously noble when, in the midst of great affliction, he declared, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,” this statement betrays an ignorance of God’s true character. Job 13:15. God doesn’t kill His children.

Elihu, the only person in the whole book of Job who wasn’t rebuked as speaking “words without knowledge,” rightly informed Job that “the Almighty . . . will not afflict.” Job 37:23; 38:1-2; 42:7-10. Job himself later repented for speaking accusations against God which were not right. “Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further. . . . Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered things that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. . . . I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.” Job 40:3-5; Job 42:3; 42:5.

Job was feverish with the Is. 5:20 Infection. So were his friends. None of them spoke rightly of God, except Elihu. Job was a righteous man, but he lacked direct and exact knowledge of God's nature. God appeared at the end of the book of Job to declare Himself. When Job saw God's true nature and repented of his own shameful view of God, then the Lord was able to manifest His goodness toward Job. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before." Job 42:10.

We need to follow Job's lead and renew our minds to the GOOD, PERFECT, and ACCEPTABLE will of the Lord. Then, our captivity to wrong thinking about the Lord will be turned as was Job's.

WHAT FUNHOUSE MIRRORS TEACH US ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT!

Have you ever stood in front of a FUNHOUSE MIRROR? Even though you appear appear perfectly normal to the naked eye, the mirror says otherwise. The "surface warps" cause the mirror to distort the reflected image. The mirror captures the "real" subject, but then distorts it in an "unreal" way.

On some levels, the Old Testament writers have occasional warps on their hearts which cause the image of God they are beholding to distort as it reflects toward us. The reflection they NOW project to us from thousands of years ago has been partially distorted by their "warped" misperceptions OF God and mis-perceptions ABOUT God.

These distortions allow God to be distorted into a killer of His own offspring, the author of all evil, and the bringer of destructive darkness. He is seen as both vengeful smiter and wrathful afflicter. God is portrayed as the bringer of plagues, oppressions, genocides, fratricides, infanticides, famines and wars.

Certainly these misperceptions and mis-presumptions are not the ONLY way God is seen in the Old Testament. He IS frequently also RIGHTLY praised and regaled as a compassionate creator, a mighty king, and a virtuous ruler who is full of loving-kindness and tender-mercies.

But what about all those distortions?

Like a warped FUNHOUSE MIRROR reflects a distorted image of an undistorted person, so too did Old Testament men sometimes distort the image of an undistorted God because of their partially warped hearts and minds. God WAS actually appearing to them, but their own limitations and "sleight capacity" (Calvin) to process divine truth caused their image of God to warp.

And these distortions affect not JUST from what we NOW think ABOUT God, but also how we NOW often act TOWARD God. They can cause us to act like a condemned

beggar before God. We find ourselves fearfully trembling in prayer, pitifully begging Him to stay His wrath, all the while cringing while we desperately urge Him to repent of His planned evil toward us.

Why are the distortions there in the first place? Who or what put caused our spiritual senses to warp? The answer is painfully simple. WE did! With Satan's help. Satan duped us into WANTING to ditch God as their head.

To ditch God, they had to first ditch His good character. As Oswald Chambers said, "The origin of ALL sin is found in the mistrust of God's character." To forsake God's presence, we first have to forsake the truth about His nature.

THE ONLY WAY TO ESCAPE GOD'S IRRESISTIBLE GOODNESS IS TO BELIEVE A FOUNDATIONAL LIE "ABOUT" GOD'S CHARACTER!

Satan provided that foundational lie. The only way Satan could lure us away from a life of continually worshipping God's light with a single eye was to sell us a lie about God's nature. This lie was a "fig leaf" we could use to cover our eyes WITH and hide from God BEHIND. Once hidden, Satan convinced us we could have our own way, be our own God and create our own existence apart from God. Of course, Satan's real motive here was to oppressively rule us and this fallen world as his own, and NOT to give us any personal freedom.

So, the simple reason we don't perceive His true nature is that we have believed a Satanic lie about him. And this lie has warped every man's heart and corrupted their ability to accurately reflect the Divine Nature.

So, what was the Satanic lie? In essence it was this: "Eat this fruit and you will know God as He truly is, as BOTH good and evil. And you will know yourself the same way, as BOTH good and evil."

Adam was the first to eat from this poisonous tree. And the very second he did, his view of God changed. He now saw God as a wrathful smiter to cringe and hide FROM, rather than a forgiving and helping Father to run TOWARD.

The first Adam ate from the Tree of Knowing God as BOTH Good and Evil:

- he saw God as BOTH light and dark
- he saw God as BOTH lover and killer
- he saw God as BOTH afflicter and healer.

And fear, death, condemnation and oppression ruled the world of the first Adam. And the trend continued throughout the Old Testament.

But, then came Jesus as the second Adam, and He had a message. And this message would forever remove and smooth all the warps from our interior "funhouse mirrors."

This explosive truth would finally allow man to accurately perceive and reflect the glory of God.

What was this message that Jesus gave us in the New Testament?

"God is light and in Him is NO darkness. It is impossible for my Father to commit evil. There is no shadow of turning in Him. Only perfect gifts come from the Father of lights. He has no connection to evil whatsoever. And let no man say He does. Satan steals, kills, and destroys, but my Father and I give ONLY life abundant. I have come to destroy all the evil works of the devil." 1 John 1:5; James 1:13-17; John 10:10; 1 John 3:8.

The second Adam ate from the Tree of Knowing God as ONLY Life Abundant:

- He saw God as ONLY light and NEVER dark
- He saw God as ONLY lover and NEVER killer
- He saw God as ONLY healer and NEVER afflicter.

When we, by communion (John 6:53), partake of Jesus' flesh and Jesus' blood, we are reaffirming ourselves as member of the second Adam club, as well reaffirming our complete resignation from the first Adam's club. We no longer eat from the Tree of Knowing God as BOTH Good and Evil. We eat exclusively at the Tree of Knowing God ONLY as Abundant Life. Jesus IS the Tree of Life!

No more FUNHOUSE MIRRORS! And WE are transformed into His same image faith to faith, and glory to glory!

Below is an outline of the ten essential truths of God's character which will be developed in the rest of this book.

THE TEN TRUTHS OF GOD'S GOODNESS

1) GOD IS LIGHT AND IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS (1 John 1:5). ONLY good and perfect gifts come down from the "shadowless" Father of lights (Ja 1:16-20). Let no man say God tempts, tests, tries, proves, discipline or entices any person with evil (James 1:13-17). NO evil shall befall us and His angels shall keep us in all our ways (Psalm 91). NO deadly thing shall harm us (Mark 16:17-18). God's armor quenches ALL the missiles of Satan (Ephesians 6:10-17). Jesus has ALREADY conquered and stripped ALL principalities and powers (Col. 2:15).

2) GOD DOES NOT ALLOW EVIL, HE DISALLOWS IT. Jesus Christ is God's total disallowance of evil. In fact, Jesus has ALREADY disallowed all evil. Be of good cheer, Jesus has ALREADY overcome ALL the things of the world: the lust of the eye, the lust

of the flesh and the pride of life (Jn 16:33; 1 John 2:16). Jesus tells us that whatever we bind on Earth has “already” been bound in Heaven.

The original Greek of Matthew 18:18 and 16:19 both clearly say that we have the authority to bind on Earth that which is already bound in Heaven. Interlinear translations agree that these verses convey the idea that, “whatever you might bind on the Earth will be, having been bound in the Heavens already.” It gets even better. Not only has the demonic been demolished, but we have also already been completely healed of all our sins, sorrows and sicknesses. Jesus again completed this healing long ago through His Cross and Resurrection: “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” 1 Pet. 2:24.

But, if demons are defeated and all our sins and sicknesses healed, then why don't we see this “always already” victory right now? “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; . . . Thou HAST [already] put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But NOW WE SEE NOT YET all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” Heb. 2:3, 8-9.

This passage is clear that all things have already been put under Jesus, but we don't yet see them put under Jesus. The reason? Because of our individual and corporate “neglect” of “so great a salvation.” Both Satan and Evil have no gasoline left in their tank because Jesus drained it all away at the Cross. They are functioning today solely off of the fumes of our neglect of Jesus' great salvation. What makes this salvation so great is its “always already” aspect. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convince us of the accomplished benefits of this great salvation. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” 1 Cor. 2:12.

3) God never operates in the power of death, Satan does (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus said Satan is the murderer and liar from the beginning (John 8:44). Satan steals, kills and destroys, God gives life (John 10:10). Death is an enemy of God, NOT a friend (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

4) GOD ONLY OPERATES IN FORMS OF LIFE-- THE GIVING, PROTECTION, AND HEALING OF IT. The dividing line is revealed in John 10:10: Satan steals, kills and destroys, while Jesus ONLY operates in bestowing various forms of abundant life. Jesus came to expose and destroy the death-works of Satan by imparting the life-works of God (1 John 3:8).

Here is God's dilemma in communicating with fallen man. How can a God who thinks and speaks only life communicate effectively to a people who have chosen to think and hear only death? Every "life offer" given by God is heard by man as a "death threat." Every "exhortation" by God is processed by man as a "condemnation." Every "praise party" from God degenerates into a "pity party" by man.

The renewing of the mind is God "retooling" our souls to learn a new language--the language of LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS so that we may discover the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God in every area of our being. This language speaks only in terms of light and NO darkness. This language speaks only in terms of life and NO death. This language speaks only in terms of love and NO wrath. Ready to learn it? Fluently? Fully? If so, we must renounce death as our first and primary language. No death spoken here! Death is now a dead language. We will not speak death. We will not think death. We will not honor death. Death is an enemy language we no longer accept as our native tongue. L' Chaim! To Life!

5) SCRIPTURES MUST BE READ BY THE SPIRIT AND NOT BY THE LETTER. ----the letter kills but the spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The Holy Spirit doesn't test us on Bible knowledge, the Bible tests us on Holy Spirit knowledge. We must let the character of God define Scripture RATHER than allowing the Scripture to define God's character. Scripture is the launching pad of truth, not the landing strip.

God is slumming when He uses human language: Does God communicate WITH language or does He communicate DESPITE our language? Does human language carry the actual communication of God, or does it, at its best, merely point us to seek a deeper realm where God speaks to us without using language? Could it be that human language, the very thing we use to describe our interactions with God, ends up being the very thing that hinders us from better communicating with Him?

Saint Augustine said that the even the person who "says" the most about God is still but "dumb." His point was that human language is woefully inadequate to impart the knowledge of God. And yet we often hold language as the highest expression of God, when in fact it is one of the lowest.

The more I hear God, the less I hear language. God speaks primarily by "tone." That tone is love, not language. Language can describe it. Language can polish it. Language can explain aspects of it. Language can even enhance it on occasion. BUT language by itself cannot contain or deliver the essence of God's love. In a word, language can't ARTICULATE the Kingdom of God. Isn't this the very reason Jesus never ARTICULATED what God's Kingdom WAS, only what it was LIKE? He knew human language could not convey God's Kingdom, so He used parables of comparison rather than language of definition.

We must be beware the idolatry of language. We are no longer slaves to language. The Spirit sings all meaning to us through the quality, character and strength of God's

goodness. I can read something literally when the Spirit sings to me that it expresses God's true character. I will not read literally when the Spirit "sounds" a different meaning to me. GOD'S TONE ALONE DEFINES ALL SCRIPTURE.

We must loosen our grip on human language. The tower of Babel proved human communication was cursed. In contrast, Pentecost proved how divine communication was blessed. Wasn't that the purpose of the gift of tongues at Pentecost--- to show that heavenly language unites and blesses? God was telling all men to loosen their grip on their own natural understanding, to stop idolizing language, to stop worshipping the letter, and to stop loving the literal. Instead, there is a non-verbal land of milk and honey waiting for us. This land flows with unspoken unctions, transcendent tingles, virtuous vibes, inner illuminations, incomprehensible utterances, and groanings beyond words. When we think of God, words will no longer initially come to mind. Rather, a "tone," a "vibe," a "sensation," a "knowing" fills the heart with divine recognition.

6) God is only all-powerful within the context of His character. It is impossible for God to lie, coerce, kill, etc. (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).

Consider this quote from Saint Anselm: "How can you be omnipotent, O God, if you cannot do all things? How can you do all things if you cannot sin - - if you cannot lie, if you cannot make false what is true? If you are unable to sin, you cannot claim to be able to do all things. Or is it that sin stems not from power, but from powerlessness? For those who commit sin have so little power over their own natures that they actually harm themselves. They are at the mercy of forces which they cannot opposeThe more people have power to commit sin, the more they are powerless. So, Lord God, you are in fact more truly omnipotent because you cannot act through powerlessness." Proslogion, Chapter 7.

BOTTOM LINE: God is NOT all-powerfully cruel, coercive, destructive and deceptive. God IS all-powerfully patient, merciful, protective and healing.

7) The Old Testament had an undifferentiated view of God and Satan. Moses and the other Old Testament saints had developmental limitations issues which affected their ability to process the divine impulses sent by God. Moses in the rock could only partially see God's goodness (Ex.33:17-23). Moses striking the rock misrepresented God's character (Numbers 20) and kept him out of the promised land..

Both ancient and modern Judaism wrongly saw Satan as God's angry voice, an obedient servant angel, God's official minister of wrath, His left hand, His death angel, the executor of His temptation, trials and judgments.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says confirms this dynamic: "Satan...is...identified with the angel of death. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of

temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9.

The renowned INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA is in full agreement with this in its entry on Satan: "The Old Testament does not contain the fully developed doctrine of Satan found in the New Testament. It does not portray him as at the head of a kingdom, ruling over kindred natures and an apostate from the family of God.... It is a significant fact that the statements concerning Satan become numerous and definite only in the New Testament. The daylight of the Christian revelation was necessary in order to uncover the lurking foe, dimly disclosed but by no means fully known in the earlier revelation.... In the early states of religious thinking it would seem to be difficult, if not impossible, to hold the sovereignty of God without attributing to His agency those evils in the world which are more or less directly connected with judgment and punishment.... The progressive revelation of God's character and purpose, which more and more imperatively demands that the origin of moral evil, and consequently natural evil, must be traced to the created will in opposition to the Divine, leads to the the ultimate declaration that Satan is a morally fallen being to whose conquest the Divine Power in history is pledged."

Author Stephen Harris likewise notes that the Old Testament Satan is not the same entity as the New Testament Satan. In the Old Testament, "The Satan figure acts as Yahweh's spy and prosecuting attorney whose job is to bring human misconduct to the deity's attention and, if possible, persuade Yahweh to punish it. Throughout the Old Testament the Satan remains among the divine 'sons,' serves as God's administrative agent, and thus reveals a facet of the divine personality.... At the outset, some Bible writers saw all things, good and evil alike, as emanating from a single source-- Yahweh. Israel's strict monotheistic credo decreed that Yahweh alone caused both joys and sorrows, prosperity and punishment (Deut. 28).... The canonical Hebrew Bible grants the Satan scant space and little power. Whereas the Old Testament Satan can nothing without Yahweh's express permission, in the New Testament he behaves as an independent force who competes with the Creator for human souls.... According to Mark's Gospel, one of Jesus' major goals is to break up Satan's kingdom and the hold that he and lesser evil spirits exercise on the people. Hence, Mark stresses Jesus' works of exorcising devils and dispossessing the victims of demonic control. The New Testament, then-- in sharp contrast to the Old-- shows Satan and the devil as one, a focus of cosmic evil totally opposed to the Creator God. This 'evil one' is the origin of lies, sin, suffering, sickness and death." UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE: A READER'S INTRODUCTION, pages 26-28.

8) The Old Testament "wrath of God" is the mislabeled destruction of Satan. Here is the perfect Scriptural example:

"And again THE ANGER OF THE LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 Sam. 24:1.

"And SATAN stood up against Israel, and PROVOKED David to number Israel..." 1 Chr. 21:1.

The above passages describe the same event where David sinned by numbering Israel. Same event. Same David. Same sin. Same result: 70,000 dead Israelites, but a different cause of evil. The Samuel passage attributes it to the anger of the Lord while the Chronicles passage attributes it to Satan. If the Old Testament viewed "the wrath of God" as the exact same thing as "the oppression of Satan," where does that leave us in the New Testament?

Much of today's confusion in reading the Bible comes this same Old Testament dynamic of NOT accurately separating Satan from God in our understanding. Jesus came to reveal the Father, to "cull out" Satan from our image of God. We judge Satan by removing him from our image of God. Until Jesus came, nobody knew the true heart of the Father in the Old Testament (John 1:18; 5:37).

9) God's judgments are purging and restorative, not punitive and destructive.

The Greek "kolasis" is the only word in the Gospels for "punishment" with regard to God punishing evildoers. Aristotle, who knew Greek word meanings better than anybody who ever walked the planet, said that "kolasis" is the kind of punishment which "is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer," which means it is for the betterment or improvement of the person being punished. This is contrasted with "timoria," which Aristotle said is the kind of punishment which is "inflicted in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction." (Rhet. 1369b13).

The Gospels reveal a God who never punishes to gratify Himself, but rather punishes to heal and help the evildoers improve and be restored. William Barclay, who was professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University and the author of many Christian commentaries and books, including a translation of the New Testament and the very popular Daily Study Bible Series, traces the word "kolasis" back, through Plato, to an original term used to describe the pruning of trees back to allow fuller and healthier growth. Revenge motives are "timoria," and only gratify the lust for an eye for an eye payback. But "kolasis" motives are always looking for a way to restore and repair that which is lost and broken.

1 Corinthians 3:16 explains God's "wise fire," where the man whose life is NOT built on Christ is nonetheless "saved," even though he himself "suffers loss, yet so as by fire."

Apocatastasis is the restitution of all things so that Christ is all in all. What is APOCATASTASIS? The Apostle Peter was the first to use the term in the following passage: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of RESTITUTION (Greek "APOCATASTASIS") of ALL THINGS, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Acts 19-21.

APOCATASTASIS was one of the great Church Father Origen's favorite topics. "When the Son is said to be subject to the Father, the PERFECT RESTORATION OF THE WHOLE CREATION is signified, so also, when enemies are said to be subjected to the Son of God, the SALVATION OF THE CONQUERED and the RESTORATION OF THE LOST is in that understood to consist." Origen, De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 5, Section 7, Anf, Vol. 4.

Jesus is "He that descended [and] is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might FILL ALL THINGS ." Ephesians 4:10.

"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, EVERY KNEE shall bow to me, and EVERY TONGUE shall confess to God." Romans 14:11.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that EVERY TONGUE should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phillipians 2:9-11.

"And EVERY creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever." Revelation 5:13.

"For Jesus must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be ALL IN ALL." 1 Corinthians 15:25-28.

10) Christus Victor! Your atonement theory REALLY matters. It either sees the Father as wrathfully killing Jesus in our place, OR it views Satan as our kidnapper to whom Jesus gave Himself as "a ransom" to free us from the devil's bondage.

Jesus didn't come to change the Father's mind but reveal it! Alexander the Great used to sleep with a copy of Homer's Iliad under his pillow. This was because he so revered the tales of courage and heroism it contained. He wanted to absorb the spirit of courage by osmosis during his sleep.

We too should all figuratively put a copy of the Christus Victor story under our pillow. It tells the epic tale of what Jesus did for us during the three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection. Sleep on it, wake on it, dream on it, dwell on it. You might be surprised at what you absorb by osmosis--- divine courage, a gladiator's resolve, and an epic revelation of the hero-God we serve.

Below is a small portion of a recent post that highlights the Christus Victor view of the atonement. Follow the Scriptures cited and you will fall in love with Jesus again, but this time as your personal hero and champion.

Christus Victor unveils the cosmic drama of Easter weekend. It reveals how Satanic forces smote Jesus on the cross and in His subsequent three day descent into Hell. Every fallen principality, fallen power, fallen throne, fallen ruler, fallen angel, as well as Satan himself ALL rushed to crush, torture and destroy Jesus when they saw Him nailed to the cross.

At the cross, for the first time, Satan's kingdom had full access to attack and afflict Jesus unhindered by His righteous hedge of protection. Jesus willingly laid His soul on the chopping block for Satan to seize, incarcerate and torment in Hell. In return, Satan had to release mankind from the covenant of death we willingly entered into with him.

But things did not go as planned. The principalities and powers could NOT take Jesus down and out. They thought they could corrupt, crush and destroy Jesus totally--- "operation annihilation" in other words. But they failed. They took their best shot, and couldn't do it. They shot their wad, and lost. They expended every bit of their their murderous power, but it was not enough.

For Jesus to descend into this enemy lair not only unarmed with His Spirit hedge, but also chained with all our soul-sins, is almost too horrible to contemplate. Jesus' suffering in Hell for these three days is unimaginable, yet it is captured in the Messianic images of Psalms 18, 22, 31 and 69 (and several others). These Psalms portray Jesus' suffering for our sins in Hell, particularly when these passages all describe various aspects of the crucifixion. The Gospels in fact quote many of these verses as fulfilled prophecy. Psalm 22:1 and Mark 15:34; Psalm 22:13,16, 18 and Luke 23:34 and John 19:23-24; Psalm 31:5 and Luke 23:46; Psalm 69:21 and Matthew 27:34 are four such references, but there are many more. Psalm 18 in particular describes on its face Jesus' battle as the "sorrows of death and hell" and "the floods of ungodly men" compassed Him (verses 3 and 4).

C. H. Spurgeon commented on Psalm 18 as follows: "In poetical language, the psalmist describes experiencing Jehovah's delivering power. Poetry has in her treasures no gem

more lustrous than this sonnet. The sorrow, the cries, the descent of the Divine One, and the rescue of the afflicted are set to music worthy of the golden harps. The Messiah our Savior is, over and beyond David or any other believer, the main and chief subject of this Psalm. We have grown more certain that every line has its deepest and profoundest fulfillment in Him.” Treasury of David, p. 110 (Nelson). After having been literally flooded and attacked by all our sins for all time; after being tortured by demonic powers known as the “strong bulls of Bashan” (Ps. 22:12; Col. 2:15); after paying the penalty for every sin committed past, present and future; after all this, the price had been paid without Jesus sinning Himself.

We must see this crucial point. When Jesus was sinless upon the earth during His thirty three years of natural life, no harvest of demonic destruction or sinful oppression was able to enter into His body gate to afflict Him. “Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” Jn. 14:30.

Yet, when He descended into Hell, His gates were voluntarily opened wide allowing all sinful destruction and demonic oppression to come into His soul like a flood. Yet, like a champion boxer, He would not go down! With His hands tied behind His back by our cords of sin, punch after demonic punch, claw after demonic claw buffeted His defenseless soul. Millions, billions, trillions of blows struck, gored and mauled Him. Yet, He would not go down! He took the full brunt of punishment past, punishment present and punishment future. Yet, He would not go down! He kept His focus during this hellish torment on two things – His covenant love for His Father and His covenant love for us.

When the price had been paid for all sins for all time, the cords started to loosen. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Acts 2:24. Strength started to return - - covenant strength. The ransom had been paid! Now it was time for resurrection!

This transaction is described in the following passages: "And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man...whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David saith concerning him...THOU WILT NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN HADES, NETHER WILT THOU GIVE THY HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION....Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David... he foreseeing 'this' spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that NEITHER WAS HE LEFT UNTO HADES , NOR DID HIS FLESH SEE CORRUPTION. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts 2:21-36.

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men. Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that HE MIGHT FILL ALL THINGS." Ephesians 4:8-10.

"And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. HE DISARMED THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." Colossians 2:13-15.

Jesus paid the blood "ransom" for us. Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6. "Ransoms" are paid to hostile kidnappers, not to loving Fathers. The Ransom Theory of the Atonement, which the early church favored, says Jesus paid the ransom to Satan to free us from the devil's evil clutches.

Do you see? The Ransom was paid BY the Father, not TO the Father. We are worth everything to Him. He was willing to pay anything to win us back, even the precious blood of His flawless son. John 3:16.

Christus Victor!

CHAPTER 2-- DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL?

No! Never! Most people don't even ask the question in a blessed way. They normally ask, "Why does God allow evil?" This form of the question is objectionable because it presumes that God DOES allow evil. At the memorial services for the 9/11 victims, Billy Graham lamented that he had never received a satisfactory answer to the question, "Why does God allow evil?" The reason there's no satisfactory answer is that it is not a satisfactory question. An unblessed and improper question will always yield an unblessed and improper answer.

The open-hearted and fair way of asking this question is, "DOES God allow evil?" In a court of law, the lawyer is not allowed to ask his witness a leading question which already presumes an answer. A lawyer can't ask his own witness a question that assumes facts not in evidence. Justice and fairness demand that an open inquiry must first establish whether the facts presumed in the question are true and established. If we can be so fair with human conduct, how much more just and open-hearted should we be with God's nature?

For instance, what if God doesn't allow evil? In fact, what if God only and always disallows evil in all its various forms? In fact, what if God has already disallowed every evil that ever has or ever will occur? Do Scriptures support such a view? Yes! They not only support it, they demand it.

POINT ONE: GOD DOES NOT ALLOW EVIL!

The term "theodicy" refers to a branch of theology which deals with the justification of God's goodness in the presence of evil. All theodicy must begin and end with James 1:13-17. It is the most specific statement in the New Testament with regard to God's relationship to evil.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Jas. 1:13-17.

The word "temptation" in the above passage is translated from the Greek "peirazo" and means, "to test, entice, discipline, prove, tempt or try." God doesn't test anybody with evil, entice anybody with evil, discipline anybody with evil, prove anything with evil, tempt anybody with evil or try anybody with evil. Thus, God has no relationship with evil. It is not in His nature. Evil cannot be traced back to God. Moreover, this passage clearly says that evil can be traced back to man. It is man who has an ongoing relationship with

evil, not God. It is man's "own lust" which draws his heart away from God to Satan's spirit, which then "conceives" and gives birth to "sin" and "death." Remember, Satan is the one Scriptures call "the Tempter" (Matt. 4:3), not God.

Jesus taught us that when evil "tares" are sown among good "wheat," that it is not God who does it but rather, "An enemy hath done this." (Matt. 13:24-28). The Apostle John commented very clearly that God's purpose was not with evil but against it. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 Jn. 3:8. Jesus came to destroy the evil works of Satan by overcoming them with the Father's goodness. "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Acts 10:38. Satan comes to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy" but Jesus came that we "might have life" and "have it more abundantly." (Jn. 10:10).

Jesus' major point to us was to show that His Heavenly Father was always and only good. No Old Testament saint knew God as "Abba," an Aramaic term used by Jesus as a title for His Heavenly Father which essentially means "Daddy." Jesus came to reflect the Father's love which never gives His sons "serpents" or "stones" or "scorpions," but instead freely gives His sons "bread" and "fishes" and "eggs" and most importantly "the Holy Spirit." (Lk. 11:11-13). This passage says that if Earthly fathers "being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give . . ." (Verse 13). This is the same Father to whom James refers to in the following passage: "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the Heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (Jas. 1:16-17).

James strongly warns us to, "LET NO ONE SAY . . ." God is related to evil in any way, and "DO NOT ERR, MY BELOVED BRETHREN . . ." by saying that anything other than good and perfection "ever" cometh down from the Father . . . (Jas. 1:13,16). This was the message of the Gospel - - God hasn't, doesn't and won't allow evil. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". 1 Jn 1:5.

In God's eyes, evil has never been something to "allow," but rather is a malignancy which must be "overcome." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good". Rom. 12:21. What's radically different about God is that He always overcomes evil with the power of perfect goodness. God the Father is this way (Matt. 5:44-45,48), God the Son is this way (Acts 10:38), and so must we be this way as the body of Christ (Rom. 12:21). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." Matt. 5:48.

POINT TWO: JESUS IS GOD'S TOTAL DISALLOWANCE OF EVIL

God's only view toward evil is to disallow it through the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. This is the power of the Cross - - to conquer and nullify evil in all its forms - - sin, death, wrath, violence, hatred, jealousy, strife, pride, lust and envy. John The Baptist was the first to recognize and declare Jesus' mission as the cure for all the world's evil. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Jn. 1:29. The term "taketh away" in the above passage really means "beareth away." At the Cross, Jesus bore away all the power of evil in our lives - - past, present and future - - bar none - - no exceptions. There is no sin, or evil or demonic power that the Cross of Jesus did not overcome. Jesus said, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33).

Don't lose this point. Sometimes, we can miss the most crucial point by neglecting to focus on it with our whole being. Jesus came to destroy evil, and He did destroy it. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 Jn. 3:8. Why evil still appears to exist and prosper is a question soon to be answered. But for now, know that the Scriptures declare that Jesus is God's full provision to prevent, protect and purify us from evil. Jesus described His own purpose as follows:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Lk. 4:18-19.

Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted - - from evil, to preach deliverance to those held captive - - by evil, to restore the sight of those blinded - - by evil, and to set at liberty those that are bruised - - by evil. Jesus' heart is always to bless and protect us. "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Lk. 10:19.

Jesus never tolerated, used or allowed evil in any form. He defeated what is called "natural evil" when He rebuked a storm which threatened to sink the boat in which He was traveling. He defeated "demonic evil" hundreds, if not thousands, of times by casting out spirits of infirmity, insanity and deformity. He protected an adulteress from "social evil" by keeping her from being murdered by other men. He battled "religious evil" constantly as He rebuked the false religion of His day which blocked people from entering the gate of truth. He overcame the "material evil" of lack by multiplying loaves, transforming water into wine and finding needed finances in the mouth of a fish. Lastly, Jesus defeated the "ultimate evil" by raising others and Himself from the dead. HE CONQUERED DEATH!

Whenever Jesus was not allowed to deliver others from evil, He marveled at their unbelief which kept them from receiving deliverance. When He instructed the disciples

to pray “this way,” the heart of Jesus’ prayer was His statement in the Greek imperative that His Heavenly Father does and will “deliver us from evil.”

I hope these verses will help lift Jesus up in all our eyes as God’s ultimate gift to vanquish all evil. God gave His all to us. Never ask again, “Why does God allow evil?” He doesn’t. To believe He does ignores, dishonors and maligns the blood, work, sacrifice and wonderful name of Jesus.

Now, the question might be asked that if at this very moment I have an evil thought or commit an evil act, hasn’t God “allowed” me to think evil or do evil? Couldn’t He force me by controlling my thoughts or body to not commit evil? The answer is no. It is not in God’s nature to coerce, manipulate or force another. God does woo us, help us, convince us, and even rebuke us. But God never coerces and forces us. Just as it is impossible for God to lie, it is impossible for God to use coercion. I know this is a challenge to conventional thinking, but it is the only way God’s goodness as revealed in the previous Scriptures listed in this chapter can be true and consistent.

The prefix “omni” means “all.” God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), but God is not omni-causative. He doesn’t cause or even allow everything to happen 24/7. If He does, then He is responsible for evil. We seem to think that God in some sense allows murder since He doesn’t strike the murderer down with lightning right before the murder is committed. Does God have the power to strike down murderers before they act? I say no. God certainly has the power to hide, protect and deliver the righteous from harm, but He won’t and can’t use violence to stop violence.

God will not and cannot act outside of His good and true nature. For instance, if God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), can God claim to be all-powerful if there is something he is unable to do? Well, this depends on how you define all-powerful. If all-powerful means God can do anything at anytime, then God is not all-powerful because He can’t and won’t lie - - ever. Yet, if all-powerful means that He has unlimited power within the context of His character and true nature, then God is certainly all-powerful in that regard. He only operates in all-powerful truth, never in all-powerful lies; in all-powerful love, never in all-powerful violence; in all-powerful tenderness, never in all-powerful cruelty; in all-powerful patience, never in all-powerful wrath.

This is easy to see in the context of lying, but what about other attributes which are not in His divine nature? What if killing is not in God’s nature? What if mental coercion is not in God’s nature? What if physical coercion is not in God’s nature? What if manipulation, revenge, pettiness, brutality, cruelty and frustration are all not in His nature? Then, it is just as “impossible” for Him to act out of these motives as it is for Him to lie. The point is that being all-powerful and all-good means that God’s power operates only within the context of His character. God never acts or operates “outside of” or “inconsistent with” His perfect goodness, which is His agape nature of love described in 1 Cor. 13.

Thus, God won’t lie to us, kill us, coerce us, manipulate us, brutalize us, abuse us, threaten us or terrorize us. God will protect us, bless us, correct us, teach us, convince

us, strengthen us, encourage us and deliver us. Why would God use tactics He commands us not to use?

Consider the following passage from Saint Anselm which hones this same point:

"How can you be omnipotent, O God, if you cannot do all things? How can you do all things if you cannot sin - - if you cannot lie, if you cannot make false what is true? If you are unable to sin, you cannot claim to be able to do all things. Or is it that sin stems not from power, but from powerlessness? For those who commit sin have so little power over their own natures that they actually harm themselves. They are at the mercy of forces which they cannot oppose . . . The more people have power to commit sin, the more they are powerless. So, Lord God, you are in fact more truly omnipotent because you cannot act through powerlessness." Proslogion, Chapter 7.

Why would He tell us not to kill, hate, hurt or avenge ourselves on our enemies, while He treats His own enemies with wrath, vengeance, brutality and destruction? Or, put another way, why would God tell us to overcome all evil with good, unless He Himself did the exact same thing? Isn't this clear from reading the following verses?

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." Matt. 5:38-48.

Since we are to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect in overcoming evil with good, then this brings the need for the great missing element in this discussion - - "patience." God is able to overcome all evil by patiently enduring and bearing all our evil until we repent. If God weren't patient, then we would all be dead or writhing in Hell right now. If God weren't patient, He would use force, violence, coercion and wrath to work His will. If God weren't patient, then the Cross would not exist to deliver us from all evil. God's agape love "thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." 1 Cor. 13:5-7. This is God's nature, always enabled by supernatural "patience," -38- which in the original Greek literally means "joyful endurance." God's "mercy [joyfully] endureth forever." (Ezra 3:11). We are likewise called to patience:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Jas. 1:2-4. To know this type of patience is to know God and to share in His sufferings. “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings . . .” Phil. 3:10. We “joyfully endure” because we are walking in the resurrection power of God, but we also suffer as we mourn the world’s ongoing rejection of Jesus. Yet, we know that the world will one day be overcome with God’s goodness and reconciled to the love of God. Our faith and patience will help hasten the Day of the Lord while our sinful impatience and unrighteous wrath will delay it.

The point is that God does not allow evil. He disallows it through the “faith and patience” of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20; Heb. 6:12-20). Understanding how God overcomes evil now gives us the wisdom to know in what sense He hasn’t, doesn’t and won’t allow evil. The next revelation is to understand that God has already disallowed all evil.

POINT THREE: GOD HAS ALREADY DISALLOWED ALL EVIL

Could this possibly be true? Evil has been ALREADY DIS-allowed. But, if Jesus has already disallowed all sinful evil, WHY do we still see evil appear to flourish? Evil, to the natural eye, does NOT APPEAR to be losing the battle NOW, much less appearing ALREADY defeated. Well, the next several sections will address this question. But let me first make a few introductory points as we start to investigate this topic.

First, we are not to be guided by appearances, for we walk by faith and not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7. Jesus in fact said that "judging the righteous judgment means NOT judging according to appearance." John 7:24. So, regardless of what evil APPEARS to be doing, this isn't to guide our conclusions about God's ironclad UNWILLINGNESS to allow evil in ANY way, shape or form.

Second, our problem is that we have pre-conceived notions about EXACTLY HOW God MUST disallow evil. We think He MUST be like Arnold Schwarzenegger in HOW He disallows evil, instantaneously mowing down evil-doers with bullets of wrath, force and coercion. But, WHAT IF God overcomes and disallows evil HIS WAY rather than ours? What if the way that God disallows evil is not in "a eye for an eye way," but rather in a "turn the other cheek" way? What if the Cross was God's ultimate way of disallowing evil by overcoming it with pure good--- by Jesus freely absorbing all our evil wrath toward God and each other. Yet, Jesus did this WITHOUT ever striking back in an "eye for an eye" way, but rather in forgiving all those who crucified Him by not holding it to their charge. Rather, He declared them forgiven because "they now not what they do." Seen from this light, the Cross becomes the GREATEST SINGLE ACT OF SUPERNATURAL GOODNESS EVER ACCOMPLISHED! By it, ALL sinful, Satanic and worldly evil has been DISALLOWED-- now and forever!

Third, the fact that evil continues to prosper is NOT because God has approved or allowed it, but rather because WE have neglected to ENFORCE GOD'S DISALLOWANCE OF ALL EVIL. We have been given the keys of the kingdom by Jesus, keys that give us full authority to vanquish and disallow all evil. The Cross, as the ultimate act of "evil-stomping goodness," is God's way of overcoming our evil. Simply put, we have "failed to escape all worldly evil" because we continue to "NEGLECT OUR SO GREAT A SALVATION." Hebrews 2:3.

God has done His part in disallowing all evil. He awaits us to do ours. To USE the keys we have been given. To BIND the evil that has already been bound in Heaven. And to LOOSE the blessings which have already been loosed in Heaven. From God's view it is a done deal and all evil stands doused, disarmed and disallowed right NOW! He is waiting for His Church to merely believe and enforce this greatest of truths:

"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened ; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling , and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints , And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe , according to the working of his mighty power , Which he wrought in Christ , when he raised him from the dead , and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality , and power , and might , and dominion , and every name that is named , not only in this world , but also in that which is to come : And hath put all things under his feet , and gave him TO BE THE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH , Which is his body , the fulness of him that filleth all in all ." Ephesians 1:18-23.

We need to remember that Hebrews 4:1-10 says that God has already rested from His works. God's works are always complete and already accomplished. Always already! Compare it to a shining star at night. The star's actual image shining through our darkness may be thousands or millions of years old (the star itself may in fact no longer exist), but the image is providing us current and active light to penetrate our darkness. The ancient image of the star has always already completed its work long ago, yet its brightness shines across time and space to illuminate all our "nows."

So too, God's light in Jesus Christ was complete ages ago at His Cross and Resurrection, yet His light shines on our darkness across all time and space. The light of His life is complete and fully accomplished. Yet it still shines currently on us as if it just happened.

To carry the analogy further, a star's light shining on us offers us light that we can still refuse to receive. I can hide under a blanket, in a closet or just shut my eyes. When I do this, I am currently rejecting and blocking a fully completed and accomplished source of light. Here, the rejection of the light is not based on the inadequacy of the light, but rather is based on my unwillingness to receive it.

Think about the enormity of this truth. If God has always already disallowed every form of evil, then we are left with a stunning conclusion - - we are the ones who allow evil by our blocking God's disallowance of it by our individual or corporate unbelief. Or, put

another way, we have the freedom to accept or reject God's disallowance of evil. God's disallowance of evil is the Cross of Christ. The more we accept the completed work of the Cross, the more we allow God's disallowance of the evil we face. The more we reject or ignore the completed work of the Cross, the more we disallow God's disallowance of evil.

Let's establish the Scriptural basis for the proposition that God has always already disallowed every form of evil. First, Jesus has already defeated every demonic power and disarmed every demonic weapon which has ever plagued mankind. Jesus "led [past tense] captivity captive" through His death, resurrection and ascension (Eph. 4:8). Theologians call this the "Harrowing of Hell," whereby Jesus led a prison-break to set us free from all demonic oppression and captivity. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he [Jesus] made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Col. 2:15. Greek scholars describe this verse as detailing a victory parade where Jesus displayed all the demonic armor and weaponry stripped off of the enemy through His Cross and Resurrection two thousand years ago. Jesus is not going to do this - - He already has done it. All demonic power has already been long ago defeated, long ago disarmed and long ago dispossessed of all evil influence.

It gets even better. Not only has the demonic been demolished, but we have also already been completely healed of all our sins, sorrows and sicknesses. Jesus again completed this healing long ago through His Cross and Resurrection: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." 1 Pet. 2:24. The Old Testament prophesied that Jesus would heal us in the future "with His stripes" (Is. 53:5). The Gospels declared that Jesus' Earthly ministry was currently healing us then: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Matt. 8:16-17. Lastly, the epistle of First Peter written decades later stresses that the work of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection was final and complete, "by whose stripes ye WERE healed." (1 Pet. 2:24).

If demons are defeated and all our sins and sicknesses healed, then why don't we see this "always already" victory right now? "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; . . . Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:3, 8-9.

This passage is clear that all things have already been put under Jesus, but we don't yet see them put under Jesus. The reason? Because of our individual and corporate "neglect" of "so great a salvation." Both Satan and Evil have no gasoline left in their tank because Jesus drained it all away at the Cross. They are functioning today solely off of

the fumes of our neglect of Jesus' great salvation. What makes this salvation so great is its "always already" aspect. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convince us of the accomplished benefits of this great salvation. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor. 2:12.

Consider the following passage which likewise confirms that all things have already been put under Jesus' feet:

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the Heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Eph. 1:17-23.

Beloved, do you see why we must never accuse God of allowing evil? He has given His own blood, sweat and tears to disallow evil in every form. The only reason evil appears to be alive and well is due to our own neglect of God's great salvation which has always already provided us deliverance from all evil. God, through His foreknowledge and unsurpassable power, has already pre-responded to every encounter with evil appearances which we will ever have, and He has predestined and pre-fixed a way of escape from every apparent threat of evil.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Rom. 8:28-29.

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. 10:13.

Again, always already. Jesus tells us that whatever we bind on Earth has "already" been bound in Heaven. The original Greek of Matthew 18:18 and 16:19 both clearly say that we have the authority to bind on Earth that which is already bound in Heaven. Interlinear translations agree that these verses convey the idea that, "whatever you might bind on the Earth will be, having been bound in the Heavens already."

This is why Jesus used the Greek imperative mood when teaching us "how to pray" in Luke 11:1-4. The imperative mood doesn't ask, beg or cajole God. The imperative mood orders reality to conform to God's already established will. Jesus isn't asking God the

Father to deliver us from evil in this passage. Jesus is ordering all reality to be conformed to His Father's always already complete deliverance from evil. Consider John 15:7 which states, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The Greek word translated as "ask" in this passage is defined in Strong's Concordance at 154 and 4441 as "strictly a demand of something due."

In other words, the imperative mood merely orders our immediate sphere of influence to conform to the already completed work of the Cross. We don't pray toward God to complete His promises. Rather we pray from God's already established and completed work. Our prayer is a form of worship and release where we say yes and amen to all the promises of God which have already been fully performed by our magnificent Savior. Beloved, God has already rested from all of His works of deliverance, and so must we. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." Heb. 4:9-11.

Do you see this magnificent reality of God's salvation? Always already. Always already. God's salvation is always already. This view of God changes everything. No longer is prayer seen as a laborious effort to get God to act or "change His mind." Prayer is now seen not as a way to change God's will, but rather as a way of implementing God's will - His "always already" will to all goodness. Worship is not based on what God might do someday, but rather true worship rejoices in what God has already fully accomplished. All we need do is to rest in the completed work of the Cross. Sure, there will be suffering. Sure, there will be temptation. Sure, there will be persecution. Sure, there will be occasional stumbles and a few set-backs. But in all these things, we are more than conquerors because Jesus has always already pre-conquered all these problems. Blaming God for allowing these problems is like blaming the fireman who pulls you out of a fire for starting the fire itself. God didn't start the fire - - we did. God gave His own blood to rescue us from the fire of sin with which we have burned ourselves.

The blood of Jesus is much mentioned and much preached. But, one crucial aspect of the blood is neglected - - it was shed two thousand years ago. It is a past accomplished fact that Jesus' blood once and forever disallows and cleanses all evil within us and outside us. Like the shining star at night mentioned previously, Jesus' blood shines from two thousand years ago to "now." While many today still close their eyes to this light, thus blocking God's disallowance of evil, the body of Christ must learn to keep its eyes open to the "always already" kingdom of light. The major way we keep the eyes of our hearts open is to not err as a beloved brother-in-Christ by letting ourselves or anyone else say that God allows evil and that anything other than good and perfection ever comes from Him (Jas. 1:13,16). Those who continue to err by believing that God does allow evil are infected with wrong thinking. This Infection is the leading cause of unbelief today. I call this illness the Isaiah 5:20 Infection. It will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3-- SATAN: OLD TESTAMENT SERVANT ANGEL OR NEW TESTAMENT COSMIC REBEL?

Is Satan the "left hand" of God? Is Jesus the "right hand" of God?

NO! Satan is NOT the left hand of God. Jesus may be seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father, but I assure you Satan is not seated at His left hand. Jesus is the ONLY hand of God. In Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. If you see Him, you have truly seen the fullness of the Father's boundless goodwill toward us.

Yet, many claim that Satan IS the left hand of God, doing only what God expressly commands him to do. Calvinists believe this. Ancient and modern Judaism believes this. Islam believes this. In fact, even the Old Testament saints believe this.

There is only one sleight problem. Jesus doesn't believe it! He came to reveal that Old Testament thinking was misguided on this point. Jesus came to correct Old Testament thinking about the relationship between God and Satan.

The problem was that Old Testament saints had an UNDIFFERENTIATED view of God and Satan. In other words, they didn't know the crucial DIFFERENCE between God and Satan. They didn't know where God ended and Satan began. In fact, they often confused Satan's voice for God's voice. These OT believers were not Spirit Baptized and lacked the ability to fully and accurately process the nature of God. This is why John 1:18 says no Old Testament saint had accurately perceived the Father's true nature. Only Jesus accurately and faithfully reveals the essence of God.

Old Testament saints wrongly believed God and Satan were joined at the hip, working together, and that all the following couplets--- good and evil, forgiveness and wrath, healing and destruction, ALL came from God's hand. The Old Testament, in other words, believed Satan was God's "left hand" while the coming Messianic King would be God's "right hand."

Most every modern misunderstanding of God's nature comes about when we slip into Old Testament UNDIFFERENTIATED thinking. Here are some particular insights into Old Testament versus New Testament thinking about God and Satan.

The Old Testament saints saw God as having TWO sides, a LIGHT SIDE of LOVE and a DARK SIDE of WRATH. Jesus taught us God has one side-- God is ONLY light and in Him is NO darkness at ALL. 1 John 1:5.

Old Testament thinking wrongly believed Satan was God's official MINISTER OF WRATH who obediently "carried out" the Lord's "dark side" orders. The New Testament teaches us Jesus came to "destroy" Satan's ministry of wrath (1 John 3:8) and that Satan was all the following: the fallen god of this world, a cosmic rebel, the father of all

lies who has NO truth in him, and a treacherous murderer from the beginning. 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:44.

Old Testament saints believed the Lord "expressly commands" Satan to inflict all the curses of Deuteronomy 28: 15 -58, which include destruction, plague, war, oppression, lack, captivity, failure and death. Jesus came to show that the Father ONLY operates in dynamics of "LIFE" -- the giving of it, the protection of it, the restoration of it, the expansion of it, and the fulfillment of it. John 10:10.

The Old Testament saints believed that God has the power of death. The New Testament teaches Satan has the power of death, that death is an enemy of God, and that God only has the power of life. Hebrews 2:14: 1 Corinthians 15:26.

The New Testament Bottom Line: Satan is not the "left hand" of God. Jesus is the ONLY hand of God, a hand which opposes Satan on every level. It is time for all Christians to know their spiritual right hand from their left.

The problem is one of definition and differentiation. The Old Testament saints had a largely UNDIFFERENTIATED view of God and Satan. They believed Satan was God's "left hand," His "angry voice," His official "minister of wrath."

Old Testament saints wrongly included Satan in their functional definition of God. Whenever there was temptation, destruction, wrath, and death, all activities which the New Testament would later assign to Satan, the Old Testament would instead attribute these destructions to God Himself. They would not pray against the wiles of the devil, the way the New Testament instructs, but would rather beg God to stay His own wrathful hand. Satan was nowhere in their causative equation. God was the ONLY cause of both good and evil.

The New Testament, by contrast, DIFFERENTIATES the identities of God and Satan totally. What is joined at the conceptual hip in the Old Testament is separated and forever severed in the New. Jesus, it could be argued, IS the DYNAMIC DIFFERENTIATION of God's image from Satan's image. He is the refining fire which burns all the unworthy attributes the Old Testament God out and away from the pure and perfect divine nature.

Let's start with the definition issue. How did the Old Testament saints functionally define God? This requires us to look at the theological context of the Old Testament authors, the foundational presumptions they brought to the table.

When the Old Testament uses the terms "the Lord," or "the voice of the Lord," what did that mean to the believers back then? How did they define "God?" Was it the same way Jesus defined "God?" Would it shock you to know the answer is a resounding NO? Fasten your seat belts. We are about to take a flight into freedom from Biblical misunderstanding.

Simply stated, the Old Testament view of Satan is lacking New Testament illumination. And, as a result, the Old Testament often blends the identities of God and Satan TOGETHER, which ends up confusing the true source of Old Testament "wrath." Only as we NOW reinsert Satan back into the destructive Old Testament passages can we rightly understand what Jesus was doing in the Old Testament versus what Satan was doing. Learning to do this instinctively will forever free up our thinking and our understanding of the Old Testament.

Jewish and Christian scholars alike have both noted that the Old Testament view of God differs SIGNIFICANTLY from the New Testament view in one key aspect-- the way Satan is viewed. THE WAY SATAN IS VIEWED explains the vast majority of "tone" discrepancies between the Old and New Testaments. Let me explain.

For the Old Testament believer, Satan was an obedient angel who had a tough job as God's enforcer who was in charge of 1) executing the wrath of God's curses on disobedient men, 2) dispensing eventual death to all men, 3) testing men's faith by oppressing them with circumstances to see if they remain righteous, 4) hardening the hearts of certain men to commit acts of rebellion so that they quickly destroy themselves, 5) destroying what God commands through war, plague, famine, and natural/ supernatural disasters, and 6) accusing men of their failures before God based on his eyewitness reports.

BUT in all this, Satan is merely fulfilling his role in the heavenly train. He is not seen as an enemy of God or a rebel opposed to the Kingdom of God on every level, the clear way he is portrayed in the New Testament. For sure, the New Testament confirms that Satan does engage in wrath, accusation, destruction, and temptation, BUT NEVER under the approval or direction of God. The Old Testament says Satan is just following orders, while the New Testament says Satan is "off the grid" in complete disobedience to God.

In short, Old Testament saints see Satan as a Luca Brasi figure. Brasi was a character from THE GODFATHER novel and movies who did the Godfather's dirty work, but who was absolutely loyal to his leader, perhaps even the most loyal. Brasi was an assassin, spy and fixer who always worked behind the scenes to discover and destroy those disloyal or opposed to his Godfather. He rooted out, then disposed of the Godfather's enemies. He always had his Godfather's trust and blessing. This was the Old Testament view of Satan.

As THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says, "Satan...is...identified with the angel of death. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free

will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9.

Author Stephen Harris notes that the Old Testament Satan is not the same entity as the New Testament Satan. In the Old Testament:

"The Satan figure acts as Yahweh's spy and prosecuting attorney whose job is to bring human misconduct to the deity's attention and, if possible, persuade Yahweh to punish it. Throughout the Old Testament the Satan remains among the divine 'sons,' serves as God's administrative agent, and thus reveals a facet of the divine personality....

At the outset, some Bible writers saw all things, good and evil alike, as emanating from a single source-- Yahweh. Israel's strict monotheistic credo decreed that Yahweh alone caused both joys and sorrows, prosperity and punishment (Deut. 28).... The canonical Hebrew Bible grants the Satan scant space and little power. Whereas the Old Testament Satan can do nothing without Yahweh's express permission, in the New Testament he behaves as an independent force who competes with the Creator for human souls....

According to Mark's Gospel, one of Jesus' major goals is to break up Satan's kingdom and the hold that he and lesser evil spirits exercise on the people. Hence, Mark stresses Jesus' works of exorcising devils and dispossessing the victims of demonic control. The New Testament, then-- in sharp contrast to the Old-- shows Satan and the devil as one, a focus of cosmic evil totally opposed to the Creator God. This 'evil one' is the origin of lies, sin, suffering, sickness and death." UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE: A READER'S INTRODUCTION, pages 26-28.

The renowned INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA is in full agreement with this in its entry on Satan:

"The Old Testament does not contain the fully developed doctrine of Satan found in the New Testament. It does not portray him as at the head of a kingdom, ruling over kindred natures and an apostate from the family of God....

It is a significant fact that the statements concerning Satan become numerous and definite only in the New Testament. The daylight of the Christian revelation was necessary in order to uncover the lurking foe, dimly disclosed but by no means fully known in the earlier revelation....

In the early states of religious thinking it would seem to be difficult, if not impossible, to hold the sovereignty of God without attributing to His agency those evils in the world which are more or less directly connected with judgment and punishment....

The progressive revelation of God's character and purpose, which more and more imperatively demands that the origin of moral evil, and consequently natural evil, must be traced to the created will in opposition to the Divine, leads to the the ultimate

declaration that Satan is a morally fallen being to whose conquest the Divine Power in history is pledged."

Finally, scholar Jeffrey Burton Russell, who has written multiple volumes on the the historical development of our understanding of Satan, notes that the reason early Jewish thought saw Satan as God's servant is as follows: "Since the God of Israel was the only God, the supreme power in the cosmos, and since, unlike the abstract God of the Greeks, He had personality and will, no deed could be done unless He willed it. Consequently, when anyone transgressed morality, God was responsible for the transgression as well as for its punishment." THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS: RADICAL EVIL AND THE POWER OF GOD IN HISTORY, Cornell University Press, 29-30.

Russell goes on to trace that later in Jewish history, closer to Jesus' day, more and more Jews began to see Satan as an evil entity acting independently of God's approval. This is easily proven by considering the incident in which King David sinned by numbering Israel. This incident is first recorded in 2 Samuel 24:1, and then centuries later in 1 Chronicles 21:1. In the earlier entry, David's sin is caused by "the anger of God," while in the later passage "Satan" is the cause of David's sin.

Do you see? Same sin, same event, entirely different cause. The Jews were beginning to see that they could not attribute BOTH sin and punishment to God, good and evil to God, love and hate to God. They began to develop the idea that Satan was an enemy to God's purposes rather than an obedient friend. Unfortunately, when Israel as a nation rejected Jesus as Messiah, they also rejected the truth about Satan and have since sadly regressed back to their early Old Testament view, as the earlier quotes above show.

But let's catch our breath and think about this for a moment. If in the passage above, Satan's destructive activity is wrongly attributed as God's wrath, then where does that leave us? It leaves us falsely accusing God of of all sorts of evil events, motives and destructions. We have chained God and Satan at the spiritual hip, good and evil at the spiritual hip, love and wrath at the spiritual hip--- God is blamed for all that Satan does, while Satan gets partial credit for the good God does. The end result is that the character of God is clouded and men are unable to fully see, trust and rejoice in his love and forgiveness.

So was the Old Testament view of Satan different than the New Testament view? Yes, vastly different, but perhaps the best way to put it is not so much that the Old Testament was wrong about Satan, but that the Old Testament was almost completely uninformed about him. The first reference to Satan is not even until 548 pages into the Old Testament. Satan is first mentioned only 3 pages into the New Testament. The total number of times Satan is mentioned in the Old Testament is 19 times, 14 of which are in the book of Job. The New Testament mentions Satan (or his devils) nearly 200 times, despite the fact that it is five times shorter than the Old Testament in length.

Only three Old Testament writers ever even mention Satan, and that only briefly. EVERY New Testament writer mentions Satan. Amazingly, Moses, David, Abraham and Solomon NEVER mentioned Satan at all-- never. Their clueless silence is hard to imagine, given the fact that these men are considered giants of the faith.

Contrast this with the New Testament, where Jesus repeatedly calls Satan "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the Apostle Paul calls Satan "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) who can appear as "an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). The Apostle Peter calls Satan-- "your adversary... a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8), and the Apostle John calls Satan-- "the evil one... in whose power the whole world lies." (1 John 5:19).

What is going on here? Not one Old Testament verse warns us of Satan's evil influence in our hearts or minds, much less his rebellious rule over the entire fallen world. Not one demon is cast out in the Old Testament. Legions of devils are cast out in the New Testament. Evil spirits are sent FROM the Lord in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 16:14), but are sent FROM Satan as Beelzebub, the ruler of demons, in the New Testament (Matthew 12:24-29).

Jesus' main thrust in ministry was to destroy the works of Satan, not enable them or approve of them in ANY way. "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8). When summarizing the Gospel for the first Gentile converts, Peter described "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about DOING GOOD and HEALING ALL who were OPPRESSED OF THE DEVIL; for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38).

The point? Jesus continually exposed Satan as an ENEMY of His Father, and NOT a SERVANT. Jesus described Satan as: "a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." (John 8:44).

This is a crucial passage for it shows Satan's evils come from "his own resources," not God's, and that he is in essence a KILLER and a LIAR, in fact the "father" of all killing and lying. Remember, Satan tried to both deceive and kill Jesus in the wilderness temptations in Luke 4. Jesus defeated him then and went on defeating him throughout the rest of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Jesus not only opposed Satan personally, he fought against Satan's ENTIRE kingdom of demonic elements, "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:10).

Through the work of the cross, Jesus defeated all of Satan's armies, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in

it." (Colossians 2:15). Greek scholars tell us these words describe Jesus having a victory parade wherein He brandishes all the captured armor of Satan's kingdom for all to see and celebrate. Satanic captivity has been taken captive by the Lord of love and light who has ransomed and rescued us from our dark kidnapers.

Now we see what one of the main problems was with Old Testament believers. They simply did not have the depth of understanding to see the truth about God's Kingdom as it related to Satan's kingdom. Their understanding of what we call New Covenant truth was at most only embryonic. This is the perfect example of John Calvin's claim that Old Testament saints had only "sleight capacity" to understand deeper New Testament concepts-- the true nature of Satan being just such a concept.

Without the indwelling Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, Old Testament saints simply could not accurately process HOW the two invisible personalities of God and Satan operated on the earth. It wasn't God working WITH Satan as they supposed. It was God working AGAINST Satan as Jesus revealed. Jesus revealed that between their two kingdoms, there was no treaty, no cooperation, no partnership, no under-the-table deals, no compromise, no joint operation going on.

IT WAS WAR between God and Satan, NOT cooperation!

Jesus stated the battle lines of this war in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. But I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." Satan = stealing, killing, destroying. Jesus = life abundant.

Once we continually make this adjustment, we have become ABLE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT SPIRIT. (2 Corinthians 3:6). We will have substituted the Old Testament "letter" for the New Testament "better."

So, for the Old Testament saint to say, "The Lord called down fire from the sky," or "The Lord brought down curses on a person," or "The Lord struck someone down with pestilence, sword, famine or death" ----- all simply meant that they believed "Satan" did the destructive act at the Lord's command. So, when God is quoted in the Old Testament, it could EITHER refer to "Yahweh" OR to "Satan."

As established above, the Old Testament saints wrongly thought "Satan speaking" WAS "God's angry voice." Since they assumed Satan was God's official "minister of wrath," they attributed EVERYTHING that worked death and destruction as coming from God. BUT, since we NOW know from Jesus' teachings that Satan operates NOT as an obedient minister OF God, but rather as a vile enemy rebel AGAINST God, then we know their voices and actions need to be "redivided and wholly separated" from each other whenever we read the Old Testament.

I want to call this way of Old Testament reading The "the Jesus Hermeneutic." Simply put, this hermeneutic holds that all Scripture must be interpreted according TO and BY the revealed nature of Jesus. The revelation of Jesus IS the revelation of the nature of

God. When reading the Old Testament, we must allow the living Jesus to DIFFERENTIATE the works of Satan FROM the works of His Father. He did it for the Emmaus disciples, and He will do it for us as well.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus told the two disciples "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He (Christ) INTERPRETED to them in ALL THE SCRIPTURES the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:26-27, 31-32).

Jesus came to forever slice, sunder and separate our image of God from the image of Satan. But, to do this, Jesus had to reveal the "YE-KNOW-NOT-WHAT-SPIRIT-YE-ARE-OF" SYNDROME. (Luke 9:51-56).

This is the Jesus Hermeneutic at its best. When James and John wanted to call down fire on the Samaritan village for rejecting them, Jesus had to show the disciples these two disciples that Old Testament saints frequently did not know WHICH spirit they were operating out of. Jesus showed them that not everything in the Old Testament that is called "God's fire," or "God's wrath," or "God's judgment" IS in fact "OF" God's Spirit.

There are only TWO SPIRITS--- the Satanic SPIRIT of the world, and the Holy Spirit which is of God. (1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2). Jesus said in John 10:10 that Satan "comes to steal, kill and destroy" while Jesus "comes that they might have life, and have it in abundance." The Jesus Hermeneutic calls us to route all death passages to Satan's spirit and all life passages to Jesus' Spirit, no matter what they literally "say."

Really, the goodness of God is based on this foundational truth-- God never kills--- EVER. He warns us not to kill, either physically or even within our heart's imagination, and that by so doing, we will be "perfect" like our Heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:38-48). The Holy Spirit doesn't test us on Bible knowledge, but the Bible certainly tests us on Holy Spirit knowledge.

CHAPTER4--

A NEW WAY TO READ THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE BRACKET OF TRUTH

Reading and rightly dividing the Old Testament by the Spirit requires the use of something I call THE BRACKET. It works this way: EVERY TIME YOU READ THE WORDS "GOD" OR "LORD" IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, MENTALLY ADD THE FOLLOWING BRACKET RIGHT NEXT TO IT-- [JESUS OR SATAN]. Then, apply the New Testament light and love you know, along with inner Holy Ghost promptings, combined with the sweet stirrings of a sanctified conscience, all bolstered by the mind of Christ which all Christians now freely possess.

THEN, look at THE BRACKET and discern whether the act, event, or statement recorded in the Old Testament is more consistent with the nature of Jesus OR the nature of Satan. Make your call, insert the right name, AND THEN you will rightly understand the Scripture in question. It's pretty simple really. But before I give you some examples, I want to show why this must be done OR the Old Testament will, at times, continue to harden us, frighten us and discourage us.

Because the Old Testament saints' view of Satan was dim and partial at best, they were clueless that Satan was an enemy of God to be resisted wholeheartedly. Rather, they simply resigned themselves to the fact that all the "occurrences of evil and destruction" on the earth were just the judgments of God to be humbly endured RATHER than zealously opposed. God first brought the evil according to His secret and mysterious purposes. Then, God wrathfully punished us for the very evil He brought by inflicting the various curses of Deuteronomy 28. Satan was merely the executing angel obeying God's orders. Satan had no "dog in the hunt," nothing personal, just doing his job.

BECAUSE of this, when the Old Testament authors used the word "Lord," for them the word COULD mean the loving works and words of Yahweh in saving and blessing His people. HOWEVER, the word "Lord" could ALSO mean the wrathful works and words of Satan in testing, judging, accusing, and cursing His people.

HERE LIES THE LOST KEY TO RIGHTLY READING THE OLD TESTAMENT. When the Old Testament describes Yahweh's great life-giving works of mercy, healing, blessing and deliverance, we can rest assured that it is our Lord Jesus being manifested. But, when the Old Testament APPEARS to say God is violent, angry, cruel and oppressive, it is NOT talking about the GOD we know through the New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ. Rather, it is talking about the motives and methods of Satan, the rebel ruler of the fallen world, who seeks the destruction of every man, woman and child who has ever lived.

The term is MISATTRIBUTION. It means "assigning the WRONG source or cause of an action, purpose or event." Simply put, the Old Testament destructions of Satan have been wrongly attributed as "the wrath of God." This is the MOTHER OF ALL MISATTRIBUTIONS because it ultimately FRAMES GOD for EVIL. The result is a

bipolar image of God that leaves us double minded and unable to receive much of anything from Him. We become poor petal-pluckers who vacillate back and forth-- "God loves me, He loves me not--- God hates me, He hates me not--- God blesses me, He blesses me not--- God saves me, He saves me not--- God answers my prayers, He answers my prayers not."

So how do we read the Old Testament in New Testament light? How to we retranslate the Old and dimmer understanding of Satan to accommodate the New and better understanding of Satan? Simply put, we must allow the Spirit to re-divide the terms "God" and "Lord" in the Old Testament. We must use THE BRACKET.

We have to PURGE THE DEVIL OUT of the Old Testament's usage of the names of the Lord. This explains why John 1:18 says that nobody prior to the Gospels had truly seen God at ANY time-- because all had wrongly blended the nature of Satan INTO their image of God. The result was that nobody had a pure understanding of God's absolute love and goodness.

For sure, Old Testament saints had a partial view of God's goodness, but not a full frontal view of His nature. This dynamic is revealed in Exodus 33:18-23, where Moses prayed to see the Lord's glory. The Lord then responded, "I will make all my goodness pass before you...." But Moses, from the cleft of the rock, could only see the Lord's goodness after He passed by. In other words, Moses could only see God's true goodness from behind and at an angled distance. Again, as Calvin said, Old Testament saints had only a "sleight capacity" to grasp God's perfect goodness as revealed by Jesus Christ. They lacked the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which God sent at Pentecost to lead believers into all truth. They also lacked the full knowledge of Jesus' coming life, death and resurrection, which we thankfully have through the preaching of the Gospel.

Where would any of us be without the Sermon on the Mount defining for us the pure nature of God? Where would we be without the Gospel revelation of grace, forgiveness, Abba-hood and life in the Spirit? Where would we be if we still thought God and Satan were working together in joint purpose and cooperation?

Well, we would be limited to the same Old Testament view that Moses had-- seeing God's goodness from behind and at an angled distance. We could know some aspects of his goodness, but we would stumble around in the "strobe light" effect of the Old Testament, with alternating flashes of light and dark disorienting us and making it difficult to perceive the nature of God in an abiding way. We would "choppily" see God as BOTH light and dark, good and evil, loving and wrathful.

Simply put, we would not have the FULL FRONTAL VIEW of His glory revealed only by the face of Jesus Christ. We would not have the revelation of 1 John 1:5 that, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." We would not have the revelation of James 1:12-17 which says we are "to let no man say" that God has any connection to evil and that only "good and perfect gifts come from the Father of lights." We would not have the

revelation of Satan as the enemy ruler of this world from John 12:31 and 1 John 5:19. In short, we would still be largely confused about who was doing what in this fallen world.

Old Testament saints simply could not process the pure nature of God without first receiving the full revelation of Jesus. For that reason, we need to put THE BRACKET around the words "Lord" and "God" EVERY time we read them in the Old Testament. Whenever Old Testament Scripture says the "Lord" kills, destroys, curses, crushes, afflicts, oppresses or devastates, we need to "open the husk" of the word "Lord" to see WHO is really being referred to in the particular passage-- God or Satan.

Let's use a couple of easy examples. In Deuteronomy 28:63, let's apply THE BRACKET "the Lord [Jesus OR Satan] will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought." What are we to make of this bloodthirsty statement? Does this sound like the compassionate Jesus we know as the God who is "the same, yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8)?

Deuteronomy 28 again and again describes how the Lord will torture, oppress and joyfully destroy us, our families and our nation if we stop listening to God. The Lord will send "enemies" to enslave us, "wonderful plagues" to afflict us, and "famines" to cause us to become cannibals who eat our own children. I am just scratching the surface here. It gets worse, much worse. But the point is this-- Satan is the one doing the plaguing and destroying and evil rejoicing here, not God.

The New Testament couldn't be any clearer that all these curses of Deuteronomy 28 are the areas where Satan rules in his wrath, "wrath" which Revelation 12:12 says is "great" against the "inhabitants of the earth." The Old Testament saints used the word "Lord" because they thought that the destroying force at work here was under God's direct and obedient command. Bottom line: a New Testament reading should retranslate the word "Lord" here to read "Satan." The wonderful blessings in the first fourteen verses should remain as clearly coming from Jesus, for that is the essence of His nature as a blesser, protector and healer. All references after this describe the devil's work, not God's, so they must be properly assigned to Satan.

Another easy example. 1 Samuel 16:14 says "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him [Saul]." Now, bracket the word "Lord" with [Jesus OR Satan]. We know all evil spirits are of Satan as the ruler of demons. God never sends evil spirits on anybody. Let no man say this, including Samuel. Jesus always cast evil spirits OUT of men, never INTO men. This is really a great example where the word "Lord" is OBVIOUSLY talking about "Satan," who again, the Old Testament saw as a servant of God rather than an enemy.

What about the flood? Who killed everybody? Satan did. Who saved Noah? Jesus did. God would have saved all who believed, but their universally hard hearts allowed Satan as the god of THIS world to destroy them. God's protective hedge constricted down to the size of an ark, but it fully protected the righteous remnant from Satan's destructions. Remember, Satan has the power of death, NOT God. (Hebrews 2:14). God saves, heals and delivers. Satan steals, kills and destroys.

Death only became real when Adam started listening to the voice of the dark Lord RATHER than the voice of the Lord of life. What do we think? That Satan was twiddling his thumbs in the Old Testament while God was killing and afflicting everybody? NO-- NEVER! Every foul and unworthy thing we have thought about God should be laid at the doorstep of Satan.

Let's look at another example. If the Old Testament Scripture says "the Lord" commanded that the people "surely stone to death" a man who merely picked up sticks on the Sabbath, then we can again use THE BRACKET: "And the Lord [Jesus OR Satan] said unto Moses, 'The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.' And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died, as the Lord [Jesus OR Satan] commanded Moses." (Numbers 15:35-36).

Does anybody really see Jesus ever commanding anybody to be stoned to death for ANY thing, much less merely picking up sticks? Jesus' own disciples violated that same law when they picked grain on the Sabbath. Jesus sure didn't command them to be stoned. Rather, He defended them against their accusers by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:24). Wow!

If that weren't enough, in John 8, when a woman caught red handed in adultery was about to be stoned in His presence, Jesus STOPPED IT! God doesn't stone us or order us to be stoned. Jesus saves us from the stonings we do deserve and the ones we don't deserve. Out of His non-condemning love for the woman, Jesus was able to tell her in a tone that was tender, tried and true, "I don't condemn you. Go forth and sin no more."

So who told Moses to stone the Sabbath breaker? Well, who stones us today with accusations, condemnations and oppressions of every kind? All together now--- "SATAN." Revelation 12:10 says Satan is "the accuser of the brethren... which accused them day and night." Satan operates in "the ministry of condemnation," not Jesus. "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:1.

Satan is the one who stones, both literally and figuratively, those who walk in the flesh apart from God. This is why Ephesians tell us to "not give place to the Devil," which is another way of saying don't allow Satan, through our neglect or unbelief, to gain ACCESS to stone us with his various oppressions.

Moses sometime heard the true God. Sometimes he heard the true Satan. Since he didn't know they were opposed to each other on every level, but rather working together, he confused their personalities, words and actions. We have a better understanding because of Jesus' indwelling and because of Jesus' Gospel teachings. Moses often misrepresented the character of God.

In fact, this is the sin-dynamic that kept Moses from entering the Promised Land. The story is told in Numbers 20:1-12, where Moses hears the true God tell him to "speak" to a "rock" to supernaturally command it to miraculously gush water to save His parched people. Instead, Moses "struck the rock" in anger while openly rebuking the people's lack of faith.

What Jesus sent to show His tender love and care, Moses deformed with his own Satan-inspired wrath. Now, the people thought God was disgusted and angry with them rather than tenderly concerned. In this episode, Moses heard BOTH God and Satan, first God but then immediately on top of it he heard Satan's wrathful distortions. The result-- God's character was misrepresented. Makes you wonder how many other times what God first spoke in love to Moses, Satan then quickly distorted with wrath by the time the people heard it.

Let's consider another example. When the Scriptures say, "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart," form THE BRACKET around the word "Lord" as follows: "the Lord [Jesus OR Satan] hardened Pharaoh's heart." Now, we know from the New Testament that it is Satan who hardens hearts, not God. Satan, not God, hardened Judas' heart and Ananias' heart. Combine this with Jesus' teaching on the soils where Jesus clearly related hardness of heart to Satan's presence and activity, and the truth is clear as to who really hardens hearts.

Jesus never came close to teaching or preaching that His loving heavenly Father EVER hardens anybody's hearts. So, if we can't imagine through the Holy Ghost's illumination within that Jesus would EVER harden anybody's heart to reject God, then we sure can't imagine the Heavenly Father doing it either. Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you HAVE seen the Father." (John 14:9).

I do think that the Apostle Paul had a little wrathful residue remaining from his Old Testament training as a Pharisee which led him to quote the original Exodus verse about God hardening Pharaoh's heart in Romans 9.

Most commentators agree that Paul, at the moment he was writing this chapter, was uncharacteristically frustrated because of national Israel's rejection of Christ as Messiah. This frustration caused his words to tip a little too far back into an "Old Testament" tone of thought. He quickly recovered and was back to trampling Satan underfoot with the peace of God by Romans 16:20.

Besides, no other New Testament verse comes close to saying God hardens hearts, instead attributing all heart invasions to Satan. Paul's anguished cry about Israel's hardened state, then, was less about theological precision and more about Paul's personal frustration toward his kinsmen. Frustration often distorts our precision.

But, this was just a speed bump on the highway of grace. Paul's teaching, on the whole, reveals as much as any other New Testament writer that Satan is the one who hardens and blinds the hearts of men, not God. Just consider such verses as Ephesians 2:2;

4:18; 6:10-17; 2 Timothy 2:26; and 2 Corinthians 4:4. These verses confirm Paul's repeated emphasis on Satan as the source of world wide heart corruption, not God.

Moreover, Paul's name is not in the proposed bracket. Jesus' name is. I might imagine ANY man, even Paul, being momentarily wrathful and destructive in word, thought or deed given the right provocation, regardless of how spiritual he usually is, BUT I can honestly say I can't see Jesus EVER exploding in destructive wrath, cruelty, violence or rage. He might turn over a few "religious" tables of obstruction which are blocking our access to true worship of His Father, but He would never physically harm, afflict or kill anybody. I have gotten to know Him too well through His indwelling Spirit to fool myself into believing that. We, under Satan's influence, harden our OWN hearts against God, never vice versa.

But more than this, we intuitively know that Jesus only tenderizes hearts. Our conscience must be consulted on these matters. A spirit-sanctified conscience is one of the major ways we hear the promptings of God. God tenderizes our consciences. He never hardens them. Satan is the "hardening agent," not God, never God.

The Holy Ghost teaches us to compare spiritual with spiritual and know what is of God and what is not. Wrath is of Satan. Love is of God. Again, THE BRACKET is the solution to most all Old Testament confusion.

I want to conclude by repeating the explanation of THE BRACKET. It works this way: EVERY TIME YOU READ THE WORDS "GOD" OR "LORD" IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, MENTALLY ADD THE FOLLOWING BRACKET RIGHT NEXT TO IT-- [JESUS OR SATAN]. Then apply the New Testament light and love you know, along with inner Holy Ghost promptings, combined with the sweet stirrings of a sanctified conscience, all bolstered by the mind of Christ which all Christians now freely possess. THEN, look at THE BRACKET and discern whether the act, event, or statement recorded in the Old Testament is more consistent with the nature of Jesus OR the nature of Satan. Make your call, insert the right name, AND THEN you will rightly understand the Scripture in question.

It's pretty simple really. If we don't learn to do this and end up rejecting THE BRACKET, then the Old Testament will continue, at times, to harden us, frighten us and discourage us. When the disciples wanted "to call down fire" on the unreceptive Samaritans just like Elijah did in the Old Testament, Jesus rebuked them, "You know not what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 9:56).

We too need to make sure we don't slip on the "wrong spirit" when we read and quote fear-inducing and hate-justifying "wrath of God" verses from the Old Testament. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear has torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:8,18). THE BRACKET allows all Satanic fear, condemnation and wrath to be "casteth out" by the love of God in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER 5-- APPLYING "THE BRACKET" TO PHARAOH AND THE TEN PLAGUES

(This chapter presumes you have already read about THE BRACKET OF TRUTH in Chapter 4)

This Exodus passage is important, so I want to spend some time applying the Bracket to it's challenging narrative. If we can rightly understand God's activity here versus Satan's activity, then we will truly become strong in discerning God's goodness in the Old Testament. The story is told in Exodus 7-14 of how Moses came to Pharaoh and warned him to "Let my people go" OR ELSE! The "or else" here meant the soon-coming Ten Plagues which would ultimately devastate Egypt, culminating in the death angel killing all of Egypt's firstborn sons.

Remember, the essence of THE BRACKET is allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal whether the Old Testament usage of the words "Lord" or "God" is referring in the specific passage to [JESUS OR SATAN]. We remember from THE FORGOTTEN KEY TO THE OLD TESTAMENT that Jews, both in the Old Testament and still even to this day, believe Satan to be a humble servant of God dutifully obeying God's commands to tempt, accuse, punish, oppress and ultimately kill all men. Satan was seen as God's enforcer, an angel of justice and retribution with a tough job, but still obedient and fully compliant with God's wishes. Because of this, for them to attribute ANYTHING, good or evil, to the "Lord" or to "God" COULD mean one of two things-- either Jesus did it OR Satan did it. Let's now apply THE BRACKET to this passage.

Was it Jesus or Satan who sent the plagues to afflict Egypt? Was it Jesus or Satan who hardened Pharaoh's heart to say "no" to God's command? Was it Jesus or Satan who parted the Red Sea? Was it Jesus or Satan who caused the Red Sea to fall back down upon and drown the fleeing Egyptians? What part in this incredible story did God play, did Satan play, did Pharaoh play, did Moses play? The dynamics are really no different than they are today-- it's just getting all the parties' roles and motives rightly divided.

Here is the issue. The Old Testament saints lived under a SPIRITUAL STROBE LIGHT. One moment they saw the light flash of God, the very next the dark flash of Satan. We all have experienced the effects of a literal strobe light, which disorients us and keeps us from seeing reality in a smooth, clear and consistent manner. The Old Testament produces the EXACT same effect. One moment it shines forth the glory and love of the Lord of light, but the next moment it eclipses that light with Satanic wrath and darkness. AND THE TRAGEDY WAS THAT THEY THOUGHT THE DARK AND LIGHT FLASHES WERE BOTH GOD. In other words, God in their thinking was BOTH light and dark.

There is even a perfect New Testament example of this STROBE LIGHT EFFECT in Matthew 16:16-23. In verses 16-17, Jesus commends Peter for speaking the following confession to Him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded with relish, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which in heaven." THIS was one of the great LIGHT FLASHES

in the Scriptures. BUT a mere FIVE VERSES later, Peter enters a DARK ECLIPSE-- he tries to keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem to both die and rise again. Peter thought he was still in the light as he was just five verses earlier, but Jesus' response had to floor him: "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Talk about a strobe light! Do you see? One moment Peter is in the light. The next he is in Satan's shadow. Only Jesus stayed in the light at all times and places. EVERYBODY else struggles with STROBE LIGHT sickness from time to time. The Old Testament believers suffered with it much more intensely and frequently, but even New Testament believers like Peter suffered with it on occasion. Any time Satanic wrath or darkness is confused or commingled with God's nature, then the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT is present. Jesus' goal is to eliminate the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT from all our minds and hearts so that we can see and know His heavenly Father in pure form and function. In other words, we see Him in sheer light and absolute goodness.

The Old Testament perspective even acknowledged and embraced the STROBE LIGHT: "I form the light, and create the darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." Isaiah 45:7. This verse TOTALLY contradicts both James 1:13 and 1 John 1:5. The James verse says God has no connection with evil whatsoever, and to "let no man say" He does. Moreover, the John passage says that, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness AT ALL."

There is NO way to resolve these New Testament passages with the Isaiah verse UNLESS we redefine terms to make sure we are talking about the same entities. THE FORGOTTEN KEY TO THE OLD TESTAMENT established that the Old Testament believers' view of God included the dark works of Satan BECAUSE they held that God was completely sovereign in creation with absolutely no spiritual opposition. The New Testament made a MASSIVE COURSE CORRECTION on this dynamic by revealing Satan's dark kingdom as an ENEMY to God's kingdom on every level. This mandates that we now redivide the Old Testament according to New Testament light and Holy Ghost leading.

So, let's get back to Moses. Is there a CLEAR example of the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT in his life where one second he is hearing God and the very next moment is hearing Satan? Absolutely! Numbers 20:1-12 reveals the story. Moses here heard the good and true God instruct him to speak to the rock before him so that it would supernaturally gush water to bless His parched people. The people would then know their God lovingly cared and provided for them.

But, Moses allowed Satan to distort that unction. Moses' own frustration and anger with the people gave Satan access to eclipse with darkness what Moses first heard in light. The result? Moses struck the rock in anger and disgust, while verbally rebuking the people with his own bitter words. The miracle DID happen BUT now the tone of God was misrepresented. The people now thought that their God was angry with them because of Moses' terrible tone and harsh action.

And so the false image of a wrathful God remained imbedded within the people, an image that grew and grew and grew, unchecked and unchallenged until Jesus came to reveal the truth about God--- that He is only and always light and love. Moses allowed the dark flash of Satan right in the wake of a light flash from God to corrupt God's image to the people. This was the STROBE LIGHT sin that kept Moses out of the Promised Land.

Do we really think this was a one time sin by Moses, or that it was a repeating pattern, a recurring dynamic, a habitual problem that Moses, as well all Old Testament believers, suffered from and struggled with their entire lives? Moses was the meekest and finest man of his day, but he still lived by his own righteousness and not the righteousness which is of God. He did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit baptism which could fully quench all dark Satanic impulses away. For this reason, Moses represents the flawed Old Covenant believer who did not yet understand where and how God and Satan differed in personality and purpose.

To think that this one-time violation would keep Moses forever exiled from the Land of Promise is a bit unrealistic and harsh. It seems unlikely knowing what we know about the grace and forgiveness of God. But what if the broader symbolic truth that God was planting in this Bible story was for New Testament believers to one day see, with the aid of the Holy Spirit that this was not a one-time sin on the part of Moses, but rather a full-time flaw.

It wasn't that Moses didn't frequently see, hear and believe in the true Lord of grace and light, for he most assuredly did. It also wasn't that Moses didn't minister many awesome miracles in the power of the Lord, for he often did. And it certainly wasn't that Moses didn't love the same Lord we do, for he richly did. The problem WAS, however, that he frequently blended God's impulses with Satan's impulses, thinking they came from the same source. He suffered the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT, in other words.

Although this passage just discussed is the only time we are made aware of this issue with Moses, the fact that it kept him forever from the Promised Land suggests there was much more to this than a one-time transgression. This episode symbolically alerts us to the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT which awaits any literal reading of the Old Testament which does not allow for New Testament illumination and renovation. That illumination and renovation is called Jesus Christ-- His nature, His goodness, His anointing, His mercy, His heroism. These are the dynamics that will remove the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT from distorting our image of God.

Let's now apply these dynamics to the Exodus passage involving Pharaoh and the Plagues. Now that we know that the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT could cause Moses to hear God one moment and Satan the next, we have to reexamine EVERYTHING Moses did and reassign each action to its proper source-- [JESUS OR SATAN].

Let's start with the plagues. It appears God sent a different plague whenever Pharaoh said "no" to God's demand to "Let my people go!" How does the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT affect this story? Well, let's start with Satan. We know that He wants all the sons of men to be destroyed, whether they be Egyptian or Israelite. He is a murderer and liar from the beginning. If God were not protecting mankind by restraining Satan from his destructions, then we would all soon perish from plague, war, famine or other destruction. The book of Job describes a "hedge" which God keeps around men to protect them from Satan's harm. How this hedge exactly works, what enlarges it and what diminishes it, is not the purpose of this chapter. But, the point to grasp is that if Satan COULD, then Satan WOULD kill us all right now.

Satan, as proven in an earlier chapter, tempts men to fail and fall by sinning, which in turn gives him access to inflict the curses of the Law upon them. These curses give Satan power to afflict on various levels, from disease to disaster, from poverty to plague, from isolation to slavery, from emotional distress to all out insanity. It's all about access, what the New Testament calls "giving place to the devil."

So the question to start with is what access did Egypt give to Satan to penetrate God's protective hedge and wreak havoc? The worst plague of course was the last, the killing of Egypt's firstborn. Let's start with the worst first. Had Egypt given any "eye for an eye" access to Satan which would allow him access to kill its firstborn? Oh yes, Egypt did the exact same thing in killing all the Israelite male infants in Exodus 1:15-22. There, Pharaoh "charged ALL his people, saying, 'Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river.'" Thus, this terrible sin was a national one in which ALL the people participated.

So, we see Satan had grounds to curse Egypt under "the eye for an eye" concept soon to be codified under the Law of Moses. Even though this Law had not yet been written in the stone tablets, the principle holds true from the beginning that curses come from access given by previous sins committed in the world. "As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come." Proverbs 26:2. This obviously is not a scientific formula we can figure out to a tee, but in general terms it is true that individual and corporate sins give Satan greater and greater access to inflict his wrathful destruction, sometimes in the same degree, but often in a "ratcheted up" or worse degree than the prior sin committed.

So, we know Satan's game plan was to destroy both Israel and Egypt if he could. Egypt gave great access to Satan's evil by their great sin in killing Israel's firstborn, not to mention their slavery of Israel to begin with, their worship of false God's, etc. By Satan's reckoning, Egypt had it coming. Destruction was coming by Satan, special delivery.

Satan's plan was to gradually destroy Egypt by plague, and then during that process provoke Egypt to destroy Israel by the sword. Brilliant plan, but for one thing-- God's protective hedge around Israel would not allow this to happen. In fact, God was working to extend mercy to Pharaoh by continually warning him to "Let my people go!" If Pharaoh had relented and repented, then God's hedge would have been strengthened to keep, or at least diminish, Satan's oncoming destructions toward Egypt.

So, is the picture clear? Two invisible presences, two personalities, two opposing forces, hovered in and around this entire situation. One seeking everybody's destruction, and the other seeking everybody's redemption. Moses now comes to Pharaoh's court to warn him of the plagues to come if he does not free Israel from slavery. Now, stop! Let's use THE BRACKET. Does God warn of impending Satanic disaster? Yes, all the time in both Old and New Testaments, God warns the righteous and unrighteous of destructions to come SO THAT they can either repent, avoid harm or otherwise defuse the danger to come. So, Moses warning Pharaoh multiple times is definitely under the inspiration of God.

Now, how about Moses being the apparent conduit of those plagues by raising or lowering his staff just prior to these different plagues manifesting? He sure seems to be the bringer of all the plagues. Well, to the extent he did serve as the conduit, he wasn't getting the power from God, but from Satan. Remember, Satan has the power of death and destruction, not God. Satan is the destroyer, the tempter, the killer, the god of this world, the commander of countless armies of demon spirits of infirmity. Satan delights to use the momentarily misguided servants of God to do his dirty work. It is one of his favorite ploys. That way, it looks like God is doing the killing rather than Satan. God ends up being framed for the very evil from which He was trying to stop and save everybody.

Whenever Moses performed an act or miracle which saved, healed or delivered, he was in a light phase where he was seeing and hearing the will of God. BUT, whenever Moses performed a miracle which maimed, killed, or destroyed, then he was seeing and hearing the will of Satan. The STROBE LIGHT EFFECT explains this entire passage. Sometimes the sequences were light/dark/light/dark, sometimes light/light/dark/dark, sometimes dark/dark/light/light. But there was always some STROBING influencing everybody's perceptions.

God warned. Satan destroyed. God protected. Satan assaulted. God worked to slow and restrain the effects of Satan's plagues so that Pharaoh could find space to repent. Satan worked to increasingly harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would not repent. Had Pharaoh repented, God's mercy would have been allowed to rush in and strengthen the divine hedge of protection around Egypt and the plagues would have been staved off. Pharaoh at first hardened his own heart to repentance, but then it says later that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." But, using THE BRACKET, we know that JESUS does not harden hearts to say no to God, but Satan surely does.

Becoming clearer? But for arguments sake, what if Moses had not yielded to the Satanic impulse to use his staff to release the plagues? Would they have still manifested? Tough to know for sure. Satan may have used some other conduit or perhaps none at all. In other words, the plagues may have just happened spontaneously. But we do know this for sure-- Satan was the source of the plagues, and Egypt's various sins allowed Satan the access to send the plagues Egypt's way.

It has been much documented that many of the plagues involved creatures and themes that were involved in Egyptian idolatry. If this was the case, then the Satanic access of some of the earlier plagues may have come as a result of their various idolatries of false Gods. Am I saying Satan would inflict plagues on ignorant idolaters, even on devil-worshippers themselves? YES! Satan would immediately afflict anybody and everybody with every means at his evil disposal, IF HE COULD.

Satan is a rabid killer who wants us all dead-- ASAP, DOA. He preys on WHOEVER he can obtain access to afflict, including his own worshippers. It is only the restraining power of God that keeps the devil at bay in any of our lives. Men's continuing sin and hardening hearts serve to quench and lessen their divine hedges of protection, and in some cases this allows Satan to destroy both men and nations in this temporal realm. Conversely, ever-increasing faith harvests ever-increasing protection-- not necessarily from all the worldly persecutions which the righteous are called to endure, but certainly sure shielding from all Satanic missiles meant to destroy us. Such is the dynamic our spiritual freedom necessitates-- faith increases divine access and protection, while unbelief increases Satanic access and vulnerability. I don't want to over-simplify this most complex dynamic, so future chapters will go into this in much greater depth.

Now, concerning the killing of the Egyptian firstborn, who was the death angel? We know from Jewish religious resources cited in previous chapters that the Jews still believe to this day that the death angel was Satan. They believed it then. They believe it now. They are absolutely correct. Their only mistake is that they believe Satan was God's personal assassin fulfilling God's will rather than God's fiercest enemy opposing God's will.

We now know Satan steals, kills, and destroys, and that he has the power of death according to Hebrews 2:14-15, not God. So if God didn't kill the firstborn, what DID God do in all this? Simple. He saved the Israelites from the death angel. By instructing the Israelites to apply blood over all their doorstep as act of FAITH, God was now enabled to fully hedge them about with complete protection. God always longs to give His full hedge of protection to all men, including the Egyptians, but men harden, reject and refuse to receive it. This quenches the Lord's access to protect, instead allowing Satan access to attack.

I have always wondered why people think that the Lord is the one who SICS the devil on us whenever we displease God. No, we are the ones who SIC the devil on ourselves. Jesus is trying to save us from our self-SICING (or self-seeking, excuse the pun). Jesus comes daily extending to us a gold-engraved invitation to experience the limitless life of God. Some receive that invitation gladly. Others spit at it and turn away immediately into Satan's waiting arms.

Poor Moses thought in Exodus 5:3 that God would actually punish Israel "with pestilence and sword" if they didn't immediately go into the desert and sacrifice to Him (see Exodus 3:18, where the Lord originally threatened no such thing). While it's certainly true that our failure to worship God does open us up to greater Satanic attacks,

the culprit is our own neglect and not the vindictiveness of God to ever SIC Satan on us. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" Hebrew 2:3.

To reject God's call is to enter Satan's domain. God doesn't unleash Satanic attacks toward us to show us who is boss. Instead, by us continuing to harden our hearts toward God, we turn ourselves over more and more to the power of the prince of darkness. God speaks only words of life, deliverance and blessing. If we harden our heart to spit at those words with our neglect and unbelief, then we have opened wide our gates to invite all kinds of demonic attack. When we ignore God, we empower Satan and diminish God's hedge around us. Repentance reestablishes and strengthens that hedge.

One last question needs to be addressed. The Red Sea crossing-- who parted the waves and who caused them to fall on and kill the Egyptians? Well, the parting is easy. God parted the waters to save the Israelites from the pursuing Egyptian army bent on killing them by the sword. That was Moses in the light cycle saving others in the pure power of God. But the falling waters is another matter.

Did you know that the Lord caused the Egyptians to get stuck in the mud as they were chasing the Israelites through the parted waters? Did you know that the Lord actually made all the Egyptian chariot wheels to fall off? Did you know that the Egyptians had actually decided to give up and started to flee back to their own shore? Exodus 14:24-25.

Do you see? Divine protection without killing anybody. They had given up and were returning home. There was no need to kill them to save Israel at this point. Do you think for a moment Jesus would have lowered His hand and commanded the waters to kill the Egyptians? No! He would have allowed the Egyptians to return home alive.

But what did Moses do in his dark cycle? He listened to wrath, to Satan, to revenge. Moses was the one who commanded the waters to fall and kill the Egyptian enemies-- not God, not Jesus, not Holy Spirit love that blesses and forgives enemies. People tried to kill, stone, and shove Jesus off a cliff at various points of His life. He NEVER harmed anybody. He just passed through their midst supernaturally. Anytime our enemies are harmed by us rather than blessed and forgiven, then rest assured the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT is responsible.

Apply THE BRACKET and you will eliminate the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT. Your image of God will be forever purified and elevated. It will be so much easier to love Jesus with a sincere and unfeigned love, one not based on fear, threat, manipulation or intimidation. Remember, it is just not the Old Testament "characters" written about who suffer from the STROBE LIGHT EFFECT. It is also the Old Testament writers themselves, and even on occasion the New Testament characters and writers. Not nearly as much for sure, but still from time to time some STROBING will occur in the New Testament. We just need to be aware of this phenomenon and know how to quickly use THE BRACKET to rightly divide Scripture with the revealed nature of Jesus. It

always comes down to Jesus. If your Spirit-enlightened conscience can't see Jesus doing horrible things described in Scripture, then don't see the Father doing it either. If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father. Satan is the source of all destructive evil, not Jesus, never Jesus.

CHAPTER 6-- THE JESUS HERMENEUTIC: THE GLORY OF ALLEGORY!

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe." Hebrews 1:1.

So many people today resent the Old Testament as a dark and wrathful document of hate which paints God as a bipolar monster. And it's understandable when we consider it only on its literal terms. I agree that a literal reading of the Old Testament is often dangerous and can be counterproductive to understanding the love of Jesus Christ. So, I totally sympathize with the concerns about where literal Bible reading takes us.

But, on the other hand, I think there IS a way to read the Old Testament which avoids "the killing letter" by embracing "the life-giving Spirit" which underflows the subtext of all Scripture. 2 Corinthians 3:6.

The Old Testament just needs FOUR ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENTS to become relevant again to New Testament believers. The FOUR ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENTS form what I like to call "the Jesus Hermeneutic." Simply put, this hermeneutic holds that all Scripture must be interpreted according TO, BY and THROUGH the revealed nature of Jesus. The revelation of Jesus IS the revelation of the nature of God. When reading the Old Testament, ALLEGORY is the key.

"Allegory is language that says one thing and means either something MORE than what it says or something OTHER than what it says." --- Theologian R.A. Norris, in his article on "Allegory" in THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO ORIGEN.

Sometimes then, the Old Testament passage spiritually means EXACTLY what it literally says. But, on other occasions, it can mean MORE than what it literally says, or OTHER than what literally says. And, on still other occasions, the passage can mean "both" OTHER and MORE than what it literally says. The outpoured and indwelling Jesus is the SOLE plum-line of Biblical interpretation. Here, we allow the character of God to interpret Scripture RATHER than allowing the bare letter of Scripture to interpret God's character.

The early Alexandrian Church believed that the primary way to read Scripture was non-literal. The greatest Biblical scholar of these Church Fathers was the 3rd Century martyr Origen. He, following the Apostle Paul's lead, wrote that the key to rightly understanding the Old Testament was to read it ALLEGORICALLY rather than LITERALLY. Other church fathers who advocated this way of reading include Ignatius, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Augustine.

"Saint Ambrose (and Augustine) took Paul's statement 'the letter kills but the Spirit gives life' as a slogan for allegorical interpretation." A. Berkeley Mickelson, INTERPRETING THE BIBLE, Eerdmans Publishing, 1963, page 34.

In fact, Allegorical Exegesis was the predominant way Christians read the Old Testament up until the 17th-18th centuries, at which time Literal Exegesis came to the forefront. Cold rationalism and clinical empiricism replaced the sacred gifts of imagination, intuition and epiphany which had so filled the early church father's readings.

These church fathers would no doubt agree with Karl Barth's sentiment that he loved the Old Testament far too much to read it literally. "What's most interesting today is that, while a host of scholars after Barth, and especially over the last twenty years, have been arguing for a return to the Church's traditional way of reading Scripture, evangelicals have by and large been the most resistant to this." Greg Boyd.

These Church Fathers and their progeny believed that the key is to read Scripture by the Spirit and not by the dead letter, for the letter kills (and makes God out to be a killer), but the Spirit gives life to the Scriptures. 2 Corinthians 3:6. The early Church Fathers did NOT read the Old Testament by the bare letter, nor should we.

"Ignorant assertions about God appear to be nothing else but this: that Scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter." Origen, On First Principles 4:2.1-2, 4.

So to avoid making "ignorant assertions" about God's character, we need to make FOUR ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENTS to make the Old Testament sing with New Testament glory.

First, we need to realize that the Old Testament had a largely undifferentiated view of God and Satan, which caused them to often wrongly attribute the works of Satan to God.

Second, we need to re-imagine the Old Testament as a treasure trove of imbedded types which ALL point to Christ.

Third, we need to see that the Old Testament often provides us negative examples which we are NOT to follow.

And fourth, we must re-designate the speaker of certain Old Testament dialogues, which though on their face may appear to be said BY or ABOUT Old Testament characters, are in reality heavenly utterances said BY or ABOUT Jesus.

Let's look at these FOUR ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENTS in greater detail.

1) The FIRST ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENT we need to make when reading the Old Testament is to recognize that its authors had a largely undifferentiated view of God. We must use the JESUS HERMENEUTIC to reverse-engineer any and all passages which misattribute the works and directives OF Satan TO God. This is the type of allegory that says something OTHER than what the text says.

It is well documented by both Jewish and Christian scholars that the Old Testament saints did not have a fully differentiated view of God and Satan. They wrongly thought Satan was God's left hand, His official minister of wrath, an obedient angel just doing God's dirty work. Jesus cleared that up as totally wrong when He came and revealed Satan as a cosmic rebel who was the author of all death and destruction. Jesus came to reveal and destroy the devil's works, not commit them, and to show us to be mistaken if we ever thought otherwise.

The major misconception the Old Testament saints had about Satan was that he worked FOR God instead of AGAINST Him. This caused occasionally errant descriptions of where destruction came as from "the Lord" rather than from "Satan." Jesus cleared that misconception up in the New Testament. John 10:10.

Under this tragic view, God is BOTH dark and light, BOTH good and evil, BOTH loving and wrathful, and BOTH forgiving and vengeful. Satan is wrongly seen as the minister of God's wrath, the enforcer of God's curses, and the executioner of God's judgments.

As THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says, "Satan...is...identified with the angel of death. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9.

Thus, Satan is NOT seen by the Old Testament Jews as a disobedient angel, or a cosmic rebel hostile to God on every level, but rather just an obedient "servant angel" with a tough job to do. Jewish literature has always considered Satan to be the obedient death angel of the Old Testament.

So, for the Old Testament saint to say, "The Lord called down fire from the sky," or "The Lord brought down curses on a person," or "The Lord struck someone down with pestilence, sword, famine or death" ----- all simply meant that they believed "Satan" did the destructive act at the Lord's command. So, when God is quoted in the Old Testament, it could EITHER refer to "Yahweh" OR to "Satan."

This is easily proven by considering the incident in which King David sinned by numbering Israel. This incident is first recorded in 2 Samuel 24:1, and then centuries

later in 1 Chronicles 21:1. In the earlier entry, David's sin is caused by "the anger of God," while in the later passage "Satan" is the cause of David's sin.

Do you see? Same sin, same event, entirely different cause. The Jews were beginning to see that they could not attribute BOTH sin and punishment to God, good and evil to God, love and hate to God. They began to develop the idea that Satan was an enemy to God's purposes rather than an obedient friend. Unfortunately, when Israel as a nation rejected Jesus as Messiah, they also rejected the truth about Satan and have since sadly regressed back to their early Old Testament view, as the earlier quotes above show.

But let's catch our breath and think about this for a moment. If in the passage above, Satan's destructive activity is wrongly attributed as God's wrath, then where does that leave us? It leaves us falsely accusing God of all sorts of evil events, motives and destructions. We have chained God and Satan at the spiritual hip, good and evil at the spiritual hip, love and wrath at the spiritual hip--- God is blamed for all that Satan does, while Satan gets partial credit for the good God does. The end result is that the character of God is clouded and men are unable to fully see, trust and rejoice in his love and forgiveness.

The Old Testament saints wrongly thought "Satan speaking" WAS "God's angry voice." Since they assumed Satan was God's official "minister of wrath," they attributed EVERYTHING that worked death and destruction as coming from God. BUT, since we NOW know from Jesus' teachings that Satan operates NOT as an obedient minister OF God, but rather as a vile enemy rebel AGAINST God, then we know their voices and actions need to be "redivided and wholly separated" from each other whenever we read the Old Testament.

Jesus came to forever slice, sunder and separate our image of God from the image of Satan. But, to do this, Jesus had to reveal the "YE-KNOW-NOT-WHAT-SPIRIT-YE-ARE-OF" SYNDROME. Luke 9:51-56.

This is the Jesus Hermeneutic at its best. When James and John wanted to call down fire on the Samaritan village for rejecting them, Jesus had to show these two disciples that Old Testament saints frequently did not know WHICH spirit they were operating out "of." Jesus showed them that not everything in the Old Testament that is called "God's fire," or "God's wrath," or "God's judgment" IS in fact "OF" God's Spirit.

There are only TWO SPIRITS--- the Satanic SPIRIT of the world, and the Holy Spirit which is of God. 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2. Jesus said in John 10:10 that Satan "comes to steal, kill and destroy" while Jesus "comes that they might have life, and have it in abundance."

The Jesus Hermeneutic calls us to re-route and re-divide all death, darkness and wrath passages to Satan's spirit and all life, light and love passages to Jesus' Spirit, no matter what they literally "say."

Really, the goodness of God is based on this foundational truth-- God never kills--- EVER. He warns us not to kill, either physically or even within our heart's imagination, and that by so doing, we will be "perfect" like our Heavenly Father. Matthew 5:38-48. The Holy Spirit doesn't test us on Bible knowledge, but the Bible certainly tests us on Holy Spirit knowledge.

HERE LIES THE FIRST KEY TO RIGHTLY READING THE OLD TESTAMENT. When the Old Testament describes Yahweh's great life-giving works of mercy, healing, blessing and deliverance, we can rest assured that it is our Lord Jesus being manifested. But, when the Old Testament APPEARS to say God is violent, angry, cruel and oppressive, it is NOT talking about the GOD we know through the New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ. Rather, it is talking about the motives and methods of Satan, the rebel ruler of the fallen world, who seeks the destruction of every man, woman and child who has ever lived.

Thus, we have to PURGE THE DEVIL OUT of the Old Testament's usage of the names of the Lord. This explains why John 1:18 says that nobody prior to the Gospels had truly seen God at ANY time-- because all had wrongly blended the nature of Satan INTO their image of God. The result was that nobody had a pure understanding of God's absolute love and goodness.

So how do we read the Old Testament in New Testament light? How do we retranslate the Old and dimmer understanding of Satan to accommodate the New and better understanding of Satan? Simply put, we must allow the Spirit to re-divide the terms "God" and "Lord" in the Old Testament.

Old Testament saints simply could not process the pure nature of God without first receiving the full revelation of Jesus. For that reason, we need to put a mental BRACKET around the words "Lord" and "God" EVERY time we read them in the Old Testament. Whenever Old Testament Scripture says the "Lord" kills, destroys, curses, crushes, afflicts, oppresses or devastates, we need to "open the husk" of the word "Lord" to see WHO is really being referred to in the particular passage-- God or Satan.

2) The SECOND ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENT is reimagining the Old Testament as a treasure trove of imbedded shadows, symbols, metaphors, enigmas and and types which all point to some facet of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. This is the type of allegory in which the Old Testament text means MORE than what it is literally saying.

Jesus frequently allegorized the Old Testament. Using key imagery from Old Testament passages which were ONLY seen as literal, He would then usurp their literal meaning into an allegorical application toward Himself. He referred to Himself as the Temple of God (John 2:19-22), the true manna from heaven (John 6:50), Jacob's supernatural ladder (John 1:51), the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-40), the I AM burning bush of Exodus 3 (John 8:58), the great shepherd of Psalm 23 (John 10:11), the Brazen

Serpent in the wilderness who was lifted up on a pole to provide healing for all (John 3:14-15), etc.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus told the two disciples "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He (Christ) INTERPRETED to them in ALL THE SCRIPTURES the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?" Luke 24:26-27, 31-32.

Now, we know that Jesus is LITERALLY nowhere explicitly to be found by name in the Old Testament. But, ALLEGORICALLY, He is everywhere to be found. Do you see? Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to these two highly blessed disciples. And their hearts burned within them as they finally understood the true import of the Old Testament.

Paul was clear that the Old Testament literal events were prophetic pre-figures, or types, of a later New Testament reality revealed in and through Jesus Christ who fills all things. Paul frequently established this divine dynamic. He wrote that Biblical revelations occur FIRST in the natural (the Old Testament), the truer and deeper meanings of which are THEN unveiled in the Spiritual (the New Testament). 1 Corinthians 15:46.

Let's look at some examples. Literal foreskin-circumcision in the Old becomes spiritual heart-circumcision in the New (Romans 2:29). Keeping the literal-Sabbath in the Old becomes instead a spiritual-Sabbath of abiding in divine rest in the New (Hebrews 4:4-11). The Law written on literal-tablets of stone in the Old becomes the Law of Christ's love written on the spiritual-tablets of our heart in the New (2 Corinthians 3:3-9).

The Israelite's literal-baptism of walking through the waters of the Red Sea in the Old becomes a type of our spiritual-baptism in the Red Sea of Jesus' saving blood in the New (1 Corinthians 10:1-6). The literal-temple in the Old becomes the spiritual-temple of our living bodies in the New (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). And the list goes on and on.

Do you see? First in the natural, then in the spiritual. FIRST in the Old Testament figure, THEN in the New Testament fulfillment. FIRST in the externalized Law and the Prophets, THEN in the internalized in the Kingdom of God within us. FIRST the shadow in the Old, THEN the substance in the New. FIRST the type in the Old, THEN the anti-type (or "real deal") in the New.

3) The THIRD ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENT is simply that the Old Testament often contains negative examples we are NOT to follow. We are never to assume that the Old Testament passage is a positive model to emulate until it passes New Testament muster. And by this, I mean it reveals qualities of God confirmed in the New Testament revelation of Jesus combined with Holy Spirit confirmation. Sometimes, Old

Testament passages are there to warn us how NOT to approach God. This is the type of Allegory which says OTHER and MORE than what the text literally says.

This concept is highlighted in the following passage:

"These things happened as EXAMPLES for us, so that we will NOT crave evil things as they did. So do not be idolaters, as some of them were.... And let us NOT be immoral, as some of them were, and twenty-three thousand died in a single day. And let us NOT put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by snakes. And do NOT complain, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel (the devil). These things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come." I Corinthians 10:6-11.

Paul in the above passage isn't telling us to follow the Old Testament, but rather NOT to follow it. Avoid their mistakes. Avoid their lapses. LEARN from them on occasion what NOT to do.

The book of Job is another example of how NOT to think about God. We are told to consider his end in the book of James, not his beginning. The book of Job is not about what Job DID know about God, but rather what he (and his friends) didn't know. If I presented you a 42 chapter book explaining my life, and filled with my thoughts and opinions of God, and THEN in the last chapter admitted that in the previous 41 chapters I really knew nothing about God and was almost entirely mistaken, you would be furious with me. You sure wouldn't take anything I said in those first 41 chapters seriously.

Well, this is EXACTLY what Job did. In the first 40 chapters, Job and his friends made some 74 false accusations about the nature of God which ALL essentially blamed God as the wrathful source of all of Job's afflictions.

But, Job himself admitted at the very end of the Book that for the previous FORTY CHAPTERS, he essentially knew NOTHING about God's nature. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once I have spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.... Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered THAT I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." Job 40:3-5; 42:3.

Actually, ONLY person who actually spoke righteously in the first 40 chapters was Elihu. He was the youngest of all who spoke. He was the last to speak. He was the only speaker God never rebuked as wrong. In fact, his great speech in Chapters 32-37 prophetically ushered in the presence of the Lord in Chapter 38. This is what a prophetic utterance should do ---- connect the audience with the manifest presence of God.

Before we look at the heart of what Elihu said, let's quickly summarize the erroneous "bottom lines" of both Job and his three friends ---- Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. It's very

simple really. Job's three friends all believed Job DESERVED the afflictions God sent BECAUSE of various theological reasons. God, so they said, was right to oppress Job, either because of Job's open or hidden sins. God, they believed, would not have sent wrath unless it was deserved on some level. The fact that God sent it meant that Job deserved it, regardless of how righteous Job's life appeared to be on the surface.

In contrast, Job's main argument was that he didn't deserve the destructions that came. He believed himself to be righteous and undeserving of the afflictions he suffered during this period. Most scholars believe that the whole book of Job took place over a nine month period of time.

So, the bottom line of Job's three friends was that Job deserved his suffering. The bottom line of Job was that he didn't deserve his sufferings. But, the bottom line of Elihu was this ---- "Touching the Almighty... He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: HE DOES NOT AFFLICT." Job 37:23.

Do you see? Job and his three friends focused on whether or not man deserved the suffering that comes in life. Elihu, however, focused solely on the GOODNESS of God. Not every thing Elihu said is perfect New Testament theology, but he largely focused on the key point ---- God is good, God is powerful, God is merciful and God is fair. Elihu tenderly noted, "But none sayeth, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" His point was that everybody was so busy either complaining or explaining Job's life away, that nobody was actually seeking the Lord's good presence to set all things right. His theology was simply that GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT!

4) The FOURTH ALLEGORICAL ADJUSTMENT is called PROSOPOLOGICAL EXEGESIS. Prosopological exegesis is a technique of interpreting Scripture common in the early church. It is a method where the dialogue in certain Old Testament passages is reinterpreted as being prophetically said BY and ABOUT New Testament characters and contexts rather than Old Testament character and contexts.

As Pauline scholar Matthew W. Bates describes in his book, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, prosopological exegesis re-attributes the "earthly dialogue" from many Old Testament passages as instead being "heavenly dialogue" prophetically said BY or ABOUT Jesus RATHER than being said BY or ABOUT historical humans.

Bates believes that the Apostle Paul, like other ancient writers, frequently used the prosopological method of exegesis by attributing various Old Testament "human" voices in the scriptural texts to specific "divine" characters, especially Christ, the Holy Spirit, or God the Father. This seamlessly weaves Old Testament Scripture into the New Testament master narrative about Christ and the gospel.

In short, even though the Old Testament writers were writing about what they thought at the time were human characters and contexts, they were in fact spiritually writing far MORE than they contextually knew. They were using human dialogues which, instead,

would later be recognized as divine dialogues BETWEEN, ABOUT, or FROM the various members of the Trinity.

For instance, in Genesis 1:26, where God says, "Let us make man in our own image," the early Church father Tertullian read this prospologically to be the God the Father making this statement to God the Son.

Tertullian (Adv. Prax. 11-13) also found evidence of various members of the Trinity addressing one another throughout the Old Testament, such as in the numerous first/second/third person shifts in Psalm 91, and even in prophecies such as Isa 45:14-15, which appears to be addressed to a generic audience and not to Christ. Thus, "Tertullian believes that the prophet can speak in this manner in the words of a persona (or prosopon) not explicitly in view in the source text" (Proclamation, 186).

The book of Hebrews prospologically interprets Psalm 110 as an extended meditation on Psalm 110, Jesus therein being seen as a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The New Testament often prospologically cites Proverbs 8, where the "wisdom of God" is literally identified as Christ.

Here is another excellent example of prosopological exegesis from the New Testament. "For David himself said by the Holy Ghost (in Psalm 110:1-5) , 'The LORD said to my Lord , Sit thou on my right hand , till I make thine enemies thy footstool.'" Mark 12:36.

In the original Psalmic passage, the utterer of the statement is either David or an unknown prophet in his court, but is unclear who the second Lord is, the one to whom the first LORD is speaking. Most would say that, contextually, it was King David himself as the "little" Lord to whom the "big" LORD, Yahweh, was addressing His divine promise of victory over King David's enemies.

But, when this passage is read prospologically in the New Testament, such as in Matthew 22:43-45; Mark 12:36-37; Luke 20:42-44; and especially Acts 2:34-35, then the "little" Lord becomes Jesus rather than David. "For David has not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD [Father] said to my Lord [Jesus] 'Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool.' Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Thus, the Old Testament Psalm in this passage would be called the pre-text, while the New Testament passages cited would be called the master texts which give ultimate meaning to the Old Testament passage.

Prosopological exegesis operates in the same way a modern movie trailer does. Just as a movie trailer previews an "out of context" snippet of the actual movie to come in its entirety in the future, the Old Testament pre-text contains a "coming attraction" snippet of the divine dialogue to be properly understood only in the fulness of the later New Testament revelation.

CONCLUSION: The Jesus Hermeneutic says that there is something to be gleaned in every Old Testament passage about Jesus, His victory over Satan and/or His Kingdom of light, love and learning.

Sometimes the Old Testament says it perfectly without allegorical adjustment.

Other times, the passage needs to be allegorized as saying MORE or OTHER than what the literal text says.

Sometimes the passages even expose what they didn't know about God, negative examples for us NOT to follow in other words.

Still other times, we must adjust the dialogue from the Old Testament passages as being prophetically said BY or ABOUT Jesus RATHER than being said BY or ABOUT historical humans.

Even the violent passages in the Old Testament can reveal truths about spiritual warfare NEVER to be taken literally against flesh and blood enemies, but rather they instruct us on how to better battle and vanquish our inner enemies-- our Goliaths of fear, our personal Philistines of affliction, and our demonic Egyptian enemies seeking to destroy our lives and enslave our souls, etc.

"Wherefore, in the Old Testament there is a veiling of the New, and in the New Testament a revealing of the Old. According to that veiling, carnal men, understanding things in a carnal fashion, have been under the dominion, both then and now, of a penal fear. On the other hand, spiritual men... have a spiritual understanding and have been made free through love which they have been gifted." Saint Augustine (On Catechizing the Uninstructed 4:8; NPNF 1/3:287).

The Jesus Hermeneutic, then, is simply the light and love of God revealed in Christ. It makes all things new, even the Old Testament! Enjoy it in good health! When it comes to tough Old Testament passages, remember to allegorize beloved, just allegorize!

CHAPTER 6-- JESUS CHRIST IS THE REVEALED WRATH OF GOD!

The wrath of God. All have heard of it. All have dreaded it. All are taught it at some point in their lives. Disasters are blamed on it. Sickness is blamed on it. Misfortune is blamed on it. Often, God's wrath is personified as the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse-- death, war, pestilence and famine-- all going forth across the planet to execute God's furious judgement on the peoples. God's anger burns toward man, ready to smite their disobedient ways, or so the "wrath mongers" say.

But conscience compels us to challenge this assumption. Is the wrath of God consistent with the full revelation of Jesus Christ given through His life, His teachings, and most importantly, His indwelling presence within us? Does the body of Christ have a blind-spot which Satan is hiding behind, lurking unperceived by us in our thoughts and emotions?

Is it possible that Satan uses the term "the wrath of God" to incite us to hate our enemies rather than love them, to curse them rather than bless them, and to crave their torturous destruction rather than their absolute pardon. Like a dilapidated house suffering from rat-infestation, is it possible our dilapidated image of God has left our souls "wRATH-infested" and structurally unsound?

Is Old Testament wrath the same as New Testament wrath? Is it even possible that God has continued to clarify the dynamic of wrath since the New Testament canon was written?

Has God revealed more and more that our views of His wrath are less and less accurate? Is it possible that over the ages God has sought to progressively wean His elect away from our addiction to wrath, so that we can begin to see a God so full of love, power, patience and restoration that wrath has no place. No place in God's character. No place in God's nature. No place in God's kingdom. No place in God's children. What would such a God look like? How would His kingdom appear?

Here is a hard truth-- the term "the wrath of God" comes from our inability to distinguish God from Satan. Because of fallen man's hardened heart and darkened understanding, he simply does not know where God ends and Satan begins. Most all Jewish and Christian scholars agree that the Old Testament writers had a very different view of God and Satan than Jesus did. Old Testament Jews believed that Satan was a servant of God and NOT a rebel angel opposed to God's Kingdom on EVERY level.

Simply put, the Old Testament was written from a perspective which saw Satan as an angel with a tough job, but who ultimately was just following the Lord's orders. Jesus, in contrast, revealed in His teachings and tone that Satan was violently opposed to His Father's will rather than humbly submitted to it.

Read most any Jewish religious reference material on Satan, and you will see they believe that Satan was the death angel who smote all the Egyptian firstborn, supposedly at the Lord's command.

And not just the Egyptians. Jews still believe that Satan is the grim reaper who ultimately kills all men only at God's sole command. The book of Job shows Satan kills with sickness ("boils"), with nature ("a great wind"), with other violent men ("Sabeans with swords"), and with supernatural power ("fire from heaven"). Satan is a master assassin who kills a million different ways, but always, the Jews believe, at the express command of God.

But in the New Testament, we get a significantly different picture. While Hebrews 2:14-15 confirms that Satan, as "the devil," does indeed have "the power of death," Jesus' purpose in bearing the cross was to "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Put even more bluntly in this passage, Jesus ascended the cross in order to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Jesus came to destroy the works of the destroyer. 1 John 3:8. But Jesus destroyed them not with His "alleged" wrath, but with His sacrificial love. Jesus came to reveal that all forms of "death" and "violence" were enemies of God and never a part of His divine nature. 1 Corinthians 15:25-28 defines the dynamic of "death" as an "enemy" of God to be "put under His feet" until it's "destroyed."

QUICK REVIEW: SCRIPTURAL PROOF THAT GOD NEVER KILLS ---- EVER----- NO EXCEPTIONS!

1) "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy HIM WHO HAS THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS, THE DEVIL." Hebrews 2:14.

This is the master verse, the one that establishes the New Testament plumb-line on this issue. Satan has the "power of death," NOT God. The Lord ONLY has the power of life. Jesus certainly has power OVER death, as He demonstrated by His own resurrection. He also continues to demonstrate His power OVER death by His healing, protection, rescue and deliverance of all those who call upon His name in faith. So, God definitely has power OVER death, but not the power OF it.

2) "The last ENEMY to be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:26.

Here death is described as an enemy of God, NOT a friend, NOT a tool, NOT an instrument, NOT a dynamic God operates in--- at all. God doesn't use evil to overcome evil, or death to overcome death. He operates only and always in life.

3) "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10. Here, Jesus divides the tactics of God here versus the tactics of Satan. Death is NOT a tactic of God. Death IS a tactic of Satan. Jesus wanted us to understand this so that we would let NO man say otherwise.

Really, all goodness is based on this foundational truth-- God never kills. He warns us not to kill, either physically or even within our heart's imagination, and that by so doing, we will be "perfect" like our Heavenly Father. Matthew 5:38-48.

Get THIS truth down and center in your heart, and soon ALL other dynamics of God's goodness will come into proper alignment.

Death, then, is no divine knife hanging on the Lord's tool-belt which He wrathfully uses to slit our throats so we will learn the consequences of defying His mighty power and provoking His fierce fury. God has no fury towards us.

Rather, God feels only full forgiveness toward us, forgiveness purchased by the blood-ransom of His Son. Matthew 5:38-48 confirms this. Read verse 48 first, THEN read the previous verses leading up to it.

Do you see? Jesus was revealing the key in this beautiful passage.

God's perfection lies in this-- He always overcomes evil with good-- always. His wrath is His unrelenting goodness. His vengeance is to ultimately save and reconcile us to Himself, NEVER to destroy or torture or exile us. More than this, Matthew 5:48 says we are to be just as "wrathlessly" PERFECT as is our Heavenly Father.

So WHOSE WRATH did Jesus bear at the cross? Satan's! Jesus bore the full wrath of Satan, who has been the god and prince of this world since Adam forfeited dominion in the Garden. Satan's wrath has infected every fallen man with lust, hate and pride. He is the father of wrath who spawns all children of wrath. The wrath Jesus DID NOT bear was the wrath of the Father.

The Father has nothing but peace on earth and goodwill toward men (Luke 2:14). Obviously, our sin does keep US from being able to recognize and rightly relate to God, but it doesn't EVER keep HIM from lovingly seeking our restoration.

God doesn't operate in wrath. Satan DOES operate in wrath, both toward us and in us. That is why the Father gave us Jesus in the first place. Understanding the "owner" of the wrath Jesus DID bear away is crucial to understanding the true nature of God.

So, the wrath Jesus bore on the cross was the wrath of Satan? Is this true?

Does Satan have wrath? Oh yes. Revelation 12:12 confirms his "great wrath" is towards "the inhabitants of the earth and sea." Did you know that the Old Testament Jews imprudently called Satan's great wrath against David and Israel the "the anger of the Lord" in 2 Samuel 24:1.

Yet, later and nearer to the coming of Jesus, the Jews improved their phrasing by calling the wrath that killed seventy thousand men "the provocation of Satan" in 1 Chronicles

21:1. So, if the "anger of the Lord" equals the "provocation of Satan," then we are left with an inescapable conclusion-- God has been wrongly blamed for Satan's wrath.

What does Jesus say about this? Did He ever use the term "the wrath of God?" No! In fact, there was a time when Jesus could have adopted and approved the term "the wrath of God," BUT HE CHOSE TO OMIT IT FROM HIS MESSAGE AND MINISTRY.

In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus is declaring His purpose on the earth by quoting Isaiah 61:1-3. This purpose included, "preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, preaching deliverance to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Now notice this. Something huge is missing from His quote of Isaiah, something that Jesus did not want associated with His name. JESUS VERY CAREFULLY OMITTED ONE KEY PURPOSE SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED IN ISAIAH 61:2 WHICH SAYS, "TO PROCLAIM...THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD." Jesus did not want the concept of wrath or vengeance to be associated with His ministry in ANY way. This was His chance to make it clear and notorious where He stood on the wrath of God. His decision? Omit it totally from His divine mission statement.

The point here is that God is not the one dispensing out wrathful judgments of woe and destruction like "Dirty Harry" on a bullet binge. Jesus said in John 5:22, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." Then, three chapters later, in John 8:15, Jesus said, "I judge no man." No bullets here from Father, Son or Holy Ghost.

Jesus elaborates on this in John 12:47-48, "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not:, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receive not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave a commandment , what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak."

Jesus could not be clearer in the above passages that the only ones who definitely DON'T judge our sin and unbelief are Jesus and the Father. But WHO is the mysterious one who DOES seek to judge us, the "one" mentioned in John 12:48? Well, there are two suspects-- Moses and Satan. John 5:45 says, "Do not think I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust."

Does this verse suggest that Moses is some divine prosecutor who accuses us in Heaven's courts? Yes, but elsewhere we are told that the identity of the Heavenly prosecutor is SATAN. Revelation 12:9-10 says that "Satan" "who deceives the whole world" is "the accuser of our brethren" who "accused them before our God day and night." Paul warns us not to, "fall into the condemnation of the devil." 1 Timothy 3:6.

So, is it Satan or is it Moses who seeks to judge us into death and Hell? Well, in a way, it is both. Satan is the "accuser," but with "what" does he accuse?

The answer: MOSES' LAW. Satan uses Moses' Law to condemn and judge us with the curses of Moses' Law. Satan is the inflicter of the curses of Deuteronomy 28, Moses' Law in other words, which renders violators vulnerable to all the Hellish oppressions there listed: broken health, broken joy, broken strength, broken love, broken business, broken friendships, broken marriages, broken families, broken nations--- all broken by the curses of the Law of Moses.

Here Satan's sinister snare becomes clear. He lured men to believe they could live AS God by ruling their own lives with their own righteousness "as God" (Genesis 3:5) RATHER than living by the righteousness which is OF and FROM and IN God (Romans 10:3; Philippians 3:9). The only requirement was that they had to prove their righteousness by following the law perfectly, just as God did. Satan implied it was certainly doable and that men would become empowered gods once they chose the forbidden fruit of SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

But here was the terrible trick of it-- James 2:10, Galatians 3:10 and Deuteronomy 27:26 all reveal the horrible secret of Moses' Law. It is this "mother of all technicalities" that snares EVERY man who has EVER lived: whoever commits ANY violation of Moses' Law, no matter how small the violation may appear to be, is as guilty as if he violated the ENTIRE Law.

Like the old saying-- in for a penny, in for a pound. Since Scripture is clear that no man has EVER been able to PERFECTLY KEEP THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW (other than Jesus) and that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23), then ALL men are ultimately subject to ALL the curses of the Law listed in Deuteronomy. These curses, individually and in tandem, comprise Satan's access and power in this world to afflict and attack us with his wrath. THIS was the wrath that Jesus ransomed us FROM at the cross.

When Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 to, "fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell," He was not talking about God, but Satan. From whom did Jesus take the keys of death and Hell mentioned in Revelation 1:18? Well, we know that Hebrews 2:14-15 says that Satan had the "power of death" before Jesus' victory at the cross.

We also know Jesus descended into Hell and "led captivity captive." Ephesians 4:8-10. Theologians call this "the harrowing of Hell," which culminated in Colossians 2:15 when Jesus stripped all demonic powers of their hellish armor and authority. Satan destroys with death and Hell, not God.

It has always been largely believed Satan ruled "the gates of Hell," against whom Jesus said His Church would "prevail." Matthew 16:18-19. Hell was not only seen as a POW camp for lost souls after death, but "the gates of Hell" were also seen as a demonic power center from which Satan operated his destructions.

Gates in the ancient world always symbolized the power center of a city. Satan's power always works various destructions toward men, both in the land of the living and in the land of the unrighteous dead. These destructions consisted of Satan's ongoing torture toward the dead imprisoned souls in Hell, as well as Satan's crippling oppressions toward the souls still alive upon the earth.

Many ancient Jewish and early Christian writers link closely the concepts of Satan and Hell (literally "Hades"). See Testament of Reuben 4:6-7; Matthew 16:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-27; Revelation 20:7-10, 13-14. So strong is the perceived connection between Satan and Hell, that renowned scholar W. Manson renders "gates of Hell" in Matthew 16:18 as "Satan-Hades."

In other words, "Satan" is "Hell" personified and "Hell" is "Satan" objectified. Jesus has given us the keys of the kingdom to defeat all forms of Satanic-death and Satanic-Hell. Jesus through the cross crushed these two demonic dynamics once and for all, and now waits for His Church to rest in that victory by faith.

So let's review. God is NEVER wrathful. Satan IS ALWAYS wrathful. Neither Jesus nor His Father ever operate in the dynamics of wrath, condemnation or judgment. Rather, they only operate in "life everlasting." Jesus absorbed all Satanic wrath both TOWARD US and IN US.

Ephesians 2:3 says that we are "children of wrath" ruled by "the lusts of our flesh." Jesus said to those opposed to God's kingdom, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." John 8:44.

Do you see? "Lusts" and "wrath" are connected closely in both "the children of wrath" and "the children of Satan." This is because they are one and the same. Satan is the father of wrath. His DNA spawns all sin and condemnation. To be a child of wrath is to be a child of Satan. "He that committeth sin is of the devil.... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." 1 John 3:8, 10.

So what are we make of the term "the wrath of God?" At first flush, all have presumed that "the wrath of God" describes wrath coming FROM God TOWARD man. This presumes the word "of" is an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE. But, did you know that an alternate Greek reading of the "the wrath of God" describes wrath coming FROM man TOWARD God?

This reading would treat the word "of" as a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE. The Greek language allows for the word "of" to describe both the action "toward" a noun as well as the action "from" a noun. For instance, the term "the fear of God" describes man's awe TOWARD God, NOT God's awe FROM Himself. "Of" here is an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE.

In contrast, the term "the faith of Abraham" describes faith POSSESSED BY Abraham, and NOT our faith TOWARD Abraham. "Of" here is a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE.

Let me give another example. The term "the blasphemy of the Spirit" describes man committing an act of blasphemy TOWARD the Holy Spirit, not blasphemy FROM the Holy Spirit, which means "of" here is being used as an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE.

Conversely, the term "the coming of the Son of Man" refers "to the coming" being FROM Jesus and not to somebody else coming TOWARD Jesus, which means "of" here is being treated a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE.

We must be led by the Spirit when choosing our genitives. It can make all the difference. Now, I freely admit that most have traditionally translated "the wrath of God" as an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE, which means that WRATH IS FROM GOD. I even grant you that the perspective of some (not all) of the New Testament saints may have intended the term to understood as destructive wrath coming FROM God.

But, we need to remember that many of these first century Jews, like the Apostle Paul and John the Baptist, were immersed in apocalyptic Jewish teaching which stressed God's soon- coming violent wrath against sinners. And in fact, John the Baptist and Paul are the only two New Testament saints, other than Revelation's author, who ever use the term "the wrath of God"-- John only once and Paul three times.

Moreover, The Anchor Bible Commentary proposes that the author of Revelation was one of John the Baptist's surviving followers because of the apocalyptic language and similarity to John the Baptist's message and tone. Israel was entrenched in their wrathful view of God, a view strongly ingrained in them for well over a thousand years.

BUT, what if God's progressive revelation of His nature, first revealed in seed form in the New Testament, then fully grown and harvested by the maturing Church in the ages to follow, ultimately reveals that "the wrath of God" is better understood as a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE, which means that the wrath described in the Bible is, in reality, OUR WRATH TOWARD GOD.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, as well as several other passages, contemplate that later ages of the Church will receive a fuller revelation regarding "the man of sin" and "the man of perdition," revelation that now is being "withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time." Verse 5.

What if our corporate growth up into the full headship of Christ requires that NOW is the appointed time to revisit "the wrath of God" and allow the Holy Ghost to reveal the accurate use of the term "of" in the term "the wrath of God?"

The reason as to why now? So that we can demolish that most ancient of strongholds-- the mental stronghold that believes God is angry, violent and destructive toward those that fail or reject Him. The stronghold that says our loving Father is a killer of children

and bringer of disease and oppression upon His enemies. The stronghold that wrongly justifies our own Satanic-infested wrath and ultimate ill-will toward our enemies. Nothing defiles our image of God more than this bitter stronghold.

The truth NOW revealed is that Satan is the "son of perdition," who sits in the temple, being worshipped as he pretends to be God. Verses 3 and 4. Could it be that our worship of a "wrathful" God is, in reality, Satan disguising himself as the God of wrath? If we harbor bloodthirsty thoughts and feelings of wrath upon our enemies, thinking that we are merely agreeing with the "dark and terrible" judgements of God by which He exercises justice upon the peoples, then what are the consequences and dangers IF we are wrong?

The answer is in Luke 9:52-56, where the disciples thought they were serving the God of wrath by offering to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who had just rejected Jesus. They were merely doing what Elijah had done in the Old Testament by calling down killing-fire on those who had mocked or rejected God. Jesus' response? "He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.'"

SO THIS IS THE DANGER: IF WE STILL OPERATE IN WHAT WE THINK IS THE WRATH OF GOD, WE CAN CALL ALL SORTS OF VERBAL, MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL FIRE DOWN ON OUR ENEMIES, BELIEVING WE ARE SERVING GOD THE ENTIRE TIME. BUT IN TRUTH, WE KNOW NOT WHAT SPIRIT WE ARE OF, WHICH IS JUST ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING WE ARE WALKING IN SATAN'S WRATH-SPIRIT RATHER THAN GOD'S LOVE-SPIRIT.

Author Tim Cooper once penned the question, "Is it possible that Jesus is the revealed wrath of God?" I say YES! This would prove that the right way to use the genitive "of" is to see that the cross revealed our wrath TOWARD GOD and NOT His wrath toward us. Jesus absorbed all our Satan-induced wrath and did not strike back, instead praying for our forgiveness and tenderly declaring that we know not what we do. He overcomes all enemy wrath with His pure nature of sacrificial love and merciful goodness.

Jesus not only preached Matthew 5:38-48, He lived it. Jesus did not operate out of an "eye for an eye spirit," but instead "resisted not evil," and "turned the other cheek." He let His killers have both His coat and cloak. He went the extra mile dying not only for their sins, but for the sins of the entire world. Jesus refused to "hate his enemies," instead "loving His enemies and blessing them which despitefully used and persecuted Him."

Jesus truly was "perfect as His heavenly Father was perfect," in that He overcame the sum of all evil with the sum of all good. Jesus is now waiting for His beloved bride and body and Church to do the same-- to love as He loved, "without wrath and doubting." 1 Timothy 2:8. When the Church has washed all its wrath away, the Bride will have made herself ready. And then we shall see Him as He is-- face to face and glory to glory.

Satan's favorite disguise is "AS" the "WRATH OF GOD." Satan wants God to get the credit for the devil's works by having you call them "God's judgments of wrath." But Satan, not God, is the one judging everybody with death, sickness, oppression and misery.

So, is it the "WRATH OF GOD" OR is it the "WRATH OF SATAN."

"And again THE ANGER OF THE LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 Sam. 24:1.

"And SATAN stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel..." 1 Chr. 21:1.

The above passages describe the same event where David sinned by numbering Israel. Same event. Same David. Same sin. Same result: 70,000 dead Israelites, but a different cause of evil. The Samuel passage attributes it to the anger of the Lord while the Chronicles passage attributes it to Satan.

So, if the Old Testament viewed the wrath of God as the exact same thing as the oppression of Satan, where does that leave us in the New Testament?

Well, until and unless we renew our mind to the perfectly good will of God the Father, it leaves us in a perfect state of confusion, where both good and evil come from the God of love and wrath. The God who loves us today may kill or destroy us tomorrow. Though he slay us, we will serve him. Though he afflict us with cancer, we will praise Him.

Though he allows our children to be kidnapped and killed, we will love Him. This type of thinking may make us sound noble, but makes God into a monster. It was to these type of outrageous claims against Gods character that John Wesley famously responded, "Your God is my Satan."

So, what in tarnation was going on in the Old Testament when it came to assigning wrath against certain people as coming FROM God?

Well, it's surprisingly simple. Not everything in the Old Testament that is called "God's fire," or "God's wrath," or "God's judgment" IS in fact "OF" God's Spirit.

You see, the Old Testament saints, as do many saints today, have an UNDIFFERENTIATED view of God. Satan, under this view, is seen as the left hand of God, while Messiah is seen as the right hand of God.

Under this tragic view, God is BOTH dark and light, BOTH good and evil, BOTH loving and wrathful, and BOTH forgiving and vengeful. Satan is wrongly seen as the minister of God's wrath, the enforcer of God's curses, and the executioner of God's judgments.

Satan is NOT seen by the Old Testament Jews as a disobedient angel, or a cosmic rebel hostile to God on every level, but rather just an obedient "servant angel" with a tough job to do.

So, for the Old Testament saint to say, "The Lord called down fire from the sky," or "The Lord brought down curses on a person," or "The Lord struck someone down with pestilence, sword, famine or death" ----- all simply meant that they believed "Satan" did the destructive act at the Lord's command. So, when God is quoted in the Old Testament, it could EITHER refer to "Yahweh" OR to "Satan."

Do you see? The Old Testament saints thought "Satan speaking" WAS "God's angry voice." Since they assumed Satan was God's official "minister of wrath," they attributed EVERYTHING that worked death and destruction as coming from God. BUT, since WE now know from Jesus' teachings that Satan operates not as an obedient minister of God, but rather as a vile enemy rebel against God, then we know their voices need to be wholly separated from each other whenever we read the Old Testament.

Jesus came to forever slice, sunder and separate our image of God from the image of Satan. But, to do this, Jesus had to reveal the "YE-KNOW-NOT-WHAT-SPIRIT-YE-ARE-OF" SYNDROME. Luke 9:51-56.

He had to show the disciples that the Old Testament saints frequently did not know WHICH spirit they were operating out of. There are only TWO SPIRITS--- the Satanic SPIRIT of the world, and the Holy Spirit which is of God. 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2. Jesus said in John 10:10 that Satan "comes to steal, kill and destroy" while Jesus "comes that they might have life, and have it in abundance."

Simply put, Jesus came to help us re-divide the Old Testament "letter" to better align with the New Testament "Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Alexander the Great was once challenged to untie the infamous "Gordian Knot" which had been intricately knot-tied by King Gordius of Phrygia. It had long been prophesied that whoever undid the knot would be ruler of all of Asia. Many would be kings tried, but they all failed and ended up with bloody fingertips raw from their futile efforts. But then came Alexander the Great. What was Alexander's solution to the complicated "Gordian Knot?" He removed his sword and severed the knot in two. He disentangled "the impossible knot" by thinking outside the box.

Jesus came to cut the "Gordian Knot" which had been hopelessly knotted together since Adam first ate the forbidden fruit. Just as Alexander the Great offered his "Gordian Knot" solution by simply cutting the infamous knot in two with his sword, so too did Jesus solve the Old Testament "Gordian Knot" of God and Satan being wrongly "knotted together" as one entity by cutting them apart with His sword of truth. John 10:10 is that sword.

Jesus wants no more confusion between the works of the devil and the works of His Father. Honestly, whenever you hear ANYBODY speak of God's wrath destroying, oppressing, torturing or cursing someone's existence, don't you feel a little queasy, as if something within you is saying "No, this is not of God. I don't bear witness that the Jesus I know would ever talk this way." I know I feel it every time someone talks that

way. Well, listen to that inner voice. It's Jesus Himself quickening your conscience so that you can be sure "YE-KNOW-WHAT-SPIRIT-YE-ARE-OF."

CHAPTER 8-- FOUR THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS WHICH WILL ROCK YOUR WORLD

#1-- A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT ON HOW TO REMOVE THE "WRATH" OUT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Imagine you are the father of an infant child who has just started verbalizing words. The infant is at the developmental stage where he has effectively learned to call his mother "mamma" and you "dada." It took him a while to distinguish between the two of you, but now he has fully separated and severed the two of you in his thinking by calling you two different names. You each have a DIFFERENTIATED identity in his young mind.

However, the child has NOT learned to differentiate you from other men. He calls ALL men "dada" when he sees them. He needs more time, more maturity, more mental development before he can effectively distinguish BETWEEN different male identities. Until that happens, calling every male "dada" is "right" for him CONSIDERING where he is at DEVELOPMENTALLY. But, for us, calling all men "dada" would be weird and woefully wrong BECAUSE of where WE are at developmentally.

Now, let's apply this to the Old Testament saints. John Calvin, in one of our few areas of agreement, rightly noted how the Old Testament saints had "only a 'sleight capacity' to understand the truths of God. The Old Testament saints were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit because they lived PRE-Cross and PRE-Pentecost. The promise of the Father had not yet descended upon and within men. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:23. Galatians says the Old Testament saints were "children in bondage under the elemental spirits of the world" in need of a "tutor" until the "faith of Christ" came (2:20; 4:1-9).

Put in practical terms, Old Testament saints were spiritual infants. They saw God as their "spiritual dada," but they also saw Satan as their "spiritual dada" because they could not separate and sever his identity from God's.

Simply put, the Old Testament saints had an UNDIFFERENTIATED understanding of God and Satan.

Jewish and Christian scholars alike have both noted that the Old Testament view of God differs SIGNIFICANTLY from the New Testament view in one key aspect-- the way Satan is viewed. THE WAY SATAN IS VIEWED explains all discrepancies between the Old and New Testaments.

Let me explain. For the Old Testament believer, Satan was an obedient angel who had a tough job as God's enforcer who was in charge of 1) executing the wrath of God's curses on disobedient men, 2) dispensing eventual death to all men, 3) testing men's faith by oppressing them with circumstances to see if they remain righteous, 4) hardening the hearts of certain men to commit acts of rebellion so that they quickly destroy themselves, 5) destroying what God commands through war, plague, famine,

and natural/ supernatural disasters, and 6) accusing men of their failures before God based on his eyewitness reports.

Do you see? The Old Testament saints saw Satan as "dada's left hand. They were not able, because of their developmental limitations, to effectively separate and sever God's identity from Satan's identity. Satan is not seen by them as an enemy of God, a rebel opposed to the Kingdom of God on every level, like he is portrayed in the more DEVELOPMENTALLY advanced New Testament. For sure, the New Testament confirms that Satan does engage in wrath, accusation, destruction, and temptation, BUT NEVER under the approval or direction of God. The Old Testament says Satan is just following orders as God's LEFT HAND, while the New Testament says Satan is "off the grid" in complete disobedience to God.

In short, Old Testament saints see Satan as a Luca Brasi figure. Brasi was a character from THE GODFATHER novel and movies who did the Godfather's dirty work, but who was absolutely loyal to his leader, perhaps even the most loyal. Brasi was an assassin, spy and fixer who always worked behind the scenes to discover and destroy those disloyal or opposed to his Godfather. He rooted out, then disposed of the Godfather's enemies. He always had his Godfather's trust and blessing. This was the Old Testament view of Satan.

As THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says, "Satan...is...identified with the angel of death. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9.

Author Stephen Harris notes that the Old Testament Satan is not the same entity as the New Testament Satan. In the Old Testament:

"The Satan figure acts as Yahweh's spy and prosecuting attorney whose job is to bring human misconduct to the deity's attention and, if possible, persuade Yahweh to punish it. Throughout the Old Testament the Satan remains among the divine 'sons,' serves as God's administrative agent, and thus reveals a facet of the divine personality....

At the outset, some Bible writers saw all things, good and evil alike, as emanating from a single source-- Yahweh. Israel's strict monotheistic credo decreed that Yahweh alone caused both joys and sorrows, prosperity and punishment (Deut. 28).... The canonical Hebrew Bible grants the Satan scant space and little power. Whereas the Old Testament Satan can do nothing without Yahweh's express permission, in the New Testament he behaves as an independent force who competes with the Creator for human souls....

According to Mark's Gospel, one of Jesus' major goals is to break up Satan's kingdom and the hold that he and lesser evil spirits exercise on the people. Hence, Mark stresses Jesus' works of exorcising devils and dispossessing the victims of demonic control. The New Testament, then-- in sharp contrast to the Old-- shows Satan and the devil as one, a focus of cosmic evil totally opposed to the Creator God. This 'evil one' is the origin of lies, sin, suffering, sickness and death." UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE: A READER'S INTRODUCTION, pages 26-28.

The renowned INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA is in full agreement with this in it's entry on Satan:

"The Old Testament does not contain the fully developed doctrine of Satan found in the New Testament. It does not portray him as at the head of a kingdom, ruling over kindred natures and an apostate from the family of God.... It is a significant fact that the statements concerning Satan become numerous and definite only in the New Testament. The daylight of the Christian revelation was necessary in order to uncover the lurking foe, dimly disclosed but by no means fully known in the earlier revelation....

In the early states of religious thinking it would seem to be difficult, if not impossible, to hold the sovereignty of God without attributing to His agency those evils in the world which are more or less directly connected with judgment and punishment.... The progressive revelation of God's character and purpose, which more and more imperatively demands that the origin of moral evil, and consequently natural evil, must be traced to the created will in opposition to the Divine, leads to the ultimate declaration that Satan is a morally fallen being to whose conquest the Divine Power in history is pledged."

Finally, scholar Jeffrey Burton Russell, who has written multiple volumes on the historical development of our understanding of Satan, notes that the reason early Jewish thought saw Satan as God's servant is as follows: "Since the God of Israel was the only God, the supreme power in the cosmos, and since, unlike the abstract God of the Greeks, He had personality and will, no deed could be done unless He willed it. Consequently, when anyone transgressed morality, God was responsible for the transgression as well as for its punishment." THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS: RADICAL EVIL AND THE POWER OF GOD IN HISTORY, Cornell University Press, 29-30.

Russell goes on to trace that later in Jewish history, closer to Jesus' day, more and more Jews began to see Satan as an evil entity acting independently of God's approval. This is easily proven by considering the incident in which King David sinned by numbering Israel. This incident is first recorded in 2 Samuel 24:1, and then centuries later in 1 Chronicles 21:1.

In the earlier entry, David's sin is caused by "the anger of God," while in the later passage "Satan" is the cause of David's sin. Same sin, same event, entirely different cause. The Jews were beginning to see that they could not attribute BOTH sin and

punishment to God, good and evil to God, love and hate to God. They began to develop the idea that Satan was an enemy to God's purposes rather than an obedient friend. Unfortunately, when Israel as a nation rejected Jesus as Messiah, they also rejected the truth about Satan and have since sadly regressed back to their early Old Testament view, as the earlier quotes above show.

But let's catch our breath and think about this for a moment. If in the passage above, Satan's destructive activity is wrongly attributed as God's wrath, then where does that leave us?

Well, unless we adjust the Old Testament Scriptures for developmental distortions, it leaves us either wanting to throw the Old Testament revelation out altogether as outdated and wrath-infested garbage, OR if we choose to retain the Old Testament as authoritative, it can lure us to digress back into wrathful Old Testament attitudes ourselves.

But, I propose a different response, one that allows us to keep the Old Testament as both inspired and authoritative, but also allows us to adjust it for developmental distortions so that we won't slip back into Old Testament wrathful and childish mindsets.

Unless we adjust its literal meanings to comply with the more developed New Testament, the Old Testament leaves us falsely accusing God of all sorts of evil events, motives and destructions. We will have chained God and Satan at the spiritual hip, good and evil at the spiritual hip, love and wrath at the spiritual hip--- God is blamed for all that Satan does, while Satan gets partial credit for the good God does. The end result is that the character of God is clouded and men are unable to fully see, trust and rejoice in his love and forgiveness.

So here is my proposal. Don't throw out the Old Testament. Just modify it with what I like to call the "Jesus adjustment."

Here is the Jesus adjustment. When I read the Old Testament. I always spiritually imagine Jesus right there physically standing in the middle of the situation, unperceived by the OT saints, but clearly visible to me as I read the passage with the Holy Spirit.

I then ask Jesus what He says about this passage. What would Jesus do if He were manifestly present there at the time visible to all. If I don't hear or see Jesus say that He would kill, maim, stone, afflict, oppress, or destroy flesh and blood humans, then I can't agree that the Father was doing it either.

Jesus lives IN us to explain the Old Testament TO us. If we can't imagine, by using our Spirit-quickenened consciences, Jesus killing children, or women, or misguided men, then we can't imagine the Father doing it either. Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father. And I mean perfect!

#2-- A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT ON PRAYER: ARE WE PRAYING "TO" AND "ABOUT" SATAN OR "TO" AND "ABOUT" GOD?

Here is a thought experiment. You wake up tomorrow and find yourself living in Old Testament times in Jerusalem. You quickly head toward the Temple so that you can see the famous building which houses the presence of God. You are excited because you long to see how God's immediate presence and glory affect those who worship and pray in the nearby Temple courts.

As you approach the Temple wall location referred to as "the ear of God," you see crowds of people praying, chanting and wailing to God. You move quietly through all the crowds, eagerly expecting to hear anointed prayers, ecstatic worship, and mystical declarations full of faith and power.

But, you are stunned. What you hear are largely begging and complaining sessions:

"Please relent from afflicting us Lord!"

"Stay your hand of destruction from us Lord!"

"Bless your name Lord, who delights to destroy us in our wickedness!"

"Bless the Lord, shall there be evil in our city which you have not planned!"

"Yes, we are consumed by your anger; we are terrified by your wrath.

"Yes, throughout all our days we experience your raging fury."

"Even one's best years are marred by trouble and oppression."

"Who can really fathom the intensity of your anger?"

"Your raging fury causes people to fear you."

"Turn back toward us, O LORD! How long must this suffering last? Have pity on your servants!"

"Make us happy in proportion to the days you have afflicted us, in proportion to the years we have experienced trouble!"

One of the nearby priests sees your bewilderment and informs you that today's liturgy is based on Psalm 90, as well as some scrolls of Isaiah. Not all their prayers are so full of blame, accusation and begging toward God, but most are. You realize that much of what they are praying is really being addressed to Satan, not God. You think how ridiculous it would be for New Testament believers to beg Satan to stop afflicting them with his destructions.

Knowing what you now know from the New Testament, you so want to show them that they are blaming God for Satan's evil and that they, without realizing it, are talking TO and ABOUT Satan, not TO and ABOUT God.

You want to ask them this burning question, "DO YOU KNOW WHO THE GOD OF THIS FALLEN WORLD 'REALLY' IS?"

Well, if ANY Old Testament saint was asked this question, their response would essentially be the same: "Yahweh is the God of this world! He alone rules and determines EACH and EVERY circumstance, event or happening on planet earth 24/7. Yahweh alone is God of this world. He BOTH afflicts and heals, He BOTH kills and resurrects, He BOTH destroys and creates, He BOTH oppresses and delivers, He is the author of BOTH good and evil."

BUT STOP!!! The New Testament clearly teaches otherwise.

The New Testament says that THE GOD OF THIS WORLD is NOT Yahweh, NOT Jesus, NOT the Holy Spirit, and NOT the Heavenly Father. No, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD is(drum-roll)..... SATAN!

The Apostle Paul confirmed this: "In whom THE GOD OF THIS WORLD hath blinded the minds of them which believe not , lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ , who is the image of God , should shine unto them ." 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Jesus confirmed this: "Now is the judgment of this world : now shall THE RULER OF THIS WORLD be cast out." John 12:31. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you : for THE RULER OF THIS WORLD cometh , and hath nothing in me ." John 14:30. "Of judgment , because THE RULER OF THIS WORLD is judged ." John 16:11.

And finally, the Apostle John confirmed this: "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and THE WHOLE WORLD IS IN THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE?" 1 John 5:18-19.

Now, the above verses should both alarm and comfort us. Comfort us because Jesus has both defeated and judged Satan, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD. But, it should also alarm us to possible Old Testament MISATTRIBUTION. What do I mean by misattribution? Well, if Old Testament saints wrongly thought that THE GOD OF THIS WORLD was Yahweh, then much of what happened in the Old Testament which is attributed to Yahweh is, in truth, the work of Satan.

All the violence, plagues, killings, oppressions, curses, afflictions, destructions and damning which the Old Testament says comes from GOD must NOW be re-evaluated with New Testament light. We must look at the particular Old Testament passage which is attributing "evil" to GOD and ask if it is referring to THE GOD OF THIS WORLD or is it referring to THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

In other words, the Old Testament had an "undifferentiated" view of God. They lumped Satan into their image of Yahweh. They simply did not differentiate God from the Devil in any meaningful way. The result? A bipolar God who is up and down, good and evil, hateful and loving, cruel and gentle, vengeful and forgiving, murderous and peaceful.

The Old Testament certainly has many accurate and priceless versions of the wondrous acts of the true Yahweh, THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Old Testament frequently reflects the riches of Jesus' love, virtue, blessing, mercy, miracles and generosity. But, not always. Too often, because they are largely clueless about Satan's identity, the Old Testament mars and deforms the image of God by attributing the works of Satan to God.

Jesus came to heal and reveal. He came to heal our image of a wrathful and hateful God by revealing His Father-God to be ALL love and ALL light. Jesus came to teach us how to differentiate the works of the true God from the works of Satan. Jesus IS that differentiation. Satan, as the FALLEN GOD of this FALLEN WORLD, operates in all forms of stealing, killing and destroying. God, on the other hand, as fully revealed by the RISEN CHRIST of the RISEN FATHER, operates only in forms of life --- the giving of it, the protection of it, the blessing of it! John 10:10.

What a difference between THE GOD OF THIS WORLD and THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST! It is the ultimate difference. Its time to KNOW the difference. It's time to live the difference. "This then is the message which we have heard of him , and declare unto you , that God is light , and in him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5.

VIVE LE DIFFERENCE!

#3-- A "THOUGHT EXPERIMENT" ON DIVINE VIOLENCE

If I told you God told me to kill scores of men, women and children, you would most likely not believe me.

Similarly, if I told you God wanted me to tell YOU to kill scores of men, women and children, you also would think I was bonkers at worst and misguided at best. You would seriously doubt my current clarity of understanding as God's nature revealed in Jesus Christ.

Even if I was a well known man of God whom you trusted and respected, you STILL wouldn't believe me if I started passing out homicidal assignments to you from the Lord. You would instead presume I had seriously distorted or mis-processed a divine impulse. Whatever the Lord may have originally and authentically sent me, you would NOW be convinced I had subsequently polluted it with my own wrath and bitterness. This would be the case regardless of whether if it were Billy Graham, Bill Johnson, the Pope, or even Mother Theresa who was doing the claiming.

The reason for your reactions? Because you know Jesus SIMPLY doesn't roll that way. Like Jesus rebuking James and John for cruelly wanting Him to call down killing-fire on all the Samaritans just like Elijah did in the Old Testament, you would know that I knew NOT what Spirit I was "of" because Jesus came not to kill men but to save them. Luke 9:52-56.

Let's go a bit further with our thought experiment...

If I were to tell you God was seeking to wrathfully destroy you, but that I, that is to say "me, myself and I," graciously interceded and talked God into being merciful, and that He thereby relented and repented of His evil wrath toward you, all because of me, what would you think? Maybe that I'm crazy? Or perhaps that I was egocentrically misinterpreting events by making myself seem like the hero of the story?

Well, at the very least, you would feel that I was misrepresenting the character of God. You would know this because of the loving nature of God which Jesus reveals. You would know that it's impossible to imagine ANY man talking Jesus out of killing or destroying ANYBODY because He would never do that in the first place. You would quickly conclude that it was outrageous for me to EVER portray to ANYBODY, even for one moment, that "I" have MORE mercy than God, MORE patience than God, MORE kindness than God, and MORE wisdom than God.

This seems so obvious, doesn't it? My version of events where I am the one who convinced God of not destroying you is patently ridiculous. God is not some "rabid" deity who is "foaming at the mouth" with fury. God is not a raging killer who WE have to talk INTO mercy. Sheesh!

So, under my proposed thought experiment, it's obvious we wouldn't believe anybody who told us to kill in God's name TODAY, not even Billy Graham, not even the Pope, not even Mother Theresa if she still lived. Our refusal to believe that they were hearing God correctly would be based, of course, on what we all intuitively know of Jesus' non-violent nature as revealed in the Gospels and by the Holy Spirit's inner witness.

So, if we wouldn't believe the prophets of TODAY if they were to claim God was ordering "homicidal hits" on men, women and children, then WHY on earth would we believe somebody who told us the same things YESTERDAY, namely the Old Testament leaders of their day? Jesus didn't change natures. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He loves His enemies, He doesn't kill them. He overcomes evil with good. Matthew 5:38-48. God doesn't hand out "death warrants" to us on men, women and children, back then or now.

And yet. And yet. And yet. There are numerous instances in a "literal" reading of the Old Testament where Moses, Joshua and Samuel told the Israelites to do exactly that. They claimed that God commanded them to mercilessly kill other men, women and children. Deuteronomy 2:32-35; 3:3-7; Numbers 31:7-18; Joshua 6:20-21; 1 Samuel 15:1-9.

The Old Testament, in its "by the letter" reading, also tells us that Abraham (Genesis 18:16-33) and Moses (Exodus 32:9-14) and David (1 Chronicles 21:14-17) all claimed that they themselves had to talk God out of His murderous ways on multiple occasions. They each claimed THEY talked God out of His murderous intent to destroy millions of people.

Moses claims he talked God into "repenting over the killing evils He thought to do to His people." Similarly, Abraham claims he got God to agree to stop His proposed destruction of Sodom and Gomorra IF the lesser number of ten righteous men were found there, as opposed to God's original quota and sterner requirement of fifty. Lastly, David rebuked God that He was wrongly punishing and killing others en masse for a sin David alone had committed, and that therefore God needed to show mercy to His people.

Do you see? Something is lacking in the Old Testament view of God. They were living off Tree of the Knowing God as BOTH Good and Evil. Had they known what we NOW know BECAUSE we have partaken of Jesus as the New Covenant Tree of Life, they would never again claim that they had to "talk" God into forgiveness. They would never NOW claim that THEY were the compassionate ones who talked God into "repenting of His evil," or "staying His wrathful hand," or "showing mercy to His people by not killing them."

Are we better than God, more merciful, more patient, more loving, more humane? Of course not!

We know better NOW, thanks to the nature revealed in the life and character of Jesus Christ, along with New Testament Holy Ghost illumination, that Satan, not God, is the Old Testament killer. Satan, not God, is the death angel, the destroyer, the minister of all destructive wrath, the father of all lies and lust, the ruler of this fallen world, the prince of the power of the air, the great dragon, in whose power the whole corrupted world lies.

Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan, not to inflict them. Jesus came to reveal that the Old Testament had a fundamental flaw, a blind-spot in their view of God. Hebrews 8:7 clearly says the Old Testament was NOT flawless. Hebrews 8:7. Whereas the Old Testament portrayed Satan as the obedient left hand of a wrathful God, Jesus came to reveal a vastly different picture of Satan. Jesus unveiled Satan as a rabid cosmic rebel operating without Divine sanction or approval, human sanction and approval yes, but NOT Divine.

The Old Testament saints had an UNDIFFERENTIATED view of God, which ultimately produced death. They did not know that the love nature of God was totally divorced from the wrath nature of Satan. They simply viewed the works of Satan as the wrath of God. So, we now know that the three passages discussed above where Abraham, Moses, and David are all portrayed as being more merciful than God---- are simply Old

Testament distortions in need of New Testament light. God is the one who ALWAYS talks us into being merciful, not vice-versa.

And let's be honest. Who REALLY gets the glory when WE claim to be the ones who talk God out of mass killing sprees. WE get the glory, not God.

Anytime the Bible portrays men as being MORE merciful and compassionate than God, rest assured distortion is present. And God wants us, by the Holy Ghost, to see these occasional distortions and correct them with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. To God be ALL the glory!

We don't talk God out of killing. He talks US out of killing.

We don't convince God to stay His wrath. He convinces us to forsake OURS.

We don't implore God to heal those oppressed of the devil. He implores US to heal them with the keys of the kingdom we have already been given.

Prayer is not getting God to change His will. Prayer is getting US to change our will to better align with His.

Let me be clear. I am not saying the Old Testament saints were intentionally lying or purposely misrepresenting what God was trying to tell them, only that they partially misprocessed the divine impulses they originally received by adding their own wrath to the Lord's original word. Just like a funhouse mirror distorts the true image of what stands before it, we can partially distort a divine word because of the warps on our being.

One can readily see an example of this in the life of Moses, where God once told him to SPEAK a miracle word to a "rock" in the dessert so that it would supernaturally spout water to bless the parched Israelites. But, Moses instead struck the rock in anger while verbally condemning the Israelites. This gave the people the WRONG impression that God was wrathful when in fact He was nothing of the sort. God called this misrepresentation of His character by Moses the "failure to sanctify His name." Sadly, this sin dynamic is what kept Moses from entering the Promised Land. Numbers 20:7-12.

Do you see? The Old Testament wrath and violence attributed to God was, in fact, the wrath and violence of Satan. Do we really think Satan was twiddling his demonic thumbs in the Old Testament while God Himself was operating Satan's ministry of wrath, accusation, temptation, oppression and condemnation? That the very things the New Testament NOW says Satan does, were nonetheless somehow in the Old Testament done directly by God?

No way! Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He changeth not. The only thing that's changed is our BETTER understanding of God's BETTER nature under our BETTER Covenant.

#4-- THOUGHT EXPERIMENT ON THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

One day during prayer, the Lord lifts your mind's eye to see a wonderfully weaved tapestry hanging in the courts of Heaven. Vivid images cover the vast tapestry top-to-bottom and form some kind of grand cosmic narrative. The tapestry tells a glorious tale, even though you can't yet decipher it.

The tapestry is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. Threads of every vibrant color sway, shift, shine and pulsate all over the masterpiece, causing it to come alive, to actually breathe out its story. Each individual thread is somehow independently alive, but the threads also share a corporate life together as they seamlessly swirl and sway in unison.

The human and divine figures which are stitched on the surface of the tapestry actually move, speak and sing. To compare it to a movie screen would do it a gross injustice. It is a thousand times more panoramic, more communicative, more interactive, and more informative. It conveys a million things at once, and one thing a million different ways. It's not just three dimensional, but four, five six dimensional, and beyond. It's holographic, fractal and mesmerizing.

Everything on the tapestry is occurring simultaneously. Whatever the story is, it's not linear at all. It's more like a swirling spiral of events, explanations and exhortations. In fact, because it's so overwhelming, your vision gets blurry because you can't keep up with all the intricate thread movements at once. This living tapestry is telling some sort of story, a narrative of something spectacular, but you can't yet process it.

In fact, as you begin to experience more and more sensory overload, the Lord quickly directs your focus to a small and particular area on the tapestry. Your blurred vision subsides momentarily as you fix your eyes on the specific patch of the tapestry. What you see is both wondrous and exciting, public and personal, important and intimate. It is good news! But, you still can't yet understand it fully, but something from it has nonetheless been internalized deep within you.

You are invigorated!

In that moment of clarity, you know that the Lord wants you to remember and record this patch of revelation for others to see. You instinctively know that the Lord has placed a spiritual camera strapped around your neck. You reach down and grab the camera. You bring it to your eye and take a snapshot of what you see.

The Lord then tells you, as your mind's eye returns to earth, that you are to use that snapshot of spiritual memory. It will help you to better recollect, process and explain the divine truths contained on the patch of the tapestry you were assigned.

You then use the snapshot memory to write down the description of what you saw. Even though the snapshot memory is helpful, it doesn't perfectly capture the incredible fluidity, the boundless energy, the swirling life, the panoramic profoundness, the holographic epiphany of what you actually beheld.

You then basically reproduce your snapshot in written and spoken language for others to see. But you sense frustration from within.

While your snapshot helps point the way to the rich revelation of the Lord's tapestry, it is not the tapestry itself. Human language only allows for snippets and snapshots of spiritual truths, two dimensional representations of a hundred dimensional reality.

The snapshot alone is not enough. It can help us to better seek, understand and prepare for encounters with the Lord's tapestry ourselves. But, the snapshot itself is only a rock of remembrance, a memorial to the experiential knowledge of God we received from our previous encounter with the Lord's tapestry.

As you pray to the Lord, He shows you that what was perfectly inspired was the tapestry itself. The snapshot you took is a memory of an inspired truth, a distant echo, a partial portrait, of a perfectly inspired divine encounter with the Lord. The snapshot is a "still-life" reproduction of an "un-still" dynamic. And for that reason, it will always fall short.

As you struggle with the limitations and inadequacies of your snapshot, the Lord comforts you. He assures you that the Lord's tapestry is weaved into each man's heart, and that each man is a living epistle of God waiting to be revealed. He explains to you that the snapshots are fingers pointing to the heavenly tapestry, but not the tapestry itself. Don't worship the finger. Follow to where the snapshot points and THEN you will encounter the ecstasy of epiphany. The inspiration of the snapshot lies in where it points, NOT in the finger itself.

Your written description of your snapshot memory is a copy of a copy, a reproduction of a reproduction. Helpful to be sure, but it is NOT the tapestry itself. The tapestry can only be properly perceived from heaven's gates within you. It is written in your hearts already. The snapshot is merely a phrase paralyzed in time and space. But, when you use that snapshot to direct your surface emotions and mental focus toward the heavenly tapestry at which the snapshot is pointing, THEN you refresh yourself in divine encounter.

So, regarding Scripture, is it inspired? Yes, the Lord's tapestry, His book of pre-destinies, His volume of life, are all the purest form of Scripture. These are HIS original holographic manuscripts. The Lord's heavenly tapestry exists only in perfect holographic form in heaven and on our hearts. The indwelling Holy Spirit IS the holographic living logos imprinted on our hearts.

But, what about written Scripture? Is it inspired too? Yes, written Scriptures are inspired reproductions of an earlier snapshot encounter with the Lord's tapestry. They are there,

like a contemplative mirror, for us to "selah" (reflect) our consciousness up and into genuine orbital encounters with the Lord's tapestry.

We are all threads in and on that tapestry. Can you feel it?

CHAPTER 9-- WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SATAN AND HIS EVIL TO EXIST?

ANSWER: HE DOESN'T!

When we ask why God allows Satan and his evil to exist, that question can just as easily be asked about men. Why would God create and allow men to commit the endless evils we perpetuate? Angels and men both have a measure of freewill, and to this cause must all earthly evil be assigned.

Here is my proposal.

I don't believe God does allow evil, at least not in the sense we presume it. I want to back up the inquiry to the proper foundational question. The proper question is not WHY does God allow evil, but rather DOES God allow evil?

Before you say, "Yes, obviously He does," I want you to take a step back and consider a couple of other possibilities.

For the sake of argument, let's assume that a good God would never create or allow evil of any kind. In other words, a good God would always DISALLOW evil and never ALLOW it.

With me so far? Now, assuming that such a good God would DISALLOW all evil, the question becomes HOW would He disallow it? Would such a God have any limitations on HOW He would disallow all evil motives, evil actions and evil events?

Would such a good God coerce the wills of free beings to incinerate every evil thought before it arose? Would this God forcibly intervene in each and every circumstance ripping every evil choice out of our minds before we could select it? Would laser beams descend from heaven burning up all evildoers to stop their wrongdoings?

Wouldn't this type of forced entry into our minds and lives make God a "rapist" of sorts? If He could physically "take over" our hearts and minds like a master puppeteer, wouldn't that make us His puppets rather than His children, His robotic chess pieces rather than His treasured offspring?

Could we then say that such a good God would NEVER resort to "reality rape" in disallowing evil? Rather, He would have to disallow evil another way, a way CONSISTENT with His flawless character.

For instance, Titus 1:2, along with several other verses, says that it is IMPOSSIBLE for God to EVER lie. So, we can easily see that God would never lie in order to stop evil.

GOD WOULD NEVER COMMIT EVIL TO STOP EVIL. The reason? Because evil is simply NOT in His nature. This good God we are discussing IS all-powerful, but ONLY in the CONTEXT of His perfect CHARACTER.

This is easy to see in the context of lying, that God would never become a liar Himself in order to stop some particular evil. But, what about other qualities of virtue in His divine nature? What if God wouldn't allow Himself to kill, rob, destroy, coerce, manipulate or brutalize in order to disallow evil?

And it's not just that God WOULDN'T do these evil things listed above to stop other evil things from happening. It is that He COULDN'T. His character IS pure virtue. His name IS His virtue. His nature is seamlessly weaved into His being. In Him is light and NO darkness, NO shadow of turning. (I John 1:5; James 1:17). He cannot violate His own goodness.

This good God is all-powerfully virtuous, NOT all-powerfully wicked. God is all-powerfully honest, all-powerfully honorable, all-powerfully loving, all-powerfully kind, all-powerfully patient, all-powerfully merciful, and all-powerfully healing. God is NOT all-powerfully cruel, all-powerfully vengeful, all-powerfully angry, vicious, coercive, etc.

Matthew 5:48, and the preceding ten verses establish that God the Father's perfection lies in this: He always overcomes evil one way and one way only--- with goodness. He always blesses His enemies to overcome their evil. He endlessly turns the other cheek, walks the extra mile, gives the extra cloak, etc. And Jesus tells us to always do the same, to "be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."

Do you see? God has already disallowed ALL evil, but not in the way our carnal minds would expect or foolishly demand. We wrongly expect, just like Israel at the time of Christ, the Messiah to be like Arnold Shwartzenegger, a brutal terminator of evil. Jesus rocked those expectations by instead appearing as the meek Lamb of God, just as He continues to rock our expectations as well.

So exactly WHEN did Jesus DISALLOW all evil? I say at the very moment evil became possible. At the foundation of the earth, before the world began, Jesus was the Lamb who was slain who takes away the sin-evil of the world. See John 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 5:12-14, 13:8.

But, if this is so, why has evil continued to appear ever since the foundation of the world? Why hasn't it already been disallowed and taken away, if Jesus was somehow slain since the foundation of the world? One word answer: PATIENCE. The way God resists, overcomes and disallows evil requires patience.

The force of goodness does not always operate instantly, although it often does where faith is fervent. Overcoming the evil in other men's hearts though usually takes time. Turning the other cheek endlessly against our attackers, perpetually blessing those who

curse us, and continually forgiving evil done to us----- this all takes time to snowball to avalanche proportions.

As we operate as children of the light by responding to all evil with all goodness, more and more momentum is being built up and stored in the heavenlies. Like rain clouds saturated with life-giving rain, the heavenlies will ultimately pour down the glorious power of God's goodness. This force of goodness will "hasten the day of the Lord" where all evil is visibly vanquished.

Jesus got the avalanche started. It is coming to full manifestation sooner or later. Sooner is better. Our goodness hastens it, while neglecting our so great a salvation hinders it's full manifestation.

We must believe that God's way of disallowing evil is SOLELY through the Cross. Jesus did not return evil for evil. He did not become evil to stop evil. Rather, He absorbed ALL our evil upon Himself, without judging us, without revenge or retaliation toward us, and without wrath returned to us.

Jesus at the Cross turned His cosmic cheek the other way and blessed us rather than cursed us. THIS was where God disallowed all evil. Evil is doomed. It is already dead. It just is thrashing wildly about, the same way a dead snake continues to furiously writhe after its head has been severed.

If demons are defeated and all our sins and sicknesses healed, then why don't we see this "always already" victory right now? "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; . . . Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:3, 8-9.

This passage is clear that all things have already been put under Jesus, but we don't yet see them put under Jesus. The reason? Because of our individual and corporate "neglect" of "so great a salvation." Both Satan and Evil have no gasoline left in their tank because Jesus drained it all away at the Cross. They are functioning today solely off of the fumes of our neglect of Jesus' great salvation. What makes this salvation so great is its "always already" aspect.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convince us of the accomplished benefits of this so great salvation. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor. 2:12.

But, what about evil events in nature? Premature death? Infants and children victimized by sickness or crippling misfortune? Tsunamis, earthquakes, mudslides, famines, wars, genocides? What or who CAUSES these things? Chance, God, Satan, Demons?

Here is my proposal.

POINT ONE: THE CAUSE OF EVIL EVENTS ARE FALLEN POWERS

I was recently reading the cosmology of the early Church Fathers. Cosmology is simply metaphysical study of the form, content, organization, of the universe. "Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth

Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep."

Lines 677-678. John Milton, Book IV, PARADISE LOST

What did the early Church believe about the role of angels and demons in everyday reality?

Athenagoras (133-190 AD) summarized the early Church's cosmology as follows: "The Maker and Framer of the world distributed and appointed....a multitude of angels and ministers...to occupy themselves about the elements, and the heavens, and the world, and the things in it, and the godly ordering of them all.... Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice....so is it among the angels. Some, free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which He had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them." A PLEA FOR THE CHRISTIANS, 10.

Athenagorus further believed that Satan, as "the (spirit) prince of (earthly) matter exercises a control and management contrary to the good that is in God" (A Plea, 25). Thrice Jesus called Satan the archon (ruler or prince) of this material creation (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul likewise called Satan the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the archon (ruler or prince) of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). As theologian Greg Boyd has sagely noted, "Athenagorus concluded that everything in nature that obviously looks contrary to God's character appears that way because it is contrary to God. It didn't arise from the omni-benevolent hand of the Creator (as the atheists of his day and ours object) but was rather due to the activity of an evil 'ruling prince' and 'the demons his followers'" (A Plea, 25).

Tertullian (160-225 AD) wrote that "[d]iseases and other grievous calamities" were demons on the attack, whose "great business is the ruin of mankind." Whenever "poison in the breeze blights the apples and the grain while in the flower, or kills them in the bud, or destroys them when they have reached maturity..." the fingerprints of evil spirits becomes clear (Apology 22).

Origen (184-254 AD) wrote that that every fiber of nature was under the direct care of "invisible husbandmen and guardians" (Against Celsus, 8.31).

"Natural" evil came from certain spirits rebelling against their creator. Origen taught that the destructive horsemen of disaster, death, pestilence, war and famine were not "natural" in God's creation, but were rather the result of fallen angels on the attack (Against Celsus, 8.31). These rebel forces were "the cause of plagues...barrenness... tempests... [and] similar calamities" (Against Celsus,1.31).

Gregory of Nysa (335-395 AD) states it more simply: "In this visible world...nothing can be achieved except through invisible forces" (Dialogues, IV.5).

POINT TWO: GOD DOES NOT ALLOW THESE UNSEEN FORCES TO COMMIT EVIL
--- WE DO!

Saying Satan has a "purpose...permitted" by God is like saying child molestation, rape or murder has a Godly "purpose" because God "permits" it. This is just another way of laying evil at God's doorstep.

No, God has DE-permitted all Satanic evil through the power of the Cross. Luke 10:18-19; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; John 16:11; Matthew 16:19; Ephesians 1:22-23. God has ALREADY disallowed all Satanic evil, but we have YET to FULLY ENFORCE His judgment on all Satanic powers and principalities. Jesus IS God's complete disallowance of evil. Satan still hangs around here NOT because God allows him, but because WE do. He is a vanquished and defeated foe. God is waiting for us as His body to enthusiastically enforce HIS disallowance of evil--- today, here, and now!

To say God specifically "permits" each and every evil Satan does regresses back to the Old Testament Judaic and modern Calvinistic mindset that tragically clams both good and evil come from God's sovereign hand. Calvin famously teaches, as does Judaism, that "God's permissions are His purposes," which is why Calvin said Satan was God's "minister of wrath."

I respect Old Testament Hebraic thought, but I do not worship it. They line up with Calvinism on very many erroneous points, which end up deforming the character of God. Jesus came to IMPROVE our understanding of Satan as the horrific god of this world and the consequent need for spiritual warfare.

The Old Testament saint Job is NOT our model for dealing with Satan, Jesus is. Job was oblivious of Satan's role of malevolent destroyer. Job hardly modeled New Testament way of dealing with Satanic attack. He never mentioned Satan, never rebuked Satan, never resisted Satan, never engaged in any form of spiritual warfare at ALL while his children, health and possessions were all being destroyed.

Am I saying OT saints had no concept of the demonic? No, not at all, they had a dim and partial grasp of angelic conflict, but no able theologian from any Christian or Jewish camp would support the claim that they had anything close to the New Testament view of Satan as "the god of this world." In fact, any Jew would scoff at Paul's use of that title

because their hyper-literal view of sovereignty would not allow for that term to apply to anybody but Yahweh.

And so, they believed evil spirits came from the Lord, not Satan. They believed the death angel was Satan who merely killed whoever the Lord instructed him to kill. Satan was God's enforcer angel just doing his job. This is exactly what ancient Rabbinic Judaism believed what and Orthodox Judaism still believes.

The Old Testament is full of wonderful types, allegories and shadows waiting to be discovered. And I am in no way saying to discard it. I AM saying that the vast majority of both Christian and Jewish theologians agree that the Old Testament view of Satan is vastly different from the New Testament view of Satan. An unperceived Satan is an unresisted Satan. He was rarely if ever perceived or resisted in the Old Testament, but is almost continually recognized and rebuked in the New Testament.

Because of this, the Old Testament needs to be illuminated with the truths of our "better covenant with better promises," many of which pertain to our complete authority to rebuke and vanquish all Satanic evil. This is what the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is all about, the supernatural equipping to trample demonic foes. Jesus started telling the disciples about Satan's full rule and fuller defeat in John 16:11, but He said they could not yet "bear it" because they had not yet been Spirit-baptized. If they couldn't handle the full truth of Satan in their unspirit-baptized condition, despite being in Jesus' actual presence, how much less could the Old Testament saint grasp Satanic realities, having never directly beheld the face of Jesus. My point is the very last thing we need to do is regress back into Old Testament thinking about Satan.

God's only view toward evil is to disallow it through the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. This is the power of the Cross - - to conquer and nullify evil in all its forms - - sin, death, wrath, violence, hatred, jealousy, strife, pride, lust and envy. John The Baptist was the first to recognize and declare Jesus' mission as the cure for all the world's evil. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Jn. 1:29. The term "taketh away" in the above passage really means "beareth away." At the Cross, Jesus bore away all the power of evil in our lives - - past, present and future - - bar none - - no exceptions. There is no sin, or evil or demonic power that the Cross of Jesus did not overcome. Jesus said, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33).

Don't lose this point. Sometimes, we can miss the most crucial point by neglecting to focus on it with our whole being. Jesus came to destroy evil, and He did destroy it. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 Jn. 3:8. Why evil still appears to exist and prosper is due to our neglect of our so great a salvation.

Scriptures declare that Jesus is God's full provision to prevent, protect and purify us from evil. Jesus described His own purpose as follows:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” Lk. 4:18-19.

Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted - - from evil, to preach deliverance to those held captive - - by evil, to restore the sight of those blinded - - by evil, and to set at liberty those that are bruised - - by evil. Jesus’ heart is always to bless and protect us. “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” Lk. 10:19.

Jesus never tolerated, used or allowed evil in any form. He defeated what is called “natural evil” when He rebuked a storm which threatened to sink the boat in which He was traveling. He defeated “demonic evil” hundreds, if not thousands, of times by casting out spirits of infirmity, insanity and deformity. He protected an adulteress from “social evil” by keeping her from being murdered by other men. He battled “religious evil” constantly as He rebuked the false religion of His day which blocked people from entering the gate of truth. He overcame the “material evil” of lack by multiplying loaves, transforming water into wine and finding needed finances in the mouth of a fish. Lastly, Jesus defeated the “ultimate evil” by raising others and Himself from the dead. HE CONQUERED DEATH!

Whenever Jesus was not allowed to deliver others from evil, He marveled at their unbelief which kept them from receiving deliverance. When He instructed the disciples to pray “this way,” the heart of Jesus’ prayer was His statement in the Greek imperative that His Heavenly Father does and will “deliver us from evil.”

POINT THREE: WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMIC OF WAR!

A) IF DEATH AND THE DEMONIC HAS "ALREADY" BEEN DEFEATED BY JESUS, WHY DO PEOPLE STILL DIE?

B) WHY DOES DEMONIC DESTRUCTION STILL OCCUR?

C) IS THE SPIRITUAL WAR TRULY OVER OR IS IT STILL GOING ON?

In his classic Christian book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan portrays Satan as two lions chained on both sides of heaven's highway. As long as we pilgrims stay centered in the Lord's highway, neither lion can reach us because the chains snap taut. But, if we stray from the center of the road, the lions can maul us. Satan is bound, but still dangerous if we neglect our so great a salvation and stray too near to his clutches.

Jesus has taken the dominion of death and destruction away from Satan. However, that victory has not yet been fully manifested in the earthly realm as it has been in the heavenly realm. Hebrews 10:13 tells us Jesus is seated at the right hand of God waiting and "expecting til his enemies be made his footstool." 1 Corinthians 15:26 tells us, "the last enemy that SHALL be destroyed is death."

Thus, even though Jesus has ALREADY disarmed all principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) in the heavenly realm, He is waiting for his church to enforce that victory upon the earth (Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:10). The fact that we still see death and defeat is not due to any deficiency in the Lord, but rather to a deficiency in the church in "neglecting" her so great a salvation (Hebrews 2:3).

I think warfare for us NOW is a matter of "faith-endorsing" and "faith-enforcing" Jesus' heavenly victory here on earth as it has ALREADY been fully won in the Heavens. This is why Paul called it a "fight of faith." It IS a fight. But, the good news is that God doesn't promise He WILL win the battle for us. No, He promises He already HAS won it. All we do is add our faith's "amen" to His grace's "yes."

It is like a scripted professional wrestling match. No matter how brutally real the violence appears, the Lord's written a spiritual script which guarantees US manifest victory IF we but fight the good fight of faith. Unhappy warriors fight with a grim spirit because they don't know the outcome. But, happy warriors, as William Wordsworth called them, fight with grins of joy unspeakable because they know the outcome is already established IF they will BUT BELIEVE IT and fervently follow the script.

Jesus tells us that whatever we bind on Earth has "already" been bound in Heaven. The original Greek of Matthew 18:18 and 16:19 both clearly say that we have the authority to bind on Earth that which is ALREADY bound in Heaven(per Colossians 2:15). Interlinear translations agree that these verses convey the idea that, "whatever you might bind on the Earth will be, having been bound in the Heavens ALREADY."

It gets even better. Not only has the demonic been demolished, but we have also already been completely healed of all our sins, sorrows and sicknesses. Jesus again completed this healing long ago through His Cross and Resurrection: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye WERE healed." 1 Pet 2:24.

But, if demons are defeated and all our sins and sicknesses healed, then why don't we see this "always already" victory right now? The following verse holds the alarming answer.

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; . . . Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we SEE NOT YET all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of

death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb 2:3, 8-9.

This passage is clear that all things have ALREADY been put under Jesus, but we don't yet SEE them put under Jesus. The reason? Because of our individual and corporate "neglect" of "so great a salvation." Both Satan and Evil have no gasoline left in their tank because Jesus drained it all away at the Cross. They are functioning today solely off of the fumes of our neglect of Jesus' great salvation. What makes this salvation so great is its "always already" aspect.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convince us of the accomplished benefits of this great salvation. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor 2:12. But, our fight is always one of faith, effectual and fervent faith which steadfastly cleaves to the Lord's reports of pre-victory.

CHAPTER 10-- DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT JUST "STAND THERE" AND LET THE DEVIL DO HIS THING?

So many people miss God's goodness because they are unfamiliar with how evil operates and how God needs our synergistic cooperation to dynamically engages and overcomes it here on earth as it's already been become in Heaven.

How does Satan kill? What is the process that allows the devil to destroy men with disasters, death and destruction? What general dynamics does God want us to glean from Scripture? Does the Holy Spirit just "stand there" and let the devil do his thing unopposed?

Let me share two different translations of a key passage which will ignite your understanding as to just HOW Satanic evil operates. The second translation is actually a highly respected interlinear translation, and so is a little choppy in English because it is word-for-word translation.

"Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." 1 Cor. 10:9-10.

"But not we might 'PRESSURE OUT' THE CHRIST, just as some of them PRESSURED and by the snakes were destroyed. But not grumble, just as indeed some of them grumbled and were destroyed by the destroyer." 1 Corinthians 10:9-10. THE WORD STUDY GREEK-ENGLISH NEW TESTAMENT by Paul R. McReynolds (Tyndale).

These passages refer to the old Testament episode described in Numbers 21:4-6. For years, I have heard these verses cited for the proposition that we better not "tempt" God or He will send snakes of affliction to kill us. And, in fact the Old Testament passage does appear to say "the Lord SENT fiery serpents among the people."

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! We live under New Testament truth, not Old Testament wrath.

The Lord didn't send the snakes. Satan did. The protective presence of the Lord is what kept the snakes AWAY in the first place. The New Testament version of this event modifies and corrects our understanding here. God didn't the snakes IN to afflict and kill the people. No, the people PRESSURED God OUT of the situation, which then allowed "the destroyer," Satan, to penetrate and assassinate the people.

According to the interlinear translation above, these verses literally warn us, "NOT" to "PRESSURE OUT" the Christ, just as some of them (the Israelites) pressured and by the snakes were destroyed.

Do you see? Neglect and unbelief cause the Lord's protective presence to wane, whereas faith and hope cause the Lord's protective presence to wax. Waxing and

waning. Waning and waxing. Learning these governing dynamics is what our faith walk is all about.

"We" are the ones who "PRESSURE OUT THE CHRIST" with our neglect, unbelief and hardness of heart. Satan THEN is able to penetrate the circumstance with his destructions. The picture becomes clearer and clearer. Man pushes God's protective presence away by his sin, grumbling and unbelief. Demonic forces (snakes) move in the vacuum created and afflict man with all forms of satanic oppression.

DISTINGUISHING GOD'S OMNI-PRESENCE FROM HIS MANIFEST PRESENCE

I want to weave a seamless cloak. This cloak represents a "righteous mindset" that dresses our every perception with the Lord's covering. It will provide us continuing understanding of how God's Spirit operates in and over our lives. This cloak of wisdom will allow us "put on" and "keep on" the protective presence of Jesus at all times. As we learn to recognize His presence with the "ready pens" of our confessing mouths and believing hearts, Heaven will openly "manifest" here and now upon the earth. Psalm 45:1.

The Lord's presence is everything. Is He fully present here and now or isn't He? Does He leave the room when evil events come? If not, why doesn't He stop them? Psalm 91 promises absolute and total protection for the righteous. Is this true all the time, or just some of the time? What good are His promises of protection if they are only occasionally true? Where is His presence when tsunamis strike, rapists attack, cancer ravages and terrorists slaughter?

Can we just shrug our shoulders and write it off to God's mysterious will? Does God love us with His right hand of Jesus one day, and then the next day hate us with His wrathful left hand of Satan? Can we truly love or trust a bi-polar God who might or might not show up for battle? Or, could it be, that His apparent "failure to appear" is caused by other factors on OUR side of the equation?

I think all would agree that the Holy Spirit IS God's actual presence in the world today. See John 16:7-15. If we rightly understand the Holy Spirit's pulsating nearness, then the seamless cloak starts to take shape. Let's get started on some basics. At the outset, I want to say that we are discussing the dynamics of God's presence in GENERAL terms only. Why God appears in one situation and not another is something we can understand in general terms, but there are always specific factors we may never know which either impede or enable the manifestation of God's presence. Only God knows ALL the factors in any given situation. I am not addressing any of those specific dynamics, only GENERAL dynamics.

IF GOD IS ALWAYS HERE, WHY DOESN'T HE ALWAYS APPEAR?

First, God is omnipresent. The prefix "omni" means "all." God then is ALL-PRESENT, which means His presence exists in all times and places. Paul told the philosophical Greeks, "That they should seek the Lord... for IN HIM we live, and move, and have our being." Acts 17:28. David also knew this dynamic when he wrote Psalm 139, a great tribute to the omnipresence of God. "Whither shall I go from thy SPIRIT? Or whither shall I flee from thy PRESENCE? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." Praise God, what a passage to remember in times of apparent darkness!

But, to say the Lord is always PRESENT is NOT to say that the Lord's presence is always openly MANIFESTING. The word "manifest" means "to make evident by showing or displaying, an outward indication which is readily perceived." Jesus said we can know the KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOW HERE WHEN GOD'S PRESENCE MANIFESTS by casting out devils, healing the sick, raising the dead, preaching deliverance to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, thereby setting at liberty all those bruised by Satan's oppressions. See Luke 11:20; Matthew 10:7-8; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38; Romans 15:18-19.

Another way to say this is as follows: THE MANIFEST PRESENCE OF GOD IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN OPEN OPERATION. Wherever God's Kingdom, which means the Holy Spirit's rule and reign, is received by faith, the presence of God is currently manifesting. The manifest presence of God means there is a demonstration of Spirit power. This can range all the way from displaying the supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), to the supernatural gifts from the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) or to a supernatural visitation by the Spirit (Acts 8:39). When God is given free reign by our faith, He WILL leave "fingerprints" able to be seen by all. "Signs" always "follow" in the wake of His manifest presence. See Mark 16:17, 20.

Convicted hearts, healed bodies, delivered souls, changed lives, displays of unfettered joy and love for one another ---- THESE ALL are the manifesting presence of God. But note that the New Testament teaches that these manifestations are to flow THROUGH US. We, as the body of Christ, are the current conduits of the manifest presence of God. "The sons of God are those led by the Spirit of God." Romans 8:14.

Any leading of the Spirit IS a manifestation of God's presence and an open operation of the Kingdom of God. In fact, ALL CREATION is groaning in expectation, "for the MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD." Romans 8:19. Even though all the enemies of God are NOW ALREADY OMNIPRESENTLY DEFEATED through Jesus' work on the Cross (Colossians 2:13-15), the Father is now waiting for US to put those enemies MANIFESTLY under OUR feet. The victory of Jesus over ALL evil is NOW

omnipresent, but we are the channels to make that victory NOW manifestly present. It was for this reason that John Wesley said, "It seems as if God is limited by our prayer (faith) life. He can do nothing upon the earth unless a man prays." We are the spigots that release the omnipresence of God unto manifest presence. Our faith doesn't create the victory, it only recognizes and releases it FROM Heaven TO earth.

Do you see? It is not that God hasn't already done all the He can to defeat every form of evil, for He has. Jesus omnipresently won the victory over every battle with sin, sickness and Satan at the Cross. By His stripes we were all HEALED (past tense) according to 1 Peter 2:24. This victory is already established and completed in Heaven. This omnipresent victory hovers and hums all around us, in us, through us, in us, between us ---- waiting to be recognized and received unto full manifestation in this earthly realm as it is already fully manifested in Heaven. God now eagerly awaits for us to BELIEVE IT UNTO MANIFESTATION, "From henceforth expecting till His enemies be (manifestly) made His footstool." Hebrews 10:13.

"Thou hast put all things in subjection under his (man's) feet. For in that He (God) put all in subjection under him (man) He (God) left nothing that is not put under him (man). But now we do not yet see (in open manifestation) all things put under him. But we see Jesus..." Hebrews 2:8-9. Hallelujah! The victory is already assured. Everything is under our feet NOW, regardless of how bad things may look, not because of our own works, but because of Jesus. All we need do is to focus on beholding Jesus, His work, His life, His Word, His Spirit ---- He is always beckoning us to "only believe" that HE HAS ALREADY OVERCOME THE WORLD. As we diligently believe Jesus, His omnipresent victory will start to openly manifest before our very eyes in greater and greater power and intensity. Like the dawn of a new day, darkness will gradually be dispelled until we are fully in the light as He is in the light.

Remember that, as said above, God's omnipresent victory hovers and hums all around you in all your circumstances. The Holy Spirit is continually whispering in your ear, "I'm here. I beat that enemy already. Been there done that. Been there won that. I love you child. Believe it and I can pour forth my glory into this matter for all to see. As it is in Heaven NOW, receive it on earth NOW!" It is as if this whole earthly plane of existence is a thin slice of "tracing paper" laid over the Kingdom of Heaven. God wants us to use our ready pens of faith to perfectly trace and replicate Heaven's underlying reality into THIS reality. In the original Greek, both Matthew 6:10 and Luke 11:2 express the idea that we are to pray that God's will on earth be done NOW as it has ALREADY been accomplished in Heaven. OUR role then, is merely to FAITH-TRACE Heaven's will on the tablet of our lives. Tracing is not difficult, but it does require us to pay close attention.

WHAT IS THE "QUENCHING" OR "GRIEVING" OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Now let's take a look at the reverse truth of this concept just discussed. The UN-MANIFESTED PRESENCE OF GOD IS THE UN-DEMONSTRATED KINGDOM OF

GOD. Wherever the Spirit is not being recognized and received by the hearts and minds of men, God's presence cannot fully manifest and demonstrate the Kingdom of God. Or, put another way, although the Kingdom of God is omnipresent, it cannot be manifestly present wherever men are disbelieving or disinterested in God. Failure to be alert toward God's Spirit is what the Bible calls **NEGLECTING OUR SO GREAT A SALVATION**. Hebrews 2:3. This verse suggests that we will not be able to escape danger if we **NEGLECT** our Psalm 91 promised salvation from all evil. Neglecting God "pressures" His manifest presence away, leaving us vulnerable to all sorts of demonic attacks.

The New Testament calls the un-manifested presence of God the "grieving" or "quenching" of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19. All over the earth right now, this very moment, men are ignoring God's Spirit, neglecting Him, rejecting Him, blaming Him for evil, slandering His character, resisting Him, and/or scoffing at His presence. Some want to manipulate the Holy Spirit, and control Him as they would any asset. Simon the sorcerer in the book of Acts is an example of this, along with many modern day charlatans who seek personal profit from Holy Spirit manifestations.

Others usurp the Holy Spirit by substituting their own personal opinions, theologies and judgements for the Holy Spirit's leading. In other words, they think their natural opinions and thoughts ARE the Holy Spirit. This is one dangerous assumption. This is why God's nature appears moody at best and monstrous at worst to most people. Many modern day religious teachers and leaders have deformed the image God because they operate in their own human opinion and tradition rather than Holy Spirit illumination. They control the masses with wrath and fear, when the Holy Spirit wants to liberate them with power and love.

So, how does all this abuse toward the Holy Spirit affect the omnipresent victory of God over ALL evil? Not at all! But how does our disbelief, disinterest, and disobedience affect the **MANIFEST** presence? Greatly! Let's look at a few examples in Scripture.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth in Mark 6:1-6, He came ready to perform the great works of God ---- miracles, demonic deliverances, dead-raising, teachings, preachings, impartations of forgiveness and restorations of wholeness, the entire package of power ministry. Yet, "He could there do no mighty work...because of their unbelief." In fact, Jesus was so grieved at the Spirit's power being quenched that, "He **MARVELED** at their unbelief." Makes you wonder how much "marveling" the Holy Spirit does today at our individual and corporate "unbelief" which **QUENCHES** His power from **MANIFESTING** right now, this very moment.

Could this be? Do we have the power to handcuff God from fully manifesting right now? Well, yes and no. No power in existence can keep God from manifesting fully and completely in Heaven. "The heavens are the Lord's but the earth has He given to the sons of men." Psalm 115:16. This plane of earthly existence, when compared to the scope and expanse of Heaven, comprises less than the smallest sliver of seaweed floating in the vast ocean. But, God used this sliver to create beings who could

experience love through freedom. To have the free response that allows true love to exist between two, God had to give men enough freedom to risk a level of rejection. Otherwise, we would all be robots, puppets on a string, who experience no real love, only control and manipulation. Love is worth the risk to God.

It comes down to this. Is God a puppet master, a control freak, a computer programmer who has already pre-downloaded and predetermined all of our life decisions? If so, we are mere robots, or automatons as C.S. Lewis famously said. Freedom would be a fiction, an illusion, just as love would be. Under this scenario, we are no more than puppets being controlled by pulls on the string by an unseen puppeteer. Yuck! But, what if God is not this kind of creator at all? Not a master puppeteer at all, but rather a loving Father? This type of Father would never coerce or rape the minds and hearts of His children. Instead, He continually encourages them, woos them, releases them, corrects them and patiently empowers them to grow IN grace THROUGH faith BY freedom TO love. Simply put, true love cannot exist without some measure of freedom to recognize it, receive it, relish it, return it or, sadly, even temporarily reject it.

I believe God gave us all enough freedom to discover and grow in love. The risk is that we can reject His saving love for this lifetime, and possibly even for unknown eons in a Hellish afterlife. But, personally, I don't believe God would give us enough freedom to eternally destroy ourselves or anybody else, not FOREVER. This is why I believe Hell, while lasting thousands or millions of years for many, could still never eternally exist because that would mean some men could defeat the love of God forever. I don't think anybody could do that. Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and thought it was forever. Hell from man's perspective certainly seems eternal and hopeless. But with God, nothing is impossible. God is a rescuing hero who always leave the ninety-nine to save the one. Nels Ferre rightly said, "Heaven can't be fully Heaven until it has emptied Hell."

But, back to the topic at hand. When we misuse our freedom by neglecting or disbelieving the promptings of the Holy Spirit, it does quench and grieve the Holy Spirit away from fully manifesting in this earthly realm. Never in the Heavenly realm, but certainly here because this earth is the podium of our freedom. This is the anvil where our eternal yes to God's love is to be forged. Anything less than a wholehearted yes to God is a half-hearted no. Half-heartedness IS our neglect of our so great a salvation.

So, when it comes to "ushering in" or "ushering out" God's manifest presence, consider the following dynamics: drench or quench, believe or grieve, select or neglect. These terms describe the ebb and flow of God's manifest presence. Remember, God's omnipresence NEVER leaves or withdraws, but His manifest presence does wax and wane, according to faith of those influencing the situation. Like the tides of the ocean ebb and flow depending on the orbital posture of the moon, so does the MANIFEST presence of God rise or withdraw depending on the orbital posture of our hearts.

If the "posture" of our hearts are focused ON, centered IN and revolving AROUND the Holy Spirit's immediate presence, then God will immediately MANIFEST to some or all

of our senses. It is that simple. The manifestation, as said above, might be a supernatural fruit, a supernatural gift, a supernatural sign, a supernatural touch of comfort, a supernatural insight, or a supernatural encouragement. God will MANIFEST into our NOW. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. If we posture our heart away from the Holy Spirit through neglect or unbelief, then the tide of His manifest presence recedes away from our senses.

PRESSURING OUT THE CHRIST

So, let's look again and reconsider our first example above. This Scripture is vital because it clearly highlights the ebb and flow of God's manifest presence. 1 Corinthians 10:9 quoted earlier warns us to NOT treat Christ the same way that the Israelites did in Numbers 21:4-9. There, they both neglected and disbelieved the Lord's goodness. They spoke against God and Moses, saying that they both had brought the Israelites out into the wilderness to die with no provision. Even though they had been amply provided supernatural manna from Heaven, the people now detested it and doubted God's goodness to protect and keep them.

The result? Venomous snakes immediately invaded the camp and killed many. The people repented, Moses prayed for them and deliverance came. The Lord commanded that a bronze serpent be lifted up on a pole, that whoever then looked up at it would be healed. They obeyed and all who focused up on the serpent pole were healed. This bronze serpent prophetically symbolized the coming Christ, who would likewise be gloriously lifted up on the Cross for the healing of the world. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:14-15.

Now, let's look again at McReynolds' interlinear translation of 1 Corinthians 10:9. "But not we might PRESSURE OUT the Christ, just as some of them PRESSURED and by the snakes were destroyed." Interlinear translations can be a little awkward to our ear, but they often give us the gold of better understanding Scripture texts.

Do you see what this passage now describes? Their rampant neglect and disbelief toward God, combined with their fear toward their circumstances, all combined to do the following. THEY PRESSURED OUT THE PROTECTIVE PRESENCE OF CHRIST. This created a vacuum of vulnerability. Satan sent the snakes in to fill the vacuum with his wrathful destructions. God's MANIFEST PRESENCE was grieved, quenched and pressured away UNTIL the people repented and Moses prayed. THEN, God's MANIFEST PRESENCE was able to flow back at high tide and reestablish protection.

This so reveals how we wrongly blame God for not showing up when bad things happen. WE are the ones who misuse our freedom to quench God away, to grieve Him away, to pressure Him away. We then blame Him for not delivering us. We are responsible, "response able" in other words. All men, regardless of what they think or believe, have the ability to respond to the Holy Spirit on some level. When we fail to

respond, through neglect or defiance, we diminish the MANIFEST presence of God. But, as we repent and believe, we un-dam the access which then allows the MANIFEST presence of God to rise as the tide. And as we know, a rising tide lifts all boats.

One final comment on this passage. The Numbers passage literally says God sent the snakes. We know better because of the topic discussed in the chapter THE FORGOTTEN KEY TO THE OLD TESTAMENT. Please read that chapter if you haven't yet. It reminds us that the Old Testament believers thought that Satan was a faithful angel who always obeyed God's instructions. SO, when they described Satan's Old Testament destructions, they often used the term "Lord" because they thought God had expressly commanded Satan to do it. For them, "God's wrath" was "Satan's destruction." God and Satan were on the same page, in other words. Not enemies, not opponents, not adversaries.

Rather, in the Old Testament mind, God and Satan were more like "good cop, bad cop," which describes modern day police partners who put on different facades in order to elicit confessions from crime suspects. One cop acts caring and protective to the suspect, while the other cop acts brutal and threatening. The suspect confesses so that the good cop will protect him from the wrath of the bad cop, but in truth both cops are working off each other totally, in full cooperation and unity of purpose.

Jesus came in the New Testament to reveal the truth that Satan is a rebel enemy of God and NOT a servant. Jesus came to destroy Satan's works, not approve them. 1 John 3:8. Satan was the bringer of the snakes, not God. God is the bringer of salvation, protection and deliverance. Whenever we lift up our eyes up and away from our fearful circumstances to behold Jesus lifted up on the Cross, we open the floodgates of His MANIFEST presence to submerge our situation with His glory. But, when we keep our eyes, thoughts and affections on things below, we are hindering God's MANIFEST PRESENCE from open showings and showerings of His goodness, power and love.

One last passage on this point. Jesus says in Luke 13:1-5 that all are equally vulnerable to Satanic attack if they neglect or disbelieve God. The people had wrongly thought that disasters killed certain Galileans and others because their sins were "worse" than other peoples. Jesus corrected them. None of the unrepentant are any less or more vulnerable than the others. There is no gradation of sin among those who are unrepentant. But, the key to this passage is often ignored. "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:2-3. Do you see it? IF YOU REPENT OVER NEGLECT AND UNBELIEF, YOU WON'T "LIKEWISE PERISH" ----- INSTEAD, YOU WILL BE PROTECTED. God's presence will be ushered in to make Psalm 91 a daily reality.

Let's go back to the "faith-tracing" concept discussed earlier. In the physical, all tracing takes is thin paper, a diligent eye and a ready pen applied with careful pressure. What is being traced is not at first clearly visible on the surface, but rather is submerged and must be discerned through penetrating focus. So too in the Spirit realm, we may not

discern God's omnipresent victory on the surface with our natural eyes, but faith focus can always discern His omnipresence, perhaps only dimly sometimes, but still always. When we apply pressure with our various "pens" ---- our sharpened minds, our ready tongues, our devoted hearts and loving hands, THEN Heaven's omnipresent victory starts to manifest on this earth ---- today, here and now! This is "faith-tracing" Heaven's omnipresence UNTO earthly manifest presence. But the tracing is in our hands, not God's. He will even help us trace by steadying our hand and eye when we falter, but He won't coerce us to "faith-trace." The decision is always ours.

Let me repeat, God is always OMNI-PRESENT on some level. In Him we move and breathe and have our being. But, He is not always MANIFESTLY-PRESENT. Where God is MANIFESTLY-PRESENT, supernatural explosions of healing, joy, renewal, revelation and love occur as abiding, common and automatic demonstrations of the Kingdom.

Where WE accept and embrace His Kingship, WE enlarge His MANIFEST-PRESENCE in our lives. When we quench, disbelieve, neglect, grieve or harden our hearts towards God's MANIFEST-PRESENCE (all different ways of explaining different angles of the same dynamic), then things NOT OF the Lord start to occur-- things which would never occur if God's full pleasure and presence was manifesting in the situation-- things like sickness, depression, oppression.

When Jesus went back to Nazareth, He could do NO mighty works BECAUSE of their unbelief. They quenched/grieved/pressured-out the fulness of His MANIFEST-PRESENCE away from doing the mighty works He wanted to do. And He MARVELED at their unbelief. Was Jesus still physically present on some level at Nazareth here? Sure. But was He MANIFESTLY-PRESENT there on every level of being, or had SOME aspect of His healing presence been quenched away? I think so.

Having seven children, I have learned one thing. I can't coerce their will to believe, embrace or trust in my goodwill toward them. On some general levels, I can help or bless them without their full or partial consent, but on most other levels I need their consent and invitation to help and guide them through their various trials.

They can, with their freewill, quench my access into their hearts and lives. This doesn't mean I EVER abandon them, but it does mean I have to relationally respect their wishes by withdrawing my MANIFEST-PRESENCE to as-nearby-a-place as the circumstances allow. If one of my teenagers insist I leave their bedroom because they don't want my input or any offer of my help or opinion, then I must reluctantly comply. If they want privacy, I have to withdraw my personal presence somewhat, not out of the house altogether, but certainly away from their immediate presence.

I will still hover as near them as I can remain without coercing or intruding on their freewill, but it will be in a somewhat grieved or quenched state, at least in regard to the issues they have steadfastly rejected my input on. Of course, I will keep my eyes alert and focused to jump to their aid the second they soften their stance toward me. This is

what invitational intimacy is all about-- walking in mutual consent. God will never coerce us, not even with His goodwill.

Anytime there are two hearts in relationship, one can pressure the fulness of the other's presence away. That's just the way freewill and love operates. It takes two to tango. A dance partner, even the partner who follows the other's lead, can always push away from their partner and put space between them.

If I am wrong, and God WAS equally MANIFESTLY-PRESENT in our minds and hearts at ALL times, then we would NEVER be sad, oppressed, sick or in lack, unless of course we believed that those afflictions WERE His cruel will for our lives. Under this scenario, His will would be fully done here on earth as it has already been done in Heaven, so that ALL that happens here would be His express and commanded will for our lives. The end result is putting evil directly on His divine doorstep as we remove from ours.

To say God NEVER withdraws ANY part of His presence from us no matter how much we reject or refuse His input, I think would ultimately make God responsible for evil events as well as functionally remove freewill from our relationship with him. Let me say that another way, when God is FULLY-PRESENT, MANIFESTLY-PRESENT, our faith hitting on all cylinders by allowing Him full access into our present, then I believe NO evil event could thrive or even occur.

I think it is healthy for us to see that we DO have a limited ability to reject/neglect/deselect God's MANIFEST-PRESENCE in this lifetime. Our ability to quench/grieve/pressure away the Holy Spirit is the only remaining access evil has to harm us. In the fulness of His presence, all evil is extinguished. But, as we partially quench His presence, evil still flickers in the vacuum.

A.W. Tozer said it this way-- "Every person is as full of the Holy Spirit as they want to be. They may not be as full as they 'wish' they were, but they most certainly are as full as they 'want' to be." The more His Spirit is invited/welcome, the more His presence is openly manifested. The less Spirit invited/welcome, the less His presence is openly manifested.

One last point. God doesn't withdraw His MANIFEST-PRESENCE because He wants to, but rather because we want Him to. He has to honor our freewill rejection to some degree. Love never forces presence. It endlessly offers full presence, but it never coerces it.

I want to clearly avoid Calvinistic monergism, which says that whatever happens at all times and places is ALL God and NO us. Synergism, by contrast, says it's MAINLY God and SLIGHTLY us. Monergism ultimately puts evil on God's sovereign doorstep alone, whereas synergism puts evil on our doorstep as we misuse our freewill by "neglecting our so great a salvation."

The point here is that OUR REPENTANCE, DILIGENCE AND FAITH YIELDS AND OPENS all our nearby floodgates to GOD'S MANIFEST PRESENCE. Repentance over past or current neglect. Diligence to keep the Lord always at our right hand as we enter into the Sabbath rest of His completed works. And faith to see Jesus lifted up and over every trial we face.

We CAN hasten the day of the Lord, His glorious appearances and glorious works. Only believe, adding all diligence to our faith. No more blaming God or wondering why He didn't show up. He is here ----always! He is available ---- always! He is willing to manifest -----always! He hovers and hums His assurances over you 24/7.

These assurances by Him always reiterate His ready and eager availability. "I AM here to show myself mighty for you my child. Only believe and the Heavens will open NOW! I AM here for you, in you and beside you. I will never forsake you or abandon you. Don't grieve my MANIFEST PRESENCE. Believe it! Don't quench my MANIFEST PRESENCE. Drench in it! And don't neglect my MANIFEST PRESENCE. Select it!"

CHAPTER 11-- WHAT IS THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURES?

This is a very important question. What is the inspiration of Scriptures? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Tim. 3:16. Does the term "given by inspiration of God" mean that God took over the minds of the authors and dictated every word of the Bible in the exact order and sentence structure used? Or, does "inspired" have another meaning.

For instance, Oprah Winfrey was recently embroiled in a controversy about her recommendation of a book entitled *A Million Little Pieces*, which was allegedly a true story of a drug abuser's fall and eventual recovery from severe addiction. Although Oprah's support helped make the book a bestseller, trouble came when certain events in the book were proven to be exaggerated, embellished and occasionally untrue. The author was humiliated and disgraced, although book editors all agreed that there would have been no controversy if the author had affixed the following language to his manuscript - - "Inspired by a True Story."

In other words, the term "inspiration" doesn't mandate perfect adherence to historical and literal fact. "Inspiration" allows and acknowledges that the author's writing has a core motivation based in real experience, but that the author's limited and unique perception as well as his freedom of expression result in the writing often being non-literal, only partially factual, and on occasion historically imprecise.

For instance, the Academy Award winning movie *Braveheart* is "inspired" by the life of the Scottish hero William Wallace, yet historians all agree that very few scenes were historically accurate. And yet the movie was deeply inspirational and moving on every level. Does it being factually less accurate take away from its legitimate inspiration?

The book and movie *The End of the Spear* both tell the inspirational story of Nate Saint, Jim Elliot and several other Christian missionaries killed by Ecuadoran tribesmen, who later became Christians and friends of the martyrs' families. Both movie and book claim to be inspired by the true story. Yet, the book and movie don't contain the literal, blow by blow, word for word, scene for scene, account of the historical event. Nobody could accurately account for every actual word said, every actual sequence of events, every actual tone of voice, every actual emotion\thought\impulse of the people involved. But does it really matter if the story is at all points and times 100% literal and factual? Or, is it more important the story catches the true essence and tone of a special occurrence?

If all we are looking for are just the facts, then newspapers are the highest form of written truth. But, if we are looking for deeper meaning, burning inspiration and compelling motivation, then we must go to a form of writing where the author has elbow room to excite and exhort the imaginations of its readers. Lower forms of these writings

include novels, plays, essays, poems and editorials. The highest form of this type of writing is Holy Scripture.

Scripture can be read as a literal-historical document in that it contains much “newspaper” type of information. But the fact that it is also “inspired by God” takes it to another level altogether. This higher level is more concerned with Spiritual meaning from God’s viewpoint than with legalistic literalism from man’s viewpoint.

The prophet Isaiah warned that when the Bible becomes only literal propositions, it will cause the reader to be snared by the enemies of his soul. “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.” Is. 28:13. The Apostle Paul likewise warned us that reading only by “the letter [literally] killeth” (2 Cor. 3:6).

Most of the early Church Fathers focused on Spiritual reading rather than literal reading. Saint Augustine preferred the non-literal meaning of Scripture as the truest sense of Scripture. So did Clement, Origen, St. Ambrose and St. Jerome. It is only this deeper sense of Scripture which gives proper shape and meaning to the literal. In other words, the literal reading doesn’t dictate what is Spiritual, but rather a Spiritual reading dictates what and when literal reading is appropriate.

Think of it this way. If all we do is read Scripture “literally,” then we can do this without God. All we need is our own natural understanding. This is the very thing God doesn’t want for us. He wants to illuminate and guide us through all Scripture so that we can see where His inspiration burns in these passages. In other words, God would never send us a revelation inspired by Him without also providing that it could only be properly understood by reading it with Him.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus didn’t write the New Testament with His own hand? If He had, then nobody could argue that it wasn’t always literally and historically perfect. And yet, Jesus didn’t do this for a very obvious reason. Had he written the Gospels Himself, then we could read them without the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and never question the meaning as being anything other than literal. We would, in effect, idolize literalism since it came directly from the pen of Jesus. This “idolatry of the literal” is exactly what happened to the Ten Commandments written by the “finger of God.” Today, millions of Jews and Christians worship the law of God instead of the Spirit of God. They worship the literal rather than the Spiritual. This is why God, in all His wisdom, used imperfect men to write Scripture so that we would have to depend on the Spirit’s guidance to properly read, understand and apply God’s inspiration.

Great Bible scholars like John Calvin noted the occasional human imprecisions and inaccuracies in the Scripture, such as when Matthew 27:9 misquotes Zechariah 11:13 as having been said by Jeremiah, and also when Acts 7:16 erroneously lists Abraham, rather than Jacob, as the purchaser of the sepulcher from the sons of Emmor\Hamor

per Joshua 24:32. God is perfect. Men are not. The Bible's inspiration is perfect. Men's expressions of that inspiration are not always perfect.

As C. S. Lewis said: "The human qualities of the raw material show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not 'the Word of God' in the sense that every passage in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God."

Do you see? The inspiration is the key. Just as the shell of a nut "husks" the seed within, so does the literal shell of Scripture "husk" the inspiration of God encased within. Scriptures are divinely inspired truths husked to varying degrees by human perceptions, mis-perceptions and partial perceptions. Let's consider some examples. Peter's revelation that Jesus was the Christ was a perfect human perception of a divinely inspired truth. However, Moses' striking of the rock in anger was a partial perception of God; part right and part wrong because while God inspired Moses to perform a miracle of provision for the parched Israelites, God did not want it delivered in Moses' wrathful tone of striking the rock but rather in tenderly speaking to the rock. Finally, many Old Testament saints totally mis-perceived the inspiration of God altogether, such as when Job attributed evil to God or when David prayed for Babylonian children's heads to be bashed against the rocks (Ps. 137:8-9).

The bottom line is that Scriptural inspiration does not mean that the men who wrote the Bible had perfect perceptions of God. In fact, Scripture tells us that prior to Jesus, no man had "seen God at any time" (Jn. 1:18; 6:46). Thus, without the Holy Spirit's guidance through Scriptures, we are blind to God's true nature. Even with God's guidance and inspiration, we still can inadvertently husk His revelation with our own partial perceptions. The thinner the husk of the writer, the closer the literal and Spiritual meanings converge. The thicker the husk of the writer, the more literal and Spiritual meanings will differ.

The key to understanding inspired Scripture is to be an inspired reader. Deep calls to deep. Scriptures say that we too are "living epistles" of God. Only the living Word within us can translate the written Word before us.

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. . . But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with

open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Cor. 3:2-6; 14-18.

LITERAL VERSUS SPIRITUAL EXEGESIS

How do we explain these Scriptures which seem to “literally” say that darkness, wrath, deception, fleshliness, death or evil does exist in God? These Scriptures will be explained at length by letting the character of God interpret Scriptures rather than using the “letter” of Scripture to interpret God’s character.

Consider C. S. Lewis on this point: “The two things one must not do are (a) to believe on the strength of Scripture or on any other evidence that God is in any way evil (In Him is no darkness at all) (b) not to wipe off the slate any passage which seems to show that He is. Behind the shocking passage be sure there lurks some great truth which you don’t understand. If one ever does come to understand it, one sees that it is good and just and gracious in ways we never dreamed of. Till then it must just be left on one side.” Letters of C. S. Lewis, (8 Aug 1953), para. 2-3, p. 253.

Also consider the words of John Wesley when responding to “by the letter” scriptural arguments that God is the source of evil: “You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it can never prove this; whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, 'What is its true meaning then?' If I say, 'I know not,' you have gained nothing; for there are many Scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense at all, than to say it had such a sense as this. It cannot mean, whatever it means besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the judge of all the world is unjust. No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that His mercy is not over all His works.” Wesley’s Journals, Vol. VII, p. 383.

Paul said we are “able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit: for the letter kills but the spirit gives life.” 2 Cor. 3:6. Scriptures then warn us on their face not to merely read them “literally” and in “our own understanding.” Our mistake is in thinking these admonitions don’t apply to us. In other words, we can wrongly presume that when we read Scriptures, we automatically are already in the Spirit, or that our past understanding of them is automatically right and Spiritual.

Rather, the premise of this book is that our indwelling Christ is the only “quickening agent” when it comes to scriptural interpretation. Literalists wrongly treat Scriptures as the landing pad of truth. In other words, all truth must land on its “literal” runways to be authentic. However, the proper way to view Scriptures is not as a landing pad, but as a launching pad. Scriptures, when they are Spiritually quickened to us by the Holy Spirit,

propel us into Heavenly interaction with the Trinity. This quickening comes from the “rhema” word of God, from the very now mouth of God to the very now heart of man.

Scriptures are wonderful, unique and divinely inspired. There is no religious document in the history of man which comes close to their authenticity and value. They are to be revered and studied for their historical truth, their beauty as literature, and most importantly for their Spiritual meaning. But, Scriptures are not the entire and ultimate Word of God. According to the first Chapter of the Book of John, Jesus is the Word of God, literally the “Logos.” The Logos is best defined as “the manifested nature or expressed essence of God.” Jesus is the Logos of God who indwells our hearts. Written Scriptures are blessed mirrors which allow us to better understand and see the true nature of Christ who already dwells in us. Only the Logos operating in us can properly understand, interpret and apply the Scriptures in an undistorted way that is Spiritual and true.

Of course, Scriptures can carry literal truth which blesses somewhat, as it sometimes did with Moses. However, Scriptures’ primary purpose is to carry Spiritual truth, as it did with Jesus. When the literal agrees with the Spiritual, believe both wholeheartedly. When the literal differs from but doesn’t contradict the Spiritual, use the literal carefully, but prioritize the Spiritual. But, when the literal contradicts the Spiritual and attributes evil to God, then the literal must be divorced and detached from the Spiritual.

This has happened more in Church history than you might think. As C. S. Lewis noted in his Reflections on the Psalms, St. Jerome considered part of the Book of Genesis to possibly be poetic rather than literal. Augustine wrote that, “if a passage seems to endorse wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid selflessness or kindness, it is figurative” and not to be read literally. He believed that all Scripture must be interpreted through the love of God and neighbor, on which all the law and prophets hang (Matt. 22:37-40).

Likewise, John Calvin had no problem believing the Book of Job to be fiction rather than literal history. Martin Luther didn’t consider it proper to read portions of the Books of Hebrews, James and Revelation literally and that no doctrines should be founded on these Epistles. And, as stated earlier, John Wesley and C. S. Lewis both believed in a non-literal reading of passages which on their face seem to attribute evil to God. Even Billy Graham doesn’t believe that Hell is a place of literal fiery torment as described in the Scriptures.

The point is that all men of God use their Spirit-quickened conscience to help properly interpret Scripture, and so should we whenever the “letter” of Scripture violates the “Spirit” of Scripture.

Scriptures are the fingers of inspired men pointing us to continual and fuller interactions with God. The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century, and even Martin Luther himself early in his walk, believed that this way of reading Scriptures was the only blessed way to read the Bible. This approach is called “Pneumatic (Spiritual) Exegesis” and essentially means “Spiritual reading.” Consider Luther on this point in stating that the

Bible “cannot be mastered by study or talent . . .you must rely solely on the influx of the Spirit.” Only later in his life did Luther change to “literal” exegesis in order to more effectively refute and condemn his enemies. This mistake changed the course of his life and greatly harmed his anointing.

I certainly grant you that Spiritual Exegesis can be dangerously wrong if the man doing it isn't Spiritual, or if the man doing it doesn't love and revere and carefully study the Scriptures. This explains why many who claim to use Spiritual Exegesis are really engaging in flights of fancy and imagination rather than truly hearing God Himself illuminate the Scriptures in a coherent way. But, just because some may abuse and misuse this principle doesn't mean it's wrong. Actually, the greatest truths are often surrounded by the greatest abuses. This is Satan's way of keeping us from truth he doesn't want us to hear. Beloved, reading the Scriptures by the Spirit of God is the only way to fly. Embrace the risk and responsibility of it and you won't fail.

This book employs and demonstrates Spiritual Exegesis in excavating, elevating and renovating the Bible from the letter into the Spirit. The result will be a fulfillment of God's goodness in the reading of any and all Scripture. The Bible will come alive and pulsate with the goodness of God. No longer will Scriptures be the “Paper Pope” whom we serve in the oldness of the letter. Scriptures instead will be inspired impressions left by the actual and living Word of God - - the Lord Jesus. These impressions will help us remember and recognize our own indwelling inspiration. Scriptures will be the diving board from which we dive into the fullness of God. To keep the diving board flexible, we must remove all husks of brittle and dry “opinions” which we have wrongly projected onto both God and Scripture and which have prevented us from “springing” into the bottomless depths of God's goodness.

Keep the following dynamics in mind when reading God's goodness into all the Scriptures:

1. Scriptures are inspired by God, but then again so are you. You are a living epistle of God which also is written by inspiration of God. We must be inspired by God ourselves in order to properly understand and blend with the inspiration of Scripture (2 Cor. 3:2-4).
2. We are to be able ministers of the New Testament who read Scriptures not by the “letter” (just literally and with our own natural understanding), but we read all Scripture by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:5-6). The “letter” kills but the Spirit gives life. With the Spirit, we are enabled and empowered to transform, enhance and enrich Scripture just as Jesus did when He excavated, renovated and elevated Old Testament law into New Testament light during the Sermon on the Mount.
3. Reading Scriptures by the Spirit means allowing our indwelling Christ to explain to our hearts not what the verses just literally say, but what the verses Spiritually mean. Sometimes the literal and Spiritual meanings are exactly the same. Sometimes the meanings may vary but still complement one another. But, still other times, the Spiritual

and literal completely contradict one another. In this latter case, the Spiritual meaning must be preferred to the literal. Only the Spirit can rightly divide the word.

4. No Scripture is of any private interpretation. In other words, only Jesus can explain the Scriptures to us. He is the character, nature and Logos of God. We have no "privacy" rights to read Scripture without the Holy Spirit's guidance.

5. We must not allow Scripture to define God's character. Rather, we must allow God's character to define Scripture. Scriptures are divinely inspired truths "husked" to varying degrees by human perceptions, partial perceptions and occasional mis-perceptions. Rightly dividing the Word is removing any human husk surrounding the true Spiritual meat of Scripture. This "fulfills" Scripture with the goodness of God. Jesus did it. Paul did it. And we must do it if we want to exchange meat for milk. Literal milk is good and is fine for Spiritual babes, but meat is for the mature who have had their senses trained to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

6. Don't worship Scriptures: worship with the Scriptures. They are the launching pad of truth, not the landing pad. They help launch us into Heavenly interaction where we experience Jesus as the truth. As C. S. Lewis rightly said: "It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him." Letters of C. S. Lewis, (8 Nov. 1952), pg. 247.

ONE MAJOR CAUTION: ALWAYS BEWARE ELEMENTAL SPIRITS!

Did you now there are worldwide demonic powers whose sole function is to lure you into reading the Bible "by the letter," without the aid and illumination of the Holy Spirit in other words? Scripture calls these forces "elemental spirits," demonic powers in other words, which continually keep us in bondage to by the letter reading and by the letter thinking. 2 Corinthians 3:6. As Colossians says below, the Cross was NOT just about breaking the power of sin and Satan, but the Cross also delivered us from the curse of the law and its legalistic mind-chains. Satan's two great weapons are lust and legalism. Lust is easy to recognize. Legalism is not. Be aware and on guard against both!

Spend some time on the below passages. Read them with fresh eyes and you will never be the same.

Galatians 4

[3] So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the ELEMENTAL SPIRITS of the universe.

[4] But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

[5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

[7] So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.
[8] Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods;
[9] but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly ELEMENTAL SPIRITS, whose slaves you want to be once more?
[10] You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years!
[11] I am afraid I have labored over you in vain.

Colossians 2

[13] And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,
[14] having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.
[15] He DISARMED the PRINCIPALITIES and POWERS and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.
[16] Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath.
[17] These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.
[18] Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,
[19] and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.
[20] If with Christ you died to the ELEMENTAL SPIRITS of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations,
[21] "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"
[22] (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines?
[23] These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

2 Corinthians 3

[3] and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
[4] Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.
[5] Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God,
[6] who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

WHY DIDN'T JESUS HIMSELF HANDWRITE THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't write the New Testament in His own perfect handwriting?

If He had, then nobody could argue that Scripture wasn't always literally accurate and historically perfect. And yet, Jesus didn't do this for a very obvious reason.

Had Jesus written the Gospels Himself, then we could then read them WITHOUT the Holy Spirit's further guidance, and never question their meaning as being anything other than literal.

We would, in effect, idolize literalism since it came directly from the pen of Jesus. This "idolatry of the literal" is exactly what happened to the Ten Commandments written by the "finger of God."

"It's like a finger pointing away to the moon. Don't concentrate on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory." — Bruce Lee.

Beloved, do you see? Today, millions of Jews and Christians worship the "finger" of the Bible pointing to the heavens rather than wholeheartedly focusing on the heavens themselves. They worship the finger of the law instead of that at which the law is ALWAYS pointing --- Jesus and the Spirit of God. They worship the literal rather than the Spiritual.

This is why God, in all His wisdom, used imperfect men to mediate and write Scripture, so that we would have to ALWAYS depend on the Spirit's guidance to properly read, understand and apply God's inspiration.

The finger of Scripture IS divinely inspired, but STILL a human finger, a little bent and twisted perhaps, but still always pointing at Jesus. Because we recognize the finger as human, we will not become fixated on it by giving it some kind of divine status the Lord never intended it to have. Instead, we will follow the finger and thrust our souls upward to achieve orbital interactions with Christ in the heavenly places.

Great Bible scholars have noted the occasional human imprecisions and inaccuracies in the Scripture, such as when Matthew 27:9 misquotes Zechariah 11:13 as having been said by Jeremiah, and also when Acts 7:16 erroneously lists Abraham, rather than Jacob, as the purchaser of the sepulcher from the sons of Emmor\Hamor per Joshua 24:32.

God is perfect. Men are not. The Bible's inspiration is perfect. Men's expressions of that inspiration are not always perfect.

C. S. Lewis' quote previously cited above bears repeating. He said: "The human qualities of the raw material show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not 'the Word of God' in

the sense that every passage in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God.” Or perhaps, better put, it is a finger pointing to the Word of God--- Jesus Christ!

Do you see? The inspiration is the key. Just as the shell of a nut “husks” the seed within, so does the literal shell of Scripture “husk” the inspiration of God encased within. Scriptures are divinely inspired truths husked to varying degrees by human perceptions, mis-perceptions and partial perceptions.

Let’s consider some examples. Peter’s revelation that Jesus was the Christ was a PERFECT and COMPLETE human perception of a divinely inspired truth. Flesh and blood didn’t reveal this to Peter, but the Heavenly Father. Matthew 16:17.

However, Moses’ striking of the rock in anger was a PARTIAL perception of God (Numbers 20). Moses was part right and part wrong in his perception, because while God inspired Moses to perform a miracle of provision for the parched Israelites, God did not want it delivered in Moses’ wrathful tone of striking the rock. Rather, God wanted the miracle done by Moses merely speaking to the rock. Moses failed to sanctify the name of the Lord here, and it kept him out of the Promised Land.

Finally, many Old Testament saints totally mis-perceived the inspiration of God altogether, such as when Job attributed evil to God or when David prayed for Babylonian children’s heads to be bashed against the rocks (Ps. 137:8-9).

The bottom line is that Scriptural inspiration does not mean that the men who wrote the Bible had perfect perceptions of God. In fact, Scripture tells us that prior to Jesus, no man had “seen God at any time” (Jn. 1:18; 6:46). Thus, without the Holy Spirit’s guidance through Scriptures, we are blind to God’s true nature.

Even with God’s guidance and inspiration, we still can inadvertently husk His revelation with our own partial perceptions. The thinner the husk of the writer, the closer the literal and Spiritual meanings converge. The thicker the husk of the writer, the more literal and Spiritual meanings will differ.

Paul said we are “able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit: for the letter kills but the spirit gives life.” 2 Cor. 3:6. Scriptures then warn us on their face not to merely read them “literally” and in “our own understanding.” Our mistake is in thinking these admonitions don’t apply to us. In other words, we can wrongly presume that when we read Scriptures, we automatically are already in the Spirit, or that our past understanding of them is automatically right and Spiritual.

Rather, the premise I am suggesting is that our indwelling Christ is the only “quickening agent” when it comes to scriptural interpretation. Literalists wrongly treat Scriptures as the landing pad of truth. In other words, all truth must land on its “literal” runways to be authentic. However, the proper way to view Scriptures is not as a landing pad, but as a launching pad. Scriptures, when they are Spiritually quickened to us by the Holy Spirit,

propel us into Heavenly interaction with the Trinity. This quickening comes from the "rhema" word of God, from the very now mouth of God to the very now heart of man.

DOES THE BIBLE EVER NEED "REVERSE-ENGINEERING?"

We can all agree that all Scripture is inspired by God. The Biblical authors were all dealing with divine impulses they were receiving from the Lord. But, the translation of those impulses was not always spot-on when it came to writing them with perfect precision and understanding. Sometimes the individual processing of those divine impulses resulted in the authors partially distorting the Lord's impulses with their own prejudices.

This is why Jesus corrected many such Old Testament distortions in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27-37). This is why Paul retranslated so many Old Testament passages "allegorically" rather than "literally."

Paul used the term "allegory" (Galatians 4:24), like many other Church Fathers, to describe a particular scripture in which one thing is said but another is intended. The text taken literally does have meaning, but there is also another meaning, which is the more important one. The discovery of the allegorical meaning can also be described as "removing the veil" (2 Corinthians 3:16), for which Holy Spirit illumination is required.

The Lord recently zapped me with the following insight: whenever the Holy Spirit reveals to us that a particular Scripture has distortion issues, there is a ready cure. It is called REVERSE-ENGINEERING. In the natural world, this process is used all the time.

The term REVERSE-ENGINEERING is defined in its natural and technical sense as follows: "Reverse-engineering is taking apart an object to see how it works in order to duplicate or ENHANCE the object.... Software reverse-engineering is done to retrieve the source code of a program because the source code was lost, to study how the program performs certain operations, to IMPROVE the performance of a program, to FIX a BUG (CORRECT an ERROR in the program when the source code is not available), to IDENTIFY MALICIOUS CONTENT in a program such as a virus or to adapt a program written for use with one microprocessor for use with another."

Do you see? Paul and Jesus both REVERSE-ENGINEERED Old Testament Scriptures ALL the time. This allowed them "ENHANCE" and "IMPROVE" and "FIX" and "CORRECT" the Old Testament Scripture with New Testament REVERSE-ENGINEERING .

Also, REVERSE-ENGINEERING helps us IDENTIFY MALICIOUS CONTENT which unspiritual people are using to deform God's true nature. Any time the Scripture appears to contradict the nature of Jesus, as revealed by both the Gospels and the Holy Spirit within us, then some REVERSE-ENGINEERING is needed to take that Scripture all the way back to the original divine impulse. We disassemble that Scripture by breaking it

down from its literal meaning back down into its original Spiritual meaning. And that meaning is ALWAYS Jesus.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL READING?

Scriptures are wonderful, unique and divinely inspired. There is no religious document in the history of man which comes close to their authenticity and value. They are to be revered and studied for their historical truth, their beauty as literature, and most importantly for their Spiritual meaning.

But, Scriptures are not the entire and ultimate Word of God. According to the first Chapter of the Book of John, Jesus is the Word of God, literally the "Logos." The Logos is best defined as "the manifested nature or expressed essence of God." Jesus is the Logos of God who indwells our hearts.

Written Scriptures are blessed mirrors which allow us to better understand and see the true nature of Christ who already dwells in us. Only the Logos operating in us can properly understand, interpret and apply the Scriptures in an undistorted way that is Spiritual and true.

Of course, Scriptures can carry literal truth which blesses somewhat, as it sometimes did with Moses. However, Scriptures' primary purpose is to carry Spiritual truth, as it did with Jesus. When the literal agrees with the Spiritual, believe both wholeheartedly. When the literal differs from but doesn't contradict the Spiritual, use the literal carefully, but prioritize the Spiritual. But, when the literal contradicts the Spiritual and attributes evil to God, then the literal must be divorced and detached from the Spiritual.

This has happened more in Church history than you might think. As C. S. Lewis noted in his Reflections on the Psalms, St. Jerome considered part of the Book of Genesis to possibly be poetic rather than literal.

"Ignorant assertions about God appear to be nothing else but this: that Scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter." Origen, On First Principles 4:2.1-2, 4.

"Wherefore, in the Old Testament there is a veiling of the New, and in the New Testament a revealing of the Old. According to that veiling, carnal men, understanding things in a carnal fashion, have been under the dominion, both then and now, of a penal fear. On the other hand, spiritual men... have a spiritual understanding and have been made free through love which they have been gifted." Saint Augustine (On Catechizing the Uninstructed 4:8; NPNF 1/3:287).

Augustine also wrote that, "if a passage seems to endorse wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid selflessness or kindness, it is figurative" and not to be read literally. He

believed that all Scripture must be interpreted through the love of God and neighbor, on which all the law and prophets hang (Matt. 22:37-40).

John Calvin had no problem believing the Book of Job to be fiction rather than literal history. Martin Luther didn't consider it proper to read portions of the Books of Hebrews, James and Revelation literally and that no doctrines should be founded on these Epistles.

And, as stated earlier, John Wesley and C. S. Lewis both believed in a non-literal reading of passages which on their face seem to attribute evil to God. Even Billy Graham doesn't believe that Hell is a place of literal fiery torment as "literally" described in the Scriptures.

The point is that all men of God use their Spirit-quickened conscience to help properly interpret Scripture, and so should we whenever the "letter" of Scripture violates the "Spirit" of Scripture.

Scriptures are the fingers of inspired men pointing us to continual and fuller interactions with God. The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century, and even Martin Luther himself early in his walk, believed that this way of reading Scriptures was the only blessed way to read the Bible.

This approach is called "Pneumatic (Spiritual) Exegesis" and essentially means "Spiritual Reading." Consider the young Martin Luther on this point in stating that the Bible "cannot be mastered by study or talent . . . you must rely solely on the influx of the Spirit." Only later in his life did Luther change to "literal" exegesis in order to more effectively refute and condemn his enemies. This mistake changed the course of his life and greatly harmed his anointing.

I certainly grant you that Spiritual Exegesis can be dangerously wrong if the man doing it isn't Spiritual, or if the man doing it doesn't love and revere and carefully study the Scriptures. This explains why many who claim to use Spiritual Exegesis are really engaging in flights of fancy and imagination rather than truly hearing God Himself illuminate the Scriptures in a coherent way.

But, just because some may abuse and misuse this principle doesn't mean it's wrong. Actually, the greatest truths are often surrounded by the greatest abuses. This is Satan's way of keeping us from truth he doesn't want us to hear. Beloved, reading the Scriptures by the Spirit of God is the only way to fly. Embrace the risk and responsibility of it and you won't fail.

I propose that all Bible readers need to learn and employ Spiritual Exegesis in excavating, elevating and renovating the Bible from the letter into the Spirit. The result will be a fulfillment of God's goodness in the reading of any and all Scripture. The Bible will come alive and pulsate with the goodness of God.

No longer will Scriptures be the “Paper Pope” whom we serve in the oldness of the letter. Scriptures instead will be inspired impressions left by the actual and living Word of God - - the Lord Jesus. These impressions will help us remember and recognize our own indwelling inspiration.

Scriptures will be the diving board from which we dive into the fullness of God. To keep the diving board flexible, we must remove all husks of brittle and dry “opinions” which we have wrongly projected onto both God and Scripture and which have prevented us from “springing” into the bottomless depths of God’s goodness.

Keep the following dynamics in mind when reading God’s goodness into all the Scriptures:

1) Scriptures are inspired by God, but then again so are you. You are a living epistle of God which also is written by inspiration of God.

2) We must be inspired by God ourselves in order to properly understand and blend with the inspiration of Scripture (2 Cor. 3:2-4). We are to be able ministers of the New Testament who read Scriptures not by the “letter” (just literally and with our own natural understanding), but we read all Scripture by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:5-6). The “letter” kills but the Spirit gives life. With the Spirit, we are enabled and empowered to transform, enhance and enrich Scripture just as Jesus did when He excavated, renovated and elevated Old Testament law into New Testament light during the Sermon on the Mount.

3) Reading Scriptures by the Spirit means allowing our indwelling Christ to explain to our hearts not what the verses just literally say, but what the verses Spiritually mean. Sometimes the literal and Spiritual meanings are exactly the same. Sometimes the meanings may vary but still complement one another. But, still other times, the Spiritual and literal completely contradict one another. In this latter case, the Spiritual meaning must be preferred to the literal. Only the Spirit can rightly divide the word.

4) No Scripture is of any private interpretation. In other words, only Jesus can explain the Scriptures to us. He is the character, nature and Logos of God. We have no “privacy” rights to read Scripture without the Holy Spirit’s guidance. The Holy Spirit won’t test on Scripture knowledge, but reading Scripture will test us on Holy Spirit knowledge.

5) We must not allow Scripture to define God’s character. Rather, we must allow God’s character to define Scripture. Scriptures are divinely inspired truths “husked” to varying degrees by human perceptions, partial perceptions and occasional mis-perceptions. Rightly dividing the Word is removing any human husk surrounding the true Spiritual meat of Scripture. This “fulfills” Scripture with the goodness of God. Jesus did it. Paul did it. And we must do it if we want to exchange meat for milk. Literal milk is good and is fine for Spiritual babes, but meat is for the mature who have had their senses trained to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

6) Don't worship Scriptures: worship with the Scriptures. They are the launching pad of truth, not the landing pad. They help launch us into Heavenly interaction where we experience Jesus as the truth. As C. S. Lewis rightly said: "It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him." Letters of C. S. Lewis, (8 Nov. 1952), pg. 247.

So, how did Jesus and His disciples read the Scriptures? Let's do a quick survey.

JESUS' READING STYLE

Jesus routinely edited the "literal" meaning of the Old Testament whenever it didn't accurately convey His Father's true nature. Consider the following passage in which Jesus first declares the purpose of His Earthly ministry.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Lk. 4:18-19.

This above passage was quoting an Old Testament passage in Isaiah 61:1-2.

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD; to comfort all that mourn . . ." Is. 61:1-2.

Compare the two passages and notice what Jesus carefully "left out" of His use of this Scripture. He left out, "To proclaim . . . the day of vengeance of our God." Isaiah's version was tinged with wrath. Jesus removed the tinge. Praise God He removes all our "tinges" if we let Him.

The Gospels are crucial to this discussion because they show us how Jesus read, understood and applied Scriptures. Jesus basically displayed three dynamics in His reading of Scriptures:

1) Sometimes, Jesus literally applied Old Testament Scripture word for word.

"And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." Lu. 4:4 (quoting Dt. 8:3).

2) Other times, Jesus adjusted and improved the literal meaning of

Old Testament Scripture.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”
Matt. 5:21-22 (quoting Ex. 20:13).

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Matt. 5:27-28 (quoting Ex. 20:14).

3) Still other times, Jesus outright contradicted and changed Old Testament Scripture.

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” Matt. 5:33-37 (quoting Nu. 30:2 and Dt. 23:23).

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” Matt. 5:38-42 (quoting Ex. 21:24).

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt. 5:43-45 (quoting Dt. 7:1-5, 16-26).

Beloved, do you see that Jesus frequently adjusted Scriptures to conform to the true nature of His Father? Sometimes, the “literal” meaning lined up with the “Spiritual” meaning. Sometimes it didn't. Jesus never let the “letter” of Scripture define God's character. Rather, Jesus always allowed the character of His Father to define Scripture. Sometimes, Old Testament saints mis-applied their inspiration in writing Scriptures. In

these cases, Jesus re-applied the Holy Spirit's wisdom to better and more accurately match "meaning" to "inspiration." Whenever needed, Jesus translated Old Testament literal darkness into New Testament Spiritual light.

Jesus didn't focus on the finger of the Old Testament, but rather on the Heavenly Father at whom the finger was pointing. And the apostles Paul and Peter were no different.

PAUL'S READING STYLE

Paul excavated, renovated and elevated certain Old Testament verses from their literal meaning to New Testament spiritual meaning.

In 1 Cor. 14:21, Paul took an Old Testament passage which on its face had nothing to do with New Testament tongues (Is. 28:11-12), and transformed, enhanced and enriched it to make it a prophetic passage for the spiritual gift of tongues.

Paul did the same thing by excavating the concept of circumcision from an empty and meaningless ritual to a spiritual transformation of the heart.

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." 1 Cor. 7:19.

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Gal. 5:6.

"But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Rom. 2:29.

Paul, who I believe authored Hebrews, also elevated animal sacrifices from being useless rituals under the "letter of the law" to a wonderful prophetic image of Christ's perfect sacrifice once and for all for sins. Heb. 10:1-10.

Paul also transformed the Sabbath from a "letter of the law" weekly ritual to an ongoing lifestyle state of being. Heb. 4:1-11.

Peter and Paul both renovated Old Testament dietary laws by integrating faith and thanksgiving into the true spiritual diet. (Acts. 11:5-10; Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Tim. 4:3-4).

The writer of the book of Hebrews also elevated animal sacrifices from being useless rituals under the "letter of the law" to a wonderful prophetic image of Christ's perfect sacrifice once and for all for sins. Heb. 10:1-10.

Peter did the same thing in taking Joel 2:28-29 and excavating, renovating and elevating it to prophesy the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is beyond dispute that the Old Testament scholars of their day would have accused Paul and Peter (and

the other New Testament writers) of butchering and misusing scriptures. They didn't see that the Old Testament scriptures needed to be transformed, enhanced and enriched.

They failed to understand the key to Old Testament translation Jesus gave us in Matt. 11:13. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." In other words, the Old Testament scriptures are all prophetic seeds waiting to be activated by New Covenant anointing. Without the anointing, Old Testament scriptures are dark and mysterious when read "by the letter." But when we add the water of the New Covenant Spirit and the light of Jesus, these hard seeds break open and sprout prophetic life.

Paul used the term "allegory," (Galatians 4:24) like many other Church Fathers, to describe a particular scripture in which one thing is said but another is intended. The text taken literally does have meaning, but there is also another meaning, which is the more important one. The discovery of the allegorical meaning can also be described as "removing the veil" (2 Corinthians 3:16), for which Holy Spirit illumination is required.

Remember, as you read the passages below, remember this key point. It is NOT that the LITERAL reading of the Old Testament NEVER has ANY historical value or moral truth, for it does. But the literal reading is NOT spiritual.

Modern day Jews know the "literal" Old Testament passages far better than most Christians, but they still are oblivious to what the verses "spiritually mean" with regard to the coming Kingdom of Jesus. Their eyes remain blind to Jesus, despite the fact Jesus said the entire Old Testament spoke of Him.

The PRIMARY way the New Testament INSTRUCTS us to read the Old Testament is allegorically and NOT literally.

Key passages on allegorical reading are:

Galatians 4:21-31 (The "allegorical" reading of the Old Testament here is both modeled and approved by Paul, as he completely reinterprets the meaning of the story of Abraham, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael to refer rather to the current relationship between Old and New Covenants).

1 Corinthians 10:1-11(Paul "allegorizes" the whole Exodus journey of Israel as a type of the Christian walk, reading it non-literally in other words).

2 Corinthians 3:6-18 (Paul here says we are to be "ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter, for the LETTER KILLS, but of the Spirit, for the Spirit gives life," and that Moses, as a symbol of Old Testament understanding, "veiled" the true meaning of OT Scripture by reading it with blind literalism).

Hebrews 8:1-5 (The voluminous OT passages about the "tabernacle" and "priesthood" and "sacrifices" are all "shadows of heavenly things" rather than literal realities on earth).

Hebrews 10:1 (Here, we see the law itself is to be read allegorically: "the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and NOT the very image of the things").

Colossians 2:17 (The OT festivals, holy days and dietary laws are all called "shadows" of "the body of Christ" to come, again not the literal thing itself but a prophetic shadow of the Kingdom of God).

Matthew 11:13 ("ALL the OT law and prophets prophesied until John the Baptist," the clear implication being that the OT is one big prophetic allegory of Christ to come).

Luke 11:27 ("ALL" the OT Scriptures, when properly read, speak ONLY of Christ).

REMOVE THE VEIL FROM THE FACE OF MOSES!

Everything in the Old Testament contains "examples" written for our "admonition." 1 Corinthians 10:6,11. The "Law" [Old Testament] is "spiritual," but its spiritual meaning remains "veiled" to those with unspiritual minds. Romans 7:14; 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

The "mind of Christ" we have been given is a spiritual mind which alone can read the Scriptures unveiled. "Removing the veil" means removing the letter-of-the-law-understanding, the literal reading in other words, in favor of the true spiritual meaning.

Like the Emmaeus disciples in the Luke 23, we need to let Jesus walking beside (and inside) us explain the Old Testament allegorically to us SO THAT whenever we read Scripture, we see ONLY HIM.

Christians can read the exact same Bible, the exact same translation, the exact same words, YET process, remember, and apply the Bible in a totally DIFFERENT spirit. Remember, the New Testament says there are only two spirits-- the Holy Spirit which is OF God AND the spirit of the world which is OF Satan. 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2.

Jesus told the disciples they did NOT know "which" SPIRIT they were OF when they wrathfully cited an Old Testament passage as support for them to "call down fire" on the Samaritans just as Elijah did. The disciples suggested this wrathful response to Jesus JUST because the Samaritans were rejecting their ministry. Jesus rebuked them and told them He came only to bring life, NOT death.

It is no different today. Many Christians don't know "which" spirit they are "of" when they read, remember and apply Scriptures to their own lives. Some use the Bible as a hammer to justify all sorts of toxic wrath and noxious condemnation. These Bible thumpers' victims come away mashed and mauled rather than healed and delivered. It ought not be so.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6, is the New Testament WARNING NOT TO READ THE BIBLE BY THE LETTER BECAUSE THE LETTER KILLETH! Rather, the passage EXHORTS US, AS ABLE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT, TO READ THE SCRIPTURE BY THE SPIRIT, FOR THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE!

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN READING THE OLD TESTAMENT-- JESUS!

"But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." John 20:31

"But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Matt. 26:56

"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" Luke 24:44

"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John (the Baptist)." Matthew 11:13

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, Jesus expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 23:27

Jesus in the above passages clearly says that ALL the Old Testament prophecies about Him. What? The entire Old Testament is to be primarily read as a series of prophecies about Jesus? How can that be?

Sure we have all heard there are a few prophetic passages in the Books of the Prophets which speak of a coming Messiah. But ALL the prophetic writings? And not only them, but ALL the Books of the Law? All of these Old Testament books were purely prophetic toward Jesus?

How can such a thing be? The Law --also known as the Torah, the Pentateuch, and the Books of Moses-- are the five books in the Bible which nearly all Jews and Christians read SOLELY as historical and literal truth. How can these books be called prophetic? Their context is not prophetic, but entirely historical in that they claim on their face to take us from the creation of the world up and through the death of Moses. They don't claim in their face to be prophetic. They don't literally mention Jesus by name. The word "messiah" appears nowhere in the Law, much less any literal promises of the coming kingdom of "the Son of God."

Now there are certainly several passages where the Lord promises Israel a blessed future, one in which all the nations will be blessed by the seed of Abraham. And some passages can certainly, in retrospect, be applicable to Jesus knowing what we now know. But to say the main thrust of the ENTIRE LAW prophesied about Jesus is mind-

blowing. Modern day Jewish scholars take these same passages and apply them to the nation of Israel.

There can be only one explanation. We are NOT reading these Old Testament Bible passages the right way unless and until we read them as prophecy. To read them properly is to see in WHAT sense they are specifically PROPHECYING to us something about Jesus.

All the Old Testament is primarily to be read as an allegorical PROPHECY of the coming life, deity, nature, character, sacrifice, death, resurrection, and victorious glorification of Jesus. But the allegory doesn't stop there. The Old Testament also prophesies as of the ascended Jesus' eventual INDWELLING of all of us through the Pentecostal outpouring of His Holy Spirit.

To read it allegorically is NOT to deny it lacks historical It is a heroic "movie trailer" of His It is to read that way through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

LET JESUS TEACH YOU HOW TO RE-DIVIDE THE OLD TESTAMENT

I think we would agree that only Jesus could perfectly discern, process, and translate divine impulses of the Father. It was for this reason that John 1:18 and 5:37 tell us that nobody prior to Jesus had fully and accurately perceived God's nature. These are stunning statements to be sure. For this reason, Jesus had to retranslate certain Old Testament passages to better comply with His Father's true nature.

Jesus demonstrated this during the Sermon in the Mount in Matthew 5 when He repeatedly said the Old Testament may have "said...." this thing or that thing, "but I SAY..." something better, deeper, higher and clearer.

Especially look at verses 38-48. Jesus here redivided Moses' law to better reflect His Father's heart. In John 8, Moses' law demanded the woman caught in adultery be stoned on the spot. But, Jesus didn't let it happen. Did he "chuck" the Old Testament out here. Well, the wrath He chucked out maybe, but I think the better way to look at it is that He "fulfilled" the Old Testament here by "filling it full of His love and mercy." He did NOT condemn the woman, but rescued her from danger and let her know He cared, THEN He exhorted her to stop sinning. Moses would have had her stoned on the spot, whose very words the crowd were obeying to begin with.

Moses was the meekest man in the land, but he was still operating in his own righteousness and NOT the righteousness which is of God. And Scripture is very clear he had a continuing anger problem. Moses sometimes seriously misrepresented the nature of God due to this anger problem. When God told Moses to "speak" to the rock and command water to flow to bless His people, Moses instead shouted disgust at the people and struck the rock in anger instead. The water did miraculously flow, but now

the people wrongly thought God was wrathful when He wasn't. So serious was this sin, it kept Moses from entering the Promised Land.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God hid him in the cleft of the rock and told Moses he could only see His goodness from behind after He had passed by, and then only at a angled distance. Moses could simply not conceptually behold God's goodness from the front because:

- 1) he was still living entirely in his own righteousness,
- 2) he was not indwelt by the Pentecostal Holy Spirit,
- 3) he was burdened with a sinful anger problem, and
- 4) he was totally clueless about Satan, whom he NEVER even mentions in all his writings. Jesus came to reveal all of these issues to us by filling us with HIS righteousness, exposing Satan's kingdom of darkness to us, filling us with the Holy Ghost, and revealing God's essence as love.

Based on all these factors, we must conclude that Moses and the other OT saints had a dimmer, distant, less mature, less developed and less differentiated view of God. They often commingled their mages of Satan and God together into one bipolar glop. They wrongly believed that Satan was an OBEDIENT servant, God's official minister of wrath, His enforcing death angel who distributed the curses of God on the disobedient. This wrong of notion of Satan is a far cry from the lying, homicidal, and "off the grid" rebel who Jesus revealed him to be.

The point is that we have to let Jesus show us how to rightly read the Old Testament with New Testament eyes, "NOT by the letter, for the letter kills, but by the Spirit, for the Spirit brings life." 2 Corinthians 3:6.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE THE BLESSED WAY

Most never learn the difference between these three important words---- context, subtext, and super-text.

Simply put, context is what the text says. Subtext is what the text means. Super-text is how the text rightly relates to all the other related texts.

The image of an iceberg helps here. CONTEXT is that part of an iceberg visible above the water. SUBTEXT is the larger part of the iceberg beneath the water. SUPER-TEXT is how the iceberg flows in relation to all the other icebergs in the area.

Now, consider the Bible. Scripture's CONTEXT is what the text literally appears to say, taking into account the facts we historically know about author and his surroundings.

Scripture's SUBTEXT is the spiritual meaning God wants us to extract FROM the text by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, Scripture's SUPER-TEXT is how the scripture in question connects to all the other passages in the Bible.

If one ONLY reads for context, that person suffers from spiritual nearsightedness which prevents him from going deep, far and high in the truths of God. If one ONLY reads for subtext, that person may still be greatly blessed but miss the richness of Biblical history. And, if one ONLY reads for super-context, that person can overlook NEW and FRESH manna because they are too focused on other scriptures.

In Bible reading, CONTEXT is "milk," SUBTEXT is "meat" and SUPER-TEXT is the "plate" on which all the food is placed. We need to appreciate milk, but prefer meat, and always remember to clean the plate. All three are important, but THE most important text is SUBTEXT. God can, and often does, speak apart from context and super-text, BUT Scriptural subtext is ALWAYS the heart of the matter.

Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext.

The author David Baboulene, in his practical academic work on Story Theory — The Story Book — defines subtext as "the result of any form of gap in knowledge between any of the participants in a story; for example, between the author and a character, between two characters or between the audience and at least one character."

Baboulene's above quote on subtext is crucial BECAUSE it explains one of the least understood aspects of accurate Biblical reading. Because the Bible is INSPIRED by God but literally WRITTEN by men, there is always a "GAP IN KNOWLEDGE" between what that writer CONTEXTUALLY and PARTIALLY knows about when he is writing VERSUS what the Lord PERFECTLY and COMPLETELY knows about the ENTIRE situation. As the great church father Origen noted, the Biblical writers spiritually "wrote" more than they contextually "knew." Until we appreciate that wondrous dynamic, we will still be vulnerable to lapsing into lazy literalism.

Moreover, in the Bible, we are dealing with TWO different kinds of subtext. With the Bible, we have synergistic co-authors who each bring different levels of knowledge and perspective to the text. Thus, we have two different potential subtexts-- the subtext of the human author AND the subtext of the divine author. Since we are dealing with divine and human coauthors here of a metanarrative of heaven and earth, it is important to understand and relate to the two different kinds of subtext.

Why on earth do we LIMIT the text of Scripture to ONLY what the human writer knew at only the ancient time he wrote it? Why not rather UNLIMIT the text by allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us on any and every level imaginable by any and all means He deems advisable, available and profitable in the here and now. This dynamic of ongoing and ever-fluid revelation is at the very core of subtext.

Earnest Hemingway, one of the greatest writers of all time, and Konstantin

Stanislavski, one of the greatest theatrical teachers of all time, both believed that the vast majority of worth and meaning of ANY written work came from its subtext. Like the iceberg mentioned above, which science says has 90% of its entire mass unseen and underwater, so too does the richness of all great writing come from the "non-literal" subtext.

You see, great writers seldom "explicitly" and "literally" convey what they want to say in linear ABC fashion. They don't cross every "t" and dot every "i." Rather, they leave much "unsaid" and "unclear." The reason? They want the reader to invest their hearts and minds in the writing in order to become treasure hunters who join the author's quest.

Great authors seek to illicit the wholeheartedness of the reader, a wholeheartedness that does not come if every little thing is literally spelled out for them. This requires no fervent effort or deep investment on the part of the reader because it's all legalistically spelled out for them. Rather, these great writers use suggestion, implication, inference, metaphor, imagery and intuition. They let the words "breathe" in our minds and hearts, so that our imagination and emotions can salivate, meditate and expand into new heartfelt territory.

So, the next time some hyper-literal reader of the Bible chastises you for not laboriously and legalistically knowing the "context" of the Scripture you are discussing, remind that person that the "Holy Ghost subtext" is FAR MORE important than the "mere human context," and that the "overall super-text" is JUST AS important as the "always-partial context." As Martin Luther said, "Scripture can rightly be understood solely by an influx of the Spirit." In other words, SPIRIT alone always supplies the all-important SUBTEXT. (Read 2 Corinthians 3 with fresh eyes and you will never be the same).

Many are wrongly taught to ALWAYS read Scripture ONLY in CONTEXT. Few are taught rather to ALWAYS read Scripture MAINLY through SUBTEXT. Fewer still are taught to connect the dots of all Scriptures so that they present a dynamic whole through SUPER-TEXT. May we be the few who weave all three dynamics into the seamless cloak of the mind of Christ.

PUT ON THE MIND OF CHRIST: USE "ABDUCTIVE" REASONING

"Neither science nor rationality are universal measures of excellence. They are particular traditions, unaware of their historical grounding." Paul Feyerabend

"You are not thinking. You are merely being logical." Neils Bohr

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift." Albert Einstein

We are addicted to rules. We snort them. We inject them. We drink them. We eat them.

Here are two ways the addiction works--- INDUCTIVE reasoning and DEDUCTIVE reasoning. We are taught to live with these two ways of thinking as our guide. But at their root, both are just rules-based thinking.

Deductive thinking comes from applying ALREADY established rules to the specific situation at hand. Inductive reasoning takes the situation at hand and tries to MAKE a general rule based on it. Either way, we are junkies trying to get mentally high on a "rule fix."

I am not saying these ways of thinking don't yield some benefit in the natural sciences. But, I am saying they yield little to no benefit in the supernatural realm of renewed spiritual thinking. And, in fact, these two thinking techniques frequently cause great harm by keeping us chained in low-functioning levels of natural understanding.

Remember, the wisdom from below is "natural, earthly and demonic." James 3:15. Avoid it all costs!

The word 'repent' (metanoia) literally means "beyond the mind." Perhaps we can relate to this by a more familiar line when people say - "Get out of your head." It's the idea of processing reality in and through a different source or dimension other than just the intellect. It doesn't mean not using your mind but more in the sense of using your mind in a different way-- a way that welcomes the input of the often illogical "heart" and the frequently irrational "gut."

The result is that imagination, intuition and epiphany now join the team of the mind. Without these other vibrant inputs, the rational mind, left to itself, defaults to rules, rules and more rules. It either automatically applies rigid rules, or automatically seeks to discover rigid rules. Either way, rigid rationality rules us with rules.

Are you tired of deductive reasoning, which legalistically applies established rules to explain your specific life observations?

Are you also tired of inductive reasoning, which endlessly strives to form new rules based on your specific life observations?

If so, then try abductive reasoning, which essentially is reasoning by enlightened epiphany, educated inklings, spontaneous speculating and intuitive insights. It doesn't think in terms of applying or forming rigid rules.

Rather, abductive reasoning uses passion-infused gut-level discernment to deftly "surf" over stale, dry and legalistic thinking. It's thinking outside the box, above the literal, beneath the surface and inside the heart of the matter. It's the release of the creative

juices within that open our inner-floodgates of revelation, inspiration and transcendent wisdom.

Albert Einstein was deeply abductive in the way he creatively used his thought experiments. He had no data or empirical studies to reason a conclusion. Rather, he intuited the truth throughout the use of his imagination. He famously said, "Imagination is more important than intelligence." Other great thinkers who frequently modeled abductive reasoning were Plato, Carl Jung, William Blake, Leonardo Da Vinci, George Washington Carver and Bruce Lee.

The Christians who think abductively are usually coined mystics. I consider that a huge complement. Personally, I believe abductive reason is the most blessed and Holy Ghost-friendly mindset. Give it a try. Leave your rule-applying and rule-making addictions at the door. Instead, gear up your gut, salivate your imagination, and intuit away! You might be shocked at how much the the Holy Ghost renews your mind with powerfully transformative thought.

Nobody was more abductive in His thinking than Jesus. Parables, epiphanies, metaphors, and allegories abound in the Bible waiting to be passionately pursued, intuitively grasped and imaginatively understood. Shall we explore this new way of thinking together?

CHAPTER 12-- ARE "LUCIFER" AND "SATAN" THE SAME PERSON? AND IF SO, WHERE WAS HE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Many today are claiming there is no scriptural evidence to link the identities of Satan and Lucifer together. That is simply incorrect. People may remain unpersuaded in their own minds as is their right, but to claim Scripture offers NO connection between the two is simply wrong.

There are two possibilities. The first possibility is that Lucifer and Satan are the exact same entity. The second possibility is that Lucifer is a human ruler who serves as an Old Testament prophetic or predictive "type" which later finds its fulfillment ("anti-type") in the ACTUAL New Testament figure of Satan.

I tend to favor the first possibility because portions of the description of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:4-17 could only fit a supernatural or cosmological being. But, I have no objection to the second possibility which makes Lucifer an OT biblical type and predictive symbol of a later NT reality.

Let me give you a perfect example which illustrates this exact same dynamic. The vast majority of Biblical scholars agree that the mysterious Old Testament figure, Melchizedek, was EITHER an OT "type" of the New Testament Christ, or, alternatively, was the actual pre-incarnate Jesus who was revealing Himself to Abraham. The Lucifer/Satan issue corresponds exactly with the Jesus/Melchizedek distinction.

Melchizedek was EITHER a human priest-king used as a symbolic reference to Jesus' eternal priesthood and kingship, OR Melchizedek was the ACTUAL pre-incarnate Lord Jesus who now literally fulfills the divine offices of BOTH priest and king. Melchizedek was famously and uniquely described as BOTH King of Salem and a High Priest of God in Genesis 14:18-20. Jesus, at his ascension, SIMULTANEOUSLY reigned as King of kings AND functioned as our heavenly High Priest (cf. Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:12, 13; Hebrews 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17).

Melchizedek and Christ then, under either reading, are to be merged in our understanding. They functionally become one in our comprehension. Similarly, under either reading proposed above, Satan and Lucifer are also to be merged in our understanding. They are one in form and function.

Now, lets examine Scripture to see if the Bible does indeed connect their identities.

1) Are Lucifer and Satan both described as "the ruler of a fallen Babylon?"

YES!

In the OT, Lucifer is the called the "FALLEN king of Babylon" in Isaiah 14:4, 12. In the NT, spiritual "Babylon is FALLEN and has become the dwelling place of demons and

EVERY foul spirit" (Revelation 18:2). This clearly describes Satan's earthly fallen empire of evil , along with his army of "fallen" rebellious principalities and angelic powers "against whom" we are called to "wrestle" in Ephesians 6:10-17.

Where does Scripture describe Satan and his army of angels "falling" from heaven? Revelation 12:7-9 describes "a war in heaven: Michael and his angels 'going forth' to war with the dragon...and his angels....he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him."

Do you see? Satan's fallen empire IS fallen earth. The word "fallen" is used to describe both the worldwide Babylonian king in Isaiah and the demon-infested empire of evil described in Revelation.

Remember that Jesus three times called Satan the "archon," or ruler of this fallen world system (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul called Satan "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). John said the whole fallen world lies in Satan's power (1 John 5:19).

The Passage in Isaiah 14:16-17 similarly describes Lucifer as making "the whole earth tremble, the kingdoms shake," and that Lucifer had made "the world a wilderness, full of unreleased prisoners." Sounds like Lucifer and Satan have the exact same modus operandi in BOTH the Isaiah and Revelation passages.

Jesus came to destroy the Satanic/Luciferian kingdom and to set all their oppressed prisoners free and INTO the rest and peace of God (1 John 3:8; Luke 4:18-19).

But, how does Satan/Lucifer rule? Who or what makes up his armies? Does the New Testament further indicate that Satan is the spiritual king of fallen Babylon who rules OVER demons/fallen angels/unclean spirits? Oh yes. Again consider Revelation 12:7-9. It describes "a war in heaven: Michael and his angels 'going forth' to war with the dragon...and his angels....he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him."

Get the picture so far? Michael, a REAL angel of high rank, leads REAL angels of light AGAINST a REAL Satan and his REAL dark fallen angels. Satan and his angelic army lose the battle and are cast down to earth. Jesus confirms the accuracy of this term in Matthew 25:41 by referring to "the devil and 'his' angels." Jesus, in Matthew 12:24-28, also calls Satan "Beelzebub," which means "the lord of the house." Satan was referenced earlier in this same passage as "the prince of demons."

Lucifer, in Isaiah 14:15, is said to be "brought down to Hell." This parallels Matthew 25:41 which says Hell was originally created for "Satan and his angels." Thus far, the connections between Lucifer, the fallen ruler of Babylon, and Satan, the fallen ruler of spiritual Babylon, are compelling. But the list of compelling connections goes on.

2) Are Lucifer and Satan described similarly in both the Isaiah passage and other Scriptural passages?

Yes!

First and foremost, Jesus quotes a portion of the Isaiah 14:12 passage in specific reference to Satan. "And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name. And he said unto them, I BEHELD SATAN FALLEN AS LIGHTNING FROM HEAVEN. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall in any wise hurt you." Most scholars agree this is a clear reference to Isaiah 14:12, which describes Lucifer as "FALLEN FROM HEAVEN."

This is bolstered by the fact that in ALL the Bible, ONLY Lucifer and Satan are described as "having fallen from heaven." THAT is clear and compelling evidence that Satan and Lucifer are one in the same. Jesus clearly linked the Isaiah passage to Satan.

Second, Isaiah 14:12's use of "Lucifer," which simply means "shining one" parallels Paul's description as Satan as a false "angel of light" in 2 Corinthians 11:14. Angels are commonly identified as shining lights, or "stars" (Job 38:7; Luke 2:9). This is good evidence of his light-bearing angelic nature.

Third, Lucifer was "cut down to the ground" in Isaiah 14:12. The New Testament identifies Satan as the original serpent in the garden, who also was "cut down to the ground and made to crawl on his belly." Revelation 12:9, 15; 20:2; Genesis 3:14.

Fourth, Satan's original mindset of rebellion was to be "as God," (Genesis 3:5), which parallels Lucifer's mindset to be "like the most high" (Isaiah 14:14). Satan wants to be AS God without being WITH or IN God. Jesus, as Emmanuel, was God WITH us and God IN us. The kingdom of God is within us.

Fifth, Lucifer's game-plan was stated in Isaiah 14:13-14 as follows: "I will ascend into heaven and exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds....I will be like the most high." How perfectly this tracks Paul's description of Satan's game-plan in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, which describes "the coming of the son of perdition," who "exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he AS God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God," whose "coming is after the working of Satan with all powers of signs and lying wonders." Satan's sinful heart attitude is exactly the same as Lucifer's, further evidence that they are one in the same.

Sixth, Isaiah 14:5-7 speaks of the Lord's breaking of Lucifer's "staff of wrath" with which he had previously "smote the people with a continual stroke." How closely this aligns with Revelation 12:12's confirmation that Satan has "great wrath."

Satan's wrath more fully described in John 10:10 where he is described as the source of all stealing, killing and destroying. This is confirmed by Hebrews 2:14-15, "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." The end result is "rest" for the people who were formerly afflicted (Isaiah 14:7 and Hebrews 4).

Do you see? This Isaiah passage describes Lucifer's worldwide rule of fallen earth being brought to naught, just as the New Testament describes Satan's worldwide rule of fallen earth being brought to nought. Jesus broke the staff of Satan's authority over death. We are saved from all the Satanic wrath which he had previously smote us with a continual stroke.

"And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall in any wise hurt you." Luke 10:17-19.

Viewing the Luke verse above as Jesus' linkage of Lucifer's fall to Satan's fall is both wonderful and obvious. Combined with the many other parallels cited above, the case is compelling that Lucifer is one in the same with Satan. At the very least, Lucifer is a clear Biblical type of Satan. We have far more to learn from making this connection than from dismissing or ignoring it.

WHERE WAS SATAN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Listen to some amazing statistics. The Old Testament is 1,109 pages compared to the New Testament's 334 pages. The Old Testament is over three times larger than the New. Yet, the New Testament references to Satan dwarf the Old Testament references. Satan basically just appears in three Old Testament passages - - Job 1-2; Zech. 3:1-2 and 1 Chr. 21:1.

Yet, in the New Testament EVERY writer mentions Satan. "Devil" is mentioned 60 times, "Devils" 51 times, "Satan" 31 times, as well as a plethora of other verses mentioning Satan by other names, such as the wicked one (1 Jn. 5:18), the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), your adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), the tempter (Matt. 4:3), a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44), prince of this world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), accuser of our brethren (Rev. 12:10), thief (Jn. 10:10), a liar and the father of it (Jn. 8:44), angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), and the great dragon (Rev. 12:9).

The bottom line is that Satan is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament, and is never identified either as the source of evil or as an enemy of God. When Satan is mentioned, he is seen as a servant of God, merely obeying the directives of God. In fact, according

to modern day Jewish encyclopedias, Satan is considered by the Jews to be the angel of death described in the Old Testament who carries out the judgments and punishments of God.

Do not overlook the importance of this fatal misconception. To omit Satan as an enemy of God and the author of evil is to make the foundational Isaiah 5:20 mistake of calling evil good and good evil. Satan (evil) is under this warped view now called good because he is, after all, only fulfilling God's will. Similarly, God (good) is now called evil because evil is now mistakenly seen as a righteous tool with which God sculpts us into His will. Thus, the claim that God is only and always good and never uses evil as a tool is seen as an evil heresy by those infected with Isaiah 5:20 thinking.

Nowhere is this Infection revealed more clearly than in the following two Old Testament passages:

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

“And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.: 1 Chr. 21:1.

The above passages describe the same event where David sinned by numbering Israel. Same event. Same David. Same sin. Same result: 70,000 dead Israelites, but a different cause of evil. The Samuel passage attributes it to “the anger of the Lord” while the Chronicles passage attributes it to “Satan.”

If the Old Testament viewed the wrath of God as the exact same thing as the oppression of Satan, where does that leave us in the New Testament? Well, until and unless we renew our mind to the perfectly good will of God the Father, it leaves us in a perfect state of confusion, where both good and evil come from the God of love and wrath.

The God who loves us today may kill or destroy us tomorrow. Though he slay us, we will serve him. Though he afflict us with cancer, we will praise Him. Though he allows our children to be kidnaped and killed, we will love Him. This type of thinking may make us sound noble, but makes God into a monster. It was to these type of outrageous claims against God's character that John Wesley famously responded, “Your God is my Satan.”

The New Testament starts to correct and cure these Old Testament distortions of God's character. The Old Testament might equate the wrath of God with the oppressions of Satan. But the New Testament clearly reveals Satan's oppressions as the enemy of Jesus who “came to destroy the works of Satan” and “heal all who are oppressed by the devil.” 1 Jn. 3:8; Acts 10:38. Jesus did this by solely using the power of “doing good.” God's power doesn't manipulate or coerce Satan into doing God's wrathful will, but rather God's power diminishes and displaces Satan's oppressions with God's good and perfect will.

Jesus, the Great Physician, came to diagnose and cure all this infected thinking described in Isaiah 5:20. He came to destroy the works of the devil. 1 Jn. 3:8. He came to reveal the character of the Father as only and always good. 1 Jn. 1:5. Jesus came to reveal the Father's will as peace on Earth and good will toward man. Lu. 2:14. Jesus came to reveal Satan as the tempter rather than God. Matt. 4:3; Jas. 1:12-17. Jesus came to reveal that the perfection of God lies in His non-violent overcoming of evil with good. Matt. 5:38-48.

Jesus came to reveal that the character of Satan is to steal, kill and destroy while the character of His Father is to only give life and to give it abundantly. Jn. 10:10. Jesus came to reveal that Satan has the power of death, not God, and that death is an enemy of God. Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:26. Jesus came to reveal that there is an enemy of God who operates outside and apart from the will of God. Matt. 13:28; Jas. 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Tim. 2:26.

Jesus came to reveal Himself as the way, the truth and life who only does good and heals all who are oppressed of the devil. Jn. 14:6; Acts 10:38. Jesus came to absorb all our sin and Satanic wrath. Jn. 1:29, 36; Col. 2:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:21. Lastly, Jesus, as the full expression of the goodness of God, came to indwell us, empower us and protect us. Lk. 10:19; Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:20.

WHY DIDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT PATRIARCHS EVER MENTION SATAN?

Abraham never mentioned the name of Satan.

Isaac never mentioned the name of Satan.

Jacob never mentioned the name of Satan.

Moses never mentioned the name of Satan.

David never mentioned the name of Satan.

These Old Testament saints never rebuked the demonic, never cast out devils and never engaged in spiritual warfare against dark powers and principalities. When they prayed to God, their approach was to ask God to do or not to do something. "God, please don't destroy us" or "God, please destroy our earthly enemy" or "God, please be merciful and stop afflicting us." It was all in God's hands, in other words. They frequently prayed for the Lord to relent and change His mind about things. They actually asked the Lord to "repent" of His destructions toward them.

The New Testament was vastly different in their view of prayer and Satan. Listen to some amazing statistics. The Old Testament is 1,109 pages compared to the New Testament's 334 pages. The Old Testament is over three times larger than the New. Yet, the New Testament references to Satan dwarf the Old Testament references.

Satan basically just appears in three Old Testament passages - - Job 1-2; Zech. 3:1-2 and 1 Chr. 21:1. Yet, in the New Testament every writer mentions Satan. "Devil" is mentioned 60 times, "Devils" 51 times, "Satan" 31 times, as well as a plethora of other

verses mentioning Satan by other names, such as the wicked one (1 Jn. 5:18), the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), your adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), the tempter (Matt. 4:3), a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44), prince of this world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), accuser of our brethren (Rev. 12:10), thief (Jn. 10:10), a liar and the father of it (Jn. 8:44), angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), and the great dragon (Rev. 12:9).

The bottom line is that Satan is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament, and is never identified either as the source of evil or as an enemy of God. When Satan is mentioned, he is seen as a servant of God, merely obeying the directives of God. In fact, according to modern day Jewish encyclopedias, Satan is considered by the Jews to be the angel of death described in the Old Testament who carries out the judgments and punishments of God.

Jesus, by contrast, continually exposed and rebuked both Satan and his devils. He made clear that Satan was a cosmic rebel opposed to God's kingdom on every level. Satan was not working for God but against Him.

Moreover, with regard to prayer, Jesus never prayed to change God's will but rather to release it. Jesus didn't change God's mind, He revealed it. Jesus prayed that God's will be done on earth, NOT that God repent of His planned evil in order to line up with our prayer petitions. Exodus 32:12. We are the ones who need to repent and relent of evil, not God. His mercy and grace is light years ahead of us of every level.

So, did Moses and the other Old Testament saints ever actually combat Satan on any level? How could they if they thought he was a good angel? We never see any of them EVER binding and loosing devils in any OT passage. We never see them "casting out" any unclean spirits, "casting out" spirits of infirmity, or for that matter "casting out" ANY kind of evil spirits as Jesus and the New Testament saints frequently did. We simply never see OT saints rebuking Satan or demonic powers in any way, shape or form. They appeared to have no concept of the New Testament truth that our very REAL battle is AGAINST demonic principalities, AGAINST Satanic powers, AGAINST the world rulers of darkness, AGAINST spiritual forces of wickedness in high places.

So, this leads to the obvious question: How did Moses resist Satan? What form did that resistance take? Did it look different than New Testament Spiritual Warfare? Was Moses ever even aware that he was fighting evil forces?

So, just how DID Moses battle Satan? Well, remember, as established previously, Moses and the OT saints had an undifferentiated view of God and Satan. Because they lived under the Old Covenant, they lacked the abiding and indwelling Spirit of God indwelling them, empowering them, and leading them into all truth regarding the unseen spiritual forces which assail the visible world. They wrongly believed that Satan was God's "angry voice," that Satan was God's "left hand," that Satan was God's "official minister of wrath," that Satan was the obedient "death angel of the Lord" who was just following the Lord's killing orders.

Jesus came in the NT to clearly to correct, clarify and purify our image of God. Jesus -- through both His teachings and actions-- declared, differentiated, and forever divided asunder the nature and works of God FROM the nature and works of Satan. He came to reveal His Abba's true nature by "culling out" all Satanic qualities from OUR misconceived image of HIS Father. Because of Jesus, no longer would God be seen as the source of BOTH good and evil, BOTH love and wrath, BOTH forgiveness and vengeance, and BOTH life and death. Instead, the New Covenant God would be seen as ONLY light, love, Spirit and truth.

IS "THE THIEF" OF JOHN 10:10 TALKING ABOUT SATAN?

"The thief cometh not , but for to steal , and to kill , and to destroy : I am come that they might have life , and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10.

Some believe that "the thief" in the above passage is talking about the hypocritical Jewish leadership of the day rather than Satan. These interpreters believe that it is wrong to use this passage as a proof text about Satan's nature, even though they acknowledge that Satan, according to other Scripture, DOES in fact steal, kill and destroy. They claim that the CONTEXT of Jesus' statement refers to wicked men and not to the wicked devil.

Here is my response.

The context is talking about BOTH the wicked human shepherds AND Satan as the chief Shepherd of evil. Both are thieving wolves in disguise. The full context of this passage needs to be put in perspective. Jesus, in John chapters 8-10, is ministering in or near the Temple, the hub of Jewish religious leadership. In these chapters, Jesus is repeatedly responding to and rebuking the deceitful and destructive attacks of evil made against Him by the Scribes, Pharisees, and other religious leaders. John 8:3, 13, 48, 52, 59; 9:13, 33-34, 40; 10:24, 31, 33, 39.

In between the Pharisees' various attacks and accusations in these three chapters, Jesus does some amazing things in and around the Temple. 1) Jesus saves the woman caught in adultery from being killed at the direction of the Jewish leadership. 2) Jesus heals the man blind from birth, a man whom the Jewish leadership then casts out of the Temple in anger because the healed man gave divine credit to Christ. 3) Jesus tells the Temple Jews that He preexisted Abraham as the great "I AM." 4) Jesus informs the Jewish leaders that He and the Father are one. 5) Finally, Jesus portrays Himself as "the true shepherd" and "door of salvation" for all men. These chapters may well be the most important three sequential chapters in the Bible.

But, there is one OTHER crucial truth in these chapters, one that answers the question as to whom "the thief" in John 10:10 is clearly referring. Jesus informs the Temple Jews of the following: " Ye are OF your father the devil , and the lusts of your father ye

will do . He was a murderer from the beginning , and abode not in the truth , because there is no truth in him . When he speaketh a lie , he speaketh of his own : for he is a liar , and the father of it." John 8:44.

Read the above passage carefully, for it is crucial that we understand the full significance of what Jesus is saying. Satan is the father of all lies, the father of all lusts, the father of all murder, and the father of all sin. All fallen men are "functional" sons of the devil until they find the true Shepherd's voice. All men were created to be sons of God, but like the prodigal son, all have strayed and been snared by the cosmic enemy known as the devil. 1 John 3:8 is in full accord here: "He that committeth sin is OF the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested , that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8.

Do you see? When John 10:1-13 refers to "a stranger," "the voice of strangers," "thieves and robbers," "the thief," and "the wolf," Jesus is referring to a system of devilish dynamics which ALL stem, originate, flow FROM and are empowered BY Satan. Jesus elsewhere in John calls Satan the prince/ruler of this fallen world. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. The apostle John tells us that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one (RSV)." Jesus is defining the nature of Satan in these three chapters as it continues to attack His ministry in and around the Temple.

Furthermore, just because a plural term is occasionally used in this passage, such as "shepherdS" or "robberS," this does not mean the terms aren't referring to the singular person of Satan. Mark 4:4 metaphorically refers to Satan in the plural, as "the fowlS of the air," who immediately comes and devours up the seed of God sown on the wayside heart. Jesus explicitly taught that these "birdS" (plural) represented Satan (singular) in Mark 4:15. This plural metaphor is clearly referring to a singular entity.

So, does "the thief "John 10:10 also refer to Pharisees? Sure it can. But, "the thief's" primary application is to the the true father of all Pharisaical living and thinking -- Satan. Pharisees are themselves mere pawns, earthly false shepherds who serve a cosmic false shepherd named Satan. The "context" of "the thief" refers primarily to Satan. The Holy Ghost "subtext" also resonates that Satan is the topical target here. We are more than justified in using this passage as one of the defining statements by Jesus as to the nature, will and purposes of Satan.

JUST WHO IS "THE GOD OF THIS WORLD?"

Well, if ANY Old Testament saint was asked this question, their response would essentially be the same: "Yahweh is the God of this world! He alone rules and determines EACH and EVERY circumstance, event or happening on planet earth 24/7. Yahweh alone is God of this world. He BOTH afflicts and heals, He BOTH kills and resurrects, He BOTH destroys and creates, He BOTH oppresses and delivers, He is the author of BOTH good and evil."

But, hold onnnnn there a minute Babalooie!!

The New Testament says that THE GOD OF THIS WORLD is NOT Yahweh, NOT Jesus, NOT the Holy Spirit, and NOT the Heavenly Father. No, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD is(drum-roll)..... SATAN!

The Apostle Paul confirmed this: "In whom THE GOD OF THIS WORLD hath blinded the minds of them which believe not , lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ , who is the image of God , should shine unto them ." 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Jesus confirmed this: "Now is the judgment of this world : now shall THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD be cast out." John 12:31. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you : for THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD cometh , and hath nothing in me ." John 14:30. "Of judgment , because THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD is judged ." John 16:11.

And finally, the Apostle John confirmed this: "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and THE WHOLE WORLD IS IN THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE?" 1 John 5:18-19.

Now, the above verses should both alarm and comfort us. Comfort us because Jesus has both defeated and judged Satan, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD. But, it should also alarm us to possible Old Testament MISATTRIBUTION. What do I mean by misattribution? Well, if Old Testament saints wrongly thought that THE GOD OF THIS WORLD was Yahweh, then much of what happened in the Old Testament which is attributed to Yahweh is, in truth, the work of Satan.

All the violence, plagues, killings, oppressions, curses, afflictions, destructions and damning which the Old Testament says comes from GOD must NOW be re-evaluated with New Testament light. We must look at the particular Old Testament passage which is attributing "evil" to GOD and ask if it is referring to THE GOD OF THIS WORLD or is it referring to THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

In other words, the Old Testament had an "undifferentiated" view of God. They lumped Satan into their image of Yahweh. They simply did not differentiate God from the Devil in any meaningful way. The result? A bipolar God who is up and down, good and evil, hateful and loving, cruel and gentle, vengeful and forgiving, murderous and peaceful.

The Old Testament certainly has many accurate and priceless versions of the wondrous acts of the true Yahweh, THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Old Testament frequently reflects the riches of Jesus' love, virtue, blessing, mercy, miracles and generosity. But, not always. Too often, because they are largely clueless about Satan's identity, the Old Testament mars and deforms the image of God by attributing the works of Satan to God.

Jesus came to heal and reveal. He came to heal our image of a wrathful and hateful God by revealing His Father-God to be ALL love and ALL light. Jesus came to teach us how to differentiate the works of the true God from the works of Satan. Jesus IS that differentiation. Satan, as the FALLEN GOD of this FALLEN WORLD, operates in all forms of stealing, killing and destroying. God, on the other hand, as fully revealed by the RISEN CHRIST of the RISEN FATHER, operates only in forms of life --- the giving of it, the protection of it, the blessing of it! John 10:10.

What a difference between THE GOD OF THIS WORLD and THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST! It is the ultimate difference. Its time to KNOW the difference. It's time to live the difference. "This then is the message which we have heard of him , and declare unto you , that God is light , and in him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5.

VIVE LE DIFFERENCE!

CHAPTER 13-- IS "JUSTICE" AN ESSENTIAL PART OF GOD'S NATURE?

Here is a strange fact. The word "justice" appears nowhere in the King James New Testament, despite the fact that the word is used many times in the Old Testament. While other translations occasionally translate the Greek word "dikaisyne" as "justice," the standard translation of "dikaisyne" is "righteousness."

Today, many demand justice from the hands of God. They want their enemies to pay for the wrong they have done. They somehow deny that what they really want is "vengeance." They instead claim they want simple "justice," as if that cleans up their motive. Rather than technically taking their own revenge, they just pray for God to lower the proverbial boom and destroy their enemies. God can do this either through natural or supernatural means. It matters not to those seeking so called "justice." They crave GOD'S WRATH to execute GOD'S JUSTICE (at least what they consider to be the justice of God).

The problem with "justice" is that it endlessly slides up and down the scale of "deserve." Somebody claims somebody DESERVES something. My enemies DESERVE to be punished. They DESERVE justice's penalty. I DESERVE justice's reward. I DESERVE to be compensated because of a wrong done to me. I DESERVE this. They DESERVE that. The troubling part is that "deserve" doesn't appear to be a legitimate word in God's New Testament Kingdom of Grace. In God's economy, all is freely given without regard to merit. The "deserving" dynamic that "justice" appears to require is nowhere to be seen in the New Testament. This may be why the word "justice" is prevalent in the Old Testament, but appears nowhere in the New Testament, at least the King James version.

So, if the English word "justice" is conspicuously ABSENT from the entire New Testament's most popular Bible translation, shouldn't we then question the role of justice in the New Covenant? Is the Greek word translated "righteous" ever to be considered synonymous in the New Testament with "justice?"

At the outset, it should be said that defining "justice" in a way all can agree on is extremely problematic. One man's justice is another man's injustice. In Plato's Dialogues, the wise Socrates punches holes in all the following proposed definitions of "justice:"

"speaking the truth and repaying what one has borrowed" (331d).

"to render to each his due" (331e).

"treating friends well and enemies badly" (332d).

"to treat well a friend who is good and to harm an enemy who is bad" (335a).

“justice is rendering to each what befits him” (332b).

"Justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger" (338c).

Socrates deconstructed these definitions one-by-one to show how unsatisfactory they all were. These definitions simply cannot withstand the challenge of new times and the power of critical thinking. Socrates refuted them all by presenting counterexamples. For instance, if we tacitly agree that justice is related to goodness, to return a weapon that was borrowed from someone who, although once sane, has turned into a madman does not seem to be just but involves a danger of harm to both sides.

Moreover, all the proposed definitions ultimately involve harming someone who acts unjustly, to which Socrates replies: "it cannot be just to harm anyone, because justice cannot produce injustice" (335a). In World War II, Hitler was the first to bomb civilian cities on a limited basis, but then Churchill retaliated by bombing civilian cities on a widespread and continual basis. Eventually, the United States dropped atomic bombs on two different cities----- thereby killing, maiming, deforming and/or irradiating hundreds of thousand of women and children. Was this justice? It seems that, sooner or later, all proposed definitions of "justice" stand on "the eye for an eye" concept, a concept Jesus definitely trumped as obsolete and no longer viable under the New Covenant. Matthew 5:38-39.

Now, back to Jesus. If His life tells us anything, it reveals Jesus as a victim of INJUSTICE. What He suffered He did not deserve. He was innocent by ANY reckoning of justice. And yet, at His most abused and victimized moment, He declares the following: "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do!" That is not justice. That is mercy. That is grace. That is love.

Matthew 5:48, and the preceding ten verses establish that God the Father's perfection lies in this: He always overcomes evil one way and one way only--- with goodness. He always blesses His enemies to overcome their evil. He endlessly turns the other cheek, walks the extra mile, gives the extra cloak, etc. And Jesus tells us to always do the same, to "be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."

Now, what Jesus modeled for us and commanded to us is NOT justice by any human definition. Rather, it appears quite unjust on it's face. Jesus commands grace, not justice. THE GRACE OF GOD OFFENDS THE JUSTICE OF MAN.

We must believe that God's way of disallowing evil is SOLELY through the Cross. Jesus did not return evil for evil. He did not become evil to stop evil. He did not dispense justice by becoming unjust Himself. Rather, He absorbed ALL our evil upon Himself, without judging us, without revenge or retaliation toward us, and without wrath returned to us. What justice is there in that? We end up NOT getting what we so richly deserve. Praise God, mercy triumphs over justice and judgment.

"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoices AGAINST judgment." James 2:13.

The Greek word translated as "rejoices against" in the above passage is κατακαυχάομαι and means "to exult against (i.e. over):--boast (against), glory, rejoice against, to glory against, to exult over, to boast one's self to the injury (of a person or thing)."

What a great verse! Mercy boasts AGAINST judgment. Mercy glories AGAINST judgement. Mercy exults OVER judgment. Mercy boasts itself to the INJURY of judgment. MERCY AND JUDGMENT ARE MORTAL ENEMIES, BUT GUESS WHAT: MERCY CRIPPLES JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT!

The bottom line is that we all need to drop our human notions and demands for justice outside the door of our hearts. What we call justice is usually just a veiled motive of "eye for an eye" revenge. Am I saying God does NOT want us living uprightly? Of course not. Am I saying God doesn't rejoice when He sees us treat each other fairly and honorably? Of course not. Am I saying that evil sowing doesn't beget evil Satanic reaping of oppressions and destructions galore? No, of course not. Am I saying that the government's rules of "justice" never provide a useful function to society? Certainly not. But, what I am saying is that God does not operate a tic-for-tac system of justice based on any human notion of "just desserts."

There IS a crooked cosmic cop looking to bust us for every single transgression, but it's not Christ. It's Satan, "the ACCUSER of the brethren," who prosecutes us "day and night." Revelation 12:10. What does he use to prosecute us? Our carnal notions of justice and revenge--- the Dead Letter of the Law in other words. This is why the letter of the law "kills" (2 Corinthians 3:6), because it forbids and excludes mercy. Satan is behind every earthly condemnation and accusation. He is also behind our every merciless impulse and response. God, on the other hand, is behind our every impulse to forgive and turn the other cheek, to bless our enemies rather than to curse them, and to help rather than than to hinder them.

So, what does the word "righteousness" mean if it doesn't mean earthly "justice?" Paul tells us in Romans 4:3 and 5, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness... Faith is counted for righteousness." Do you see? It is not what we DO that defines justice in God's eyes, but rather on whom we BELIEVE. The former is living under the Law, while the later is living under Grace. Simply put, faith in Christ is the only justice we perform. "Whatever is not from faith is sin," and thereby unjust. Romans 14:23.

So, what about God's nature? Is justice an essential part of His nature? The New Testament does NOT say God IS justice, but it does say God IS love. 1 John 4:8. Love, then, is the essential ground of His being. He certainly IS just, but that justness serves His love. Justice in the service of love restores victims WITHOUT avenging them.

God is certainly fair, but He is much more than just fair. By all human standards, He INFINITELY MORE THAN FAIR. His "over-fairness" (by our standards of justice) should indicate to us that His justice is very different than ours. It is grounded on grace, faith, love, mercy, patience and restoration. These are the qualities that, as John Cougar Mellencamp sings, "Help a man grow tall!"

"Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord I will repay." So many quote this passage in cruel, hard and woeful tones, but ALWAYS omit the next verse so that the full contextual flavor of the passage is never conveyed. "THEREFORE if thine enemy hunger , feed him ; if he thirst , give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head . Be not overcome of evil , but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:19-21.

Do you see? The purpose of the passage is NOT about threatening ourselves and others with destructive wrath, which is the way the first verse quoted above is mainly used today. Rather, the passage exhorts us to forsake "destructive wrath" in favor of the Father's "restorative wrath."

The Lord's way of vengeance and wrath is to overcome ALL evil with ALL good-- feeding hungry enemies, giving drink to thirsty enemies, blessing them, praying for them, and forgiving them freely. This dynamic overcomes evil with good by heaping coals of conviction on the enemies' heads so THAT they will thereby repent and enter the kingdom of God's restorative love.

I propose that God's "restorative wrath" and His "restorative love" are one in the same. The DAY OF JUBILEE and the DAY OF VENGEANCE are the same thing. God's "day of vengeance" IS His "day of restoration."

Isaiah 61 describes the Lord's "restorative wrath." Where is the widespread and worldwide melting and mauling of the wicked millions here? Rather, does not this "day of vengeance" sound exactly like the "restorative love" of Jubilee?

"The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives , and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; To PROCLAIM the acceptable year of the LORD , and the DAY OF VENGEANCE of our God ; to comfort all that mourn ; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion , to give unto them beauty for ashes , the oil of joy for mourning , the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called trees of righteousness , the planting of the LORD , that he might be glorified ." Isaiah 61:1-3.

There is no violence described above, only full restoration. Loving well IS the best revenge! When Jesus declared that He Himself was the fulfillment Isaiah 61, He actually omitted the words "day of vengeance" from His recitation. Perhaps He knew how that word can be twisted by wrath-mongers and didn't want it corrupting His mission statement.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me , because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives , and recovering of sight to the blind , to set at liberty them that are bruised , To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Luke 4:18-19

Sounds good to me!

But could this be true? Is this dynamic elsewhere stated clearly by Jesus? Oh yes!

This was Jesus' central message in the sermon on the mount.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said , An eye for an eye , and a tooth for a tooth : But I say unto you , That ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek , turn to him the other also . And if any man will sue thee at the law , and take away thy coat , let him have thy cloak also .

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile , go with him twain . Give to him that asketh thee , and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away . Ye have heard that it hath been said , Thou shalt love thy neighbour , and hate thine enemy .

But I say unto you , Love your enemies , bless them that curse you , do good to them that hate you , and pray for them which despitefully use you , and persecute you ; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good , and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust .

For if ye love them which love you , what reward have ye ? do not even the publicans the same ? And if ye salute your brethren only , what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so ?

Be ye THEREFORE perfect , even AS your Father which is in heaven is perfect ."
~~Matthew 5:38-48.

The last verse is key. It instructs us to "THEREFORE" be "PERFECT, even AS the Father is perfect." The "therefore" refers to the previous ten verses in which the Father's perfection is explained. His perfection lies in this-- He loves, blesses, forgives and restores His enemies!

Am I saying that "the coals of conviction" heaped on the enemies' heads isn't painful? No, coals on the head hurt and I think nothing is more painful than seeing the gravity of our own self-centered evil. Am I saying that God's purging flames don't singe, sting, sear and scorch? No, God's fire is white hot and white holy. But, what I am saying though is that His fire ultimately saves us by overcoming all of our evil with all of His good. The church father Origen called God's judging flames "wise fire" because they ultimately heal rather than harm. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

The only word in the Gospels for "punishment" with regard to God punishing evildoers is "kolasis," which according to Aristotle, who knew Greek word meanings better than anybody who ever walked the planet, said that "kolasis" is the kind of punishment which "is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer," which means it is for the betterment or improvement of the person being punished. This is contrasted with "timoria," which Aristotle said is the kind of punishment which is "inflicted in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction." (Rhet. 1369b13).

The Gospels reveal a God who never punishes to gratify Himself, but rather punishes to heal and help the evildoers improve and be restored. William Barclay, who was professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University and the author of many Christian commentaries and books, including a translation of the New Testament and the very popular Daily Study Bible Series, traces the word "kolasis" back, through Plato, to an original term used to describe the pruning of trees back to allow fuller and healthier growth. Revenge motives are "timoria," and only gratify the lust for an eye for an eye payback. But "kolasis" motives are always looking for a way to restore and repair that which is lost and broken.

In his Commentary on Matthew 10.2, Origen, my favorite early church father, explained the "the weeping and gnashing of teeth" of those in fiery judgment as a form of repentance and sort of anger of the sinners against themselves, while in the furnace they are being purified. The Lord is the great physician with His motive for His surgical punishments always being restorative "kolasis." God's modus operandi is always to overcome evil with good. Loving well is the best revenge!

Even the Lord's punishments are healing. His vengeance is His virtue. Hallelujah!

THE NUCLEAR POWER OF FORGIVENESS!

Do you know why it's best to turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, give the additional coat? Do you know why it's better to pray for your enemies and bless those who curse and spitefully use you? Why are all these things better than eye-for-an-eye revenge, tooth-for-a-tooth retaliation and hate-for-hate cursing toward those who offend us? See Matthew 5:38-48.

It is not JUST that turning the other cheek keeps us from sinning, although it does. It is not JUST that praying for our enemies is the noblest thing we can do, although it is. And it is not JUST that blessing those who hate, curse and spitefully use us makes us Christ-like, although it certainly does.

No, the REASON "loving our enemies" is the best thing we can ever do is that it gives us the maximum POWER to ultimately overcome all their evil for THEIR sake.

Let me put it another way. When somebody victimizes YOU with condemnation, hatred, cursing, lying, violence or betrayal, you know what you then become? You become the most powerful intercessor on earth for that PARTICULAR person. This is a Spiritual law

imbedded by God in all creation. Whenever you are wronged, you are AUTOMATICALLY given EXTRA mojo, power, authority, anointing, and access to pray blessing and Holy Ghost "conviction" UPON the heads of the wrongdoers.

The absolute best blessing you can pray for the enemy you have TRULY forgiven is to fervently and tenderly "pray down conviction" upon their souls, which Romans likens to "hot coals" searing their consciences with the urge and need to repent. I call these "soul-coals." "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Romans 12:20.

An eye-for-an-eye spirit of condemnation, revenge and resentment against your enemies will HINDER and OBSTRUCT their conviction to repent. But, a turn-the-other-cheek Spirit of love and non-judgment will MAXIMIZE and OPTIMIZE the conditions for their Godly repentance to occur. Whereas an eye-for-an-eye "spirit" causes you to call down fire on your enemies, just as the misguided disciples did in Luke 9:51-56, the turn-the-other-cheek "Spirit" causes you to pity your enemies for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34.

Talk about victims' rights! We have the right and increased power to help save those who wrong us--- to save them to the uttermost from sin, Satan and themselves.

God has weaved an invincible dynamic into creation that always gives those who are victimized the most powerful force in the universe to wield at their disposal--- forgiveness. But biblical "forgiveness" is not just "mercy" to graciously overlook the wrong. Biblical "forgiveness" in the original Greek language means complete "deliverance" for the sinner FROM the bondage to the sin itself.

In other words, "perfect forgiveness" ULTIMATELY works "COMPLETE deliverance." This "power of good" to ultimately "overcome evil" and thoroughly PURGE evildoers of all sin-bondages works absolutely and without exception. Sometimes it works quickly. Sometimes it works slowly. Sometimes it works in THIS age. Sometimes it will work in the age to COME. But it ALWAYS works.

In our patience and faith in this Scripturally-promised dynamic, that of overcoming all evil with good, we will truly "possess our souls" as we count it all joy when we are "victimized" by persecutions. Luke 21:19; James 1:2-4. The reason we can rejoice is that IF and AS we truly forgive, bless and love our enemies, we are literally "saving them" from Satan's clutches.

But, on the other unfortunate hand, our toxic resentment and desire to retaliate against our enemies will only worsen the situation, both ours AND our enemies. It may well be that there is so little true deliverance FROM sin because there is so little true forgiveness OF sin by those who have been victimized. But, us learning to fully and actively "forgive," JUST AS the Father and Jesus "forgive," is the KEY thing we are now called to realize and walk in.

Do you see? The strongest intercession FOR particular evildoers potentially comes from those who are victimized BY those same evildoers. This is why, "Jesus liveth to make intercession for them." We are "them." Jesus is our champion intercessor BECAUSE He became the champion victim. He turned His cosmic cheek the other way in love rather than retaliate against us in wrath. And because of this, He truly is all powerful in Heaven and earth. His mercy ransomed us from all evil.

Jesus is easily the MOST victimized person to ever walk the earth. He was completely sinless, yet bore the full brunt of victimization for EVERY sin ever committed. He was victimized by all OUR misguided evildoing in thought, deed or word. Our mental, verbal, emotional and physical violence, all inflicted UPON Jesus at the Cross gave Him the the most powerful intercessory influence the world has ever seen.

So, even if we fail to fully forgive, we still have a cosmic safety net---- Jesus! Jesus is the savior of the whole world, which in the Latin is expressed as "Salvador Mundi." Jesus is the perfect intercessor, and His love shall not fail to eventually overcome and rescue all men trapped in sin. He shall overcome them with His flawless goodness, whether it be in this life or the next.

But, let's don't just count on His safety net of mercy to make all things right in some FUTURE age. Let's join in the "fray" of forgiveness right HERE and NOW. As warriors of virtue, let's battle all wrath by learning to "forgive" with a vengeance! When we learn that God's only "vengeance" is to "wholly heal" His enemies, then our hearts will be primed and ready to fight the good fight of faith.

CHAPTER 14-- WHAT DO WE TELL OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE KILLING GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Before I answer that question, I want to propose a thought experiment which will highlight how important this issue is, not only for us, but especially and primarily for our children. The image of God you teach them will set them off in the direction of truth or in the direction of error.

So, lets begin.

Here is a simple thought experiment. I apologize in advance for the graphic image, but we need to take a RAW and REAL look at the IMPLICATIONS of what we have wrongly believed about God. Until we are brutally honest about these implications, we, along with our children, will labor with a bipolar view of God which cripples our "faith in" and "intimacy with" Him.

So, here is the thought experiment.

Imagine Jesus angrily entering a bathroom where a young girl is bathing and playing in the tub. Jesus sneers down at the child in disgust. He then reaches down and pushes the girl's head down underneath the tub water. Jesus then continues to hold her little face underwater while her arms flail wildly about in panic, grasping and gasping for air. As the water gradually fills her lungs, she eventually slows her thrashing, and then stops moving altogether. She is dead.

Now check your response.

Your understandable reaction is, "NO, that's outrageous, and blasphemous. Jesus would NEVER do that. How dare you propose that!"

Experiment over!

Now, let me ask you another question. If we can't believe this of Jesus, then HOW on earth can we tell our children that Jesus did that exact same thing (or its homicidal equivalent) in the Old Testament, and not only to one child, but to EVERY child in the world during Noah's day, to EVERY firstborn child in Egypt, to EVERY child in Sodom and Gomorrah, and to ALL the enemies' children killed by Israel pursuant to God's command in the Promised Land incursions.

So, what do we tell our children? That Jesus is a child-killer? May it never be! And yet, we do THAT very thing whenever we read our children Noah and the Flood story books without ever explaining the truth about the passages involved. And, usually that is one of the very first stories we read to them about God! No wonder their little eyes open wide in terror when they hear this story.

And then, to make things worst, we add to it by reading the OTHER Old Testament stories in which GOD COMMITS WIDESPREAD KILLING OF CHILDREN:

--Jesus killed a nation full of Egyptian firstborn infants and children during the well-known Exodus story.

--Jesus killed a huge city full of children of all ages in Sodom and Gomorra (not to mention all the other children killed at God's express command in the various Biblical bloodbaths, including even rebellious Israelite children under God's "no exception" stoning law).

--God has 42 children mauled by bears. In 2 Kings 2:23-24, some youths tease the prophet Elisha, and God sends bears to dismember them. (Newer cosmetic translations say the bears "maul" the children, but the original Hebrew, baqa, means "to tear apart.")

NOW, THAT'S JUST CHILDREN. CONSIDER THE HUMAN LIFE GOD IS ACCUSED OF TAKING BELOW.

--God drowns the whole earth in Genesis 7:21-23, God drowns the entire population of the earth: men, women, children, and fetuses.

--God kills half a million people 2 Chronicles 13:15-18, God helps the men of Judah kill 500,000 of their fellow Israelites.

--God kills 14,000 people for complaining that God keeps killing them. In Numbers 16:41-49, the Israelites complain that God is killing too many of them. So, God sends a plague that kills 14,000 more of them.

--Genocide after genocide after genocide. In Joshua 6:20-21, God helps the Israelites destroy Jericho, killing "men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys." In Deuteronomy 2:32-35, God has the Israelites kill everyone in Heshbon, including children. In Deuteronomy 3:3-7, God has the Israelites do the same to the people of Bashan. In Numbers 31:7-18, the Israelites kill all the Midianites except for the virgins, whom they take as spoils of war. In 1 Samuel 15:1-9, God tells the Israelites to kill all the Amalekites – men, women, children, infants, and their cattle – for something the Amalekites' ancestors had done 400 years earlier.

--God kills 50,000 people for curiosity. In 1 Samuel 6:19, God kills 50,000 men for peeking into the ark of the covenant. (Newer cosmetic translations count only 70 deaths, but their text notes admit that the best and earliest manuscripts put the number at 50,070.)

--God orders 3,000 Israelites killed for inventing a false god. In Exodus 32, Moses has climbed Mount Sinai to get the Ten Commandments. The Israelites are bored, so they invent a golden calf god. Moses comes back and God commands him: "Each man strap

a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.” Around 3,000 people are then brutally killed.

--The Amorites are destroyed by sword and by God’s rocks. In Joshua 10:10-11, God helps the Israelites slaughter the Amorites by sword, then finishes them off with rocks from the sky.

--God burns two cities to death. In Genesis 19:24, God kills everyone in Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from the sky. Then God kills Lot’s wife for looking back at her burning home.

After reading these stories, our children's view of God is now so tainted, so chilled, so terrorized, so horrible, so quenched, that they have no interest in learning about God at all. Instead, they want to join Adam and Eve in hiding from His monstrous wrath.

So, WHAT should we tell them about all this Old Testament violence?

Simple, we tell them that the Old Testament characters didn't understand that Satan was an enemy of God, that they wrongly thought Satan was just doing what God told him to do, and that Satan was just God's official mister of wrath, His left hand of judgment so to speak.

We tell them that the Old Testament saints mistakenly joined the images of God and Satan together at the hip, and that this caused them to sometimes describe something evil or destructive as having been done or said "by the Lord," when in truth it was done or said "by Satan." (For the OT saints, the term "the Lord" sometimes included Satan's works in their functional definition of God).

We tell them that the Old Testament writers wrongly thought BOTH good and evil came from God, that BOTH healing and sickness came from God, and that BOTH killing wrath and restoring love come upon us EXCLUSIVELY from the hand of God*****but then we tell them that Jesus came from Heaven to correct this idea and to show us God was ONLY and ALWAYS good.

We tell them that Old Testament prayers wrongly "begged God to stop" oppressing the people, while New Testament prayers rebuked Satan directly, while praising and affirming the goodness, love and protective power of God from all Satanic activity.

We tell them that what what the ancients called the wrath of God in the Old Testament is what WE call the works of Satan in the New Testament.

We tell them that Jesus came to show us that Satan was BOTH our enemy and His enemy, and that we are always to resist Him steadfast in the faith.

We tell them that ALL death, disaster, sickness, oppression and destruction comes from the work of the devil, but that ONLY love, light, protection, rescue, restoration and healing come from the heavenly Father.

We tell them God is only and always good and to trust on His love, light and power for all things.

We tell them Satan's evil is temporary and will not last beyond this life in Heaven, and that there will be a future generation who rises up and finally ENDORSES and ENFORCES Satan's complete defeat here on earth which Jesus has already accomplished over him in both Heaven and Hell.

We will tell them that as we read the Old Testament, we must then allow the Holy Spirit to reveal where Satan secretly lurks hidden in the story, sort of like the old "Where's Waldo?" game where the child has to locate the redstripe-shirted Waldo who is secretly imbedded somewhere in a very busy and complex picture.

Then, as they grow, we will teach them a better way to read the Old Testament, a non-literal way which the church fathers used to honor the character of God by purging away all character distortions from the Old Testament's "by the letter" readings. We will show them a better way to read the Bible, the Emmaus way where Jesus guides us through ALL Scripture by His Holy Spirit, explaining along the way the wonderful things we need to know about His Father's goodness while correcting any and all Old Testament distortions which say otherwise.

All of the above proposals include my personal approach which I used on my own seven children. The key is to start and focus in the New Testament. Build that foundation FIRST, and THEN start to go back to the Old Testament stories, always with a view to "cull out" allegorical truths about Jesus and His Kingdom from those passages. I had to do a lot of on-the-spot editing when I would read them Bible stories, but it sharpened me and strengthened them. I can't love God for them, but I can present a clear picture of God which won't impede or mislead their faith.

What is explained in the Emmaus passage below is what we passionately want for our children. We want them to have "burning hearts" which KNOW Jesus through a spiritual reading of Scriptures, RATHER than hard hearts which never truly know Jesus because of a strictly literal, "by the letter," reading of Scripture. 2 Corinthians 3:6 commissions us as "able ministers of the New Covenant" to read Scripture by "the living Spirit" rather by the "the dead letter." As the church father Origen said, "Ignorant assertions about God appear to be nothing else but this: that Scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter." Origen, On First Principles 4:2.1-2, 4.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, Jesus expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.... And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart

burn within us, while he talked with us by the way , and while he opened to us the scriptures ?" Luke 24: 27, 31-32.

CHAPTER 15-- THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF JOB: BEWARE THE "JOB-STROBE"

The JOB-STROBE describes the disorienting effect from "snapshot" vision through the use of flickering lights or vibrating shutters. We have all experienced the choppy and confusing effects of moving through strobe-lighted areas, whether it be at a fair, dance, party, concert or class demonstration.

Basically, we stop seeing reality in a smooth and continuous flow. Instead, we see reality solely in snapshots through alternating flashes of light and dark. We see briefly, then are blinded briefly --- light, dark, light, dark, light, dark. We are left unbalanced, unsure and confused. We see some things briefly, but we lose the visual feelings of momentum, flow and movement. These isolated "snippets of seeing" leave us with sensations of disconnectedness. Isolation breeds isolation. Isolated perception results in isolated thinking, isolated feelings and isolated being.

In the Spirit realm, there is a similar dynamic that confuses believers into low levels of faith, hope and confidence toward God. They become tentative in their spiritual walk because for every INSIGHT OF LIGHT they receive toward God, it is quickly blotted over by an INSIGHT OF DARKNESS. They are left isolated and shrugging their shoulders about God's nature because they simply don't see God in a continuous stream of light and love.

Their image of God changes every other thought. God brings good, God brings evil. God heals me, God afflicts me. God is love, God is wrath. God protects me, God attacks me. The end result is a double-minded man who, as James 1:8 says, can receive nothing from God.

This poor man becomes a spiritual petal-plucker who wastes his time alternatively lamenting and wondering about God, "He loves me, He loves me not." This can be easily seen in the Psalms, where the frustrated David says in one verse that God has abandoned him, but then in the next verse that God's love is steadfast and never ending. Many of the Psalms read this way, not to mention many other Old Testament passages which quickly alternate God's infinite love with God's infinite wrath.

But instead of calling the spiritual version of this dynamic the STROBE-EFFECT, I want to call it the JOB-STROBE. This is because this way of double-minded thinking derives largely from the Book of Job WHENEVER it is read without Holy Ghost illumination. Job is a wonderful book when it is read in a wonderful way. But when read with natural thinking, wrathful intent and little faith, the book of Job MUTATES into a monstrous book which greatly deforms the image of God. I want to share some interpretive keys to Job which will remove all "strobing" from our understanding of God's goodness.

KEY NUMBER ONE: JOB WAS CLUELESS ABOUT GOD'S TRUE NATURE

The Book of Job at its root is not about what we know about God's nature. Rather, it exposes what we DON'T know about God. Job is often cited as a righteous man whose conduct and attitude toward God we are to imitate. Many say, "Look how noble Job bears up under the hard hand of God." Others say, "Job loved God so much, even though God slew his sons, robbed his riches, afflicted his health and crushed his happiness. If only we could approach suffering the way Job did then we would be righteous too."

WRONG!!! If I presented you a 42 chapter book explaining my life, and filled with my thoughts and opinions of God, and THEN in the last chapter admitted that in the previous 41 chapters I really knew nothing about God and was almost entirely mistaken, you would be furious with me. You sure wouldn't take anything I said in those first 41 chapters seriously.

Well, this is EXACTLY what Job did. In the first 40 chapters, Job and his friends made some 74 false accusations about the nature of God which ALL essentially blamed God as the wrathful source of all of Job's afflictions. But, Job himself admitted at the very end of the Book that for the previous FORTY CHAPTERS, he essentially knew NOTHING about God's nature. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once I have spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.... Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered THAT I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." Job 40:3-5; 42:3.

Job THOUGHT he knew God well DURING all the dialogues through the first forty chapters. But at the end of the matter, he repented for what he and his friends had previously thought and said about God in chapters 1-40. First, he admitted his own previous opinions about God were wrong, as quoted above. He recognized that God was "too wonderful" for his previous theology to rightly understand. Then, he summarized his sin as follows: "I have heard of You by the HEARING of the ear, but NOW my eyes SEE you. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5-6. He THEN prayed for his three friends who did not speak of the Lord that "what is right" during the previous 40 chapters. Job 42:7-10. "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job...."

Beloved, do you see? To take the first 40 chapters of Job as reliable theology on the nature of God and the problem of evil on any level is absurd. The point of Job is that men in their natural thinking have NO IDEA of the dynamics of God, Satan, good and evil. The message of Job is NOT to follow in Job's footsteps, at least until chapter 40.

Job did have a righteous appreciation and reverence of God throughout the whole book (Job 1:1, 8, 22; 2:3). BUT he was woefully ignorant of the Lord's flawless character AND Satan's role as the destroyer. He had righteously believed God based on what he had

heard, or been taught in other words, BUT only at the end of the Book did he actually see, perceive and EXPERIENCE the true essence of the Lord.

What was the newfound essence of God revealed at the end of Job? What is it that Job perceived which drove him to repent over his previously poor theology about the nature of God and the problem of evil? What drove him to his repentant knees? Simple. He EXPERIENCED the presence of God, perhaps for the first time in his life. He had heard "about" God from others, had righteously "believed" what he heard, and had even dutifully sacrificed "toward" and prayed "to" God. But Job had never been "WITH" God in His immediate and intimate presence.

Through the final scene of the Book, Job richly EXPERIENCED the presence and love of God as a hero, his hero who did not bring Job his captivity, but instead turned Job's captivity into blessing. Job saw God as the lover and deliverer of his soul.

James 5:11 instructs us to focus on Job's end, not his beginning. Job's end saw him repentant and richly restored twofold in all he had previously lost. If we focus on Job's beginning, which describes his suffering and his "noble statements" of "bearing up" under God's "firm hand," we will make the mother of all mistakes. We will glorify men and not God. God never gets the glory for sending disasters, death and destructions upon men as the beginning of Job describes. Men, not God, are the only ones glorified when such statements are made as Job makes in the following passages:

"And Job said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21.

"What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil." Job 2:10.

"Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet Thou dost destroy me." Job 10:8.

"For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again Thou shewest Thyself marvelous upon me." Job 10:16.

"Are not my days few? Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little." Job 10:20.

"Thou art become cruel to me: with Thy strong hand thou opposest Thyself against me" Job 31:21.

"For destruction from God is a terror to me" Job 31:23.

"But now He hath made me weary: Thou hast made desolate all my company. And Thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in

me beareth witness to my face. He teareth me in His wrath, who hateth me: He gnasheth upon me with His teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth His eyes upon me." Job 16:7-9.

"He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes." Job 30:19.

I could go on and on with Job's wrong statements about God, not to mention those also made by his misguided friends, but I think the above quotes offer a good sampling. The error is the same ---- God is the bringer of affliction, the bringer of evil, the bringer of disasters. This is totally contradicted by New Testament theology, specifically James 1:13-18, which says God doesn't use "evil" to "tempt" men and to "let no man say" He does. The Greek word in this passage for "tempt" is "periazō" and means "to test, entice, discipline, prove, tempt or try."(Strong's #3985).

Thus, God doesn't test man with evil, entice man with evil, discipline man with evil, prove man with evil, tempt man with evil, or try man with evil. And let no man say God DOES do these things, not EVEN Job or the author of the Book named after him. This James passage renders Job's "literal" reading IMPOSSIBLE to the extent that it "appears" to claim God DOES use EVIL by "testing" and "trying" Job's faith in some sort of arbitrary and perverted cosmic bet made with Satan in which God supposedly admits to Satan, "thou MOVED me against him (Job), to destroy him WITHOUT CAUSE." Job 2:3.

Satan MOVES God to destroy men WITHOUT CAUSE? No way! Never! That is blasphemous. Whatever Job means, it can't mean that. Job can't violate the James 1:13-18 passage. It can't violate Jesus. Jesus always trumps Job. New Covenant inspiration COMPELS us to reread Job and renovate its primitive and literal meaning WHENEVER it fails to conform to the nature and character of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

I even grant you that these Job passages quoted above were heartfelt sentiments that both Job and his friends were sincerely feeling, BUT they were sincerely wrong. Let me give a modern day parallel. There is a well known Christian author who was paralyzed in a diving accident as a teenager. She never tires of attributing the accident as coming from the hand of God in order to keep her from leading a sexually promiscuous lifestyle.

WHAT? God crippled her as a teen in order to keep her from sinning sexually? That is outrageous! Did Jesus ever bless or protect any body by first crippling them or afflicting them with leprosy? NO! Aren't there some other ways God works chastity other than breaking teenage spines? How does this paint the goodness of God? She looks like a victim saint, while God looks like a unknowable monster. She even asks people not to pray for her healing, but instead to pray that she know God better. Sounds noble, and I am sure she is heartfelt in her beliefs, just as Job was, BUT again, who gets the glory here?

I hear so many Calvinists paint this woman as a modern day Job who is a champion of faith and theology. God is left holding the bag of cruelty and evil. This is why atheism flourishes. Who can love a crippler of children? My heart aches for her and for those who follow her. As well intentioned as they may all be, they are the blind leading the blind into a faithless ditch. Time and time again this misguided woman preaches from the Book of Job, over and over and over. Audiences weep and weep and weep. And faith is weakened and weakened and weakened.

Trace the pastors and teachers who glorify this woman's theology and you will know who to avoid if you are seeking the "captivity-turning" power of God. Bless them, but reject their teachings. They need to have an EXPERIENCE of God's presence, power and goodness, just like Job, which will lead them to repent. Then they need to put their hands over their mouth and stop talking nonsense. Then, God will turn THEIR captivity and all will be well.

KEY NUMBER TWO: JOB WAS CLUELESS ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF SATAN

Job the man never mentioned Satan. He was completely unaware of Satan's role in the murder of his children, the murder of his servants, the killing of his flocks, the destruction of his wealth, and the affliction of his health. Job directly attributed all these acts of violence and oppression solely to the hand of the Lord. Job NEVER uttered the word Satan or Devil in the entire Book of Job.

We now know the reason. Old Testament saints had a dim and distorted view of Satan. The Old Testament saints, that is the ones who even knew Satan existed, believed that the Devil was a servant angel of God performing an unpleasant but necessary job for the Lord. This job was essentially to test, tempt, judge, punish and eventually kill all men.

Satan was NOT seen by Old Testament believers as an ENEMY of God, or a REBEL leader OPPOSED to the Kingdom of Heaven on EVERY level. Rather, he was perceived as an enforcing angel fulfilling his role in the Lord's courts. He was known by the Jews in various Old Testament passages as the Death Angel, the Destroyer, the Tempter and even on occasion the Angel of the Lord, BUT he was always acting at the express command of God.

In short, Old Testament theology did not see Satan as EVIL. Jesus' response to this notion? NO! WRONG! UNTRUE! MISGUIDED! SATAN IS PURE EVIL ---- THE FATHER OF LIES, A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, THE ACCUSER OF THE BRETHREN, THE GREAT DRAGON, THE SERPENT, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD, YOUR ADVERSARY, A ROARING LION SEEKING TO DEVOUR YOU, THE EVIL ONE, THE THIEF, THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR.

Jesus came to reveal both His Father's Kingdom of Light AND Satan's Kingdom of Darkness. In fact, Jesus came to DESTROY the works of the devil, NOT to approve

them. 1 John 3:8. Jesus and the New Testament reveal that there is a cosmic rebellion and that the earth is a battlefield in which we are soldiers in constant need of spiritual armor and weapons of righteousness in our right hand and in our left.

So, where did this leave Job? Well, it left him clueless that the enemy of his soul was Satan. It left him uninformed, unprepared and unarmed. Job never once resisted Satan, never once rebuked Satan and never once put on "the full armor of God" THAT he would be "able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:13. Job was completely clueless as to the need for spiritual warfare. He didn't even know he had an enemy. He thought it all came directly from God, BOTH good and evil. In this ignorance, Job was even unaware that God had surrounded him with a protective "hedge" that Satan could not penetrate. Job 1:10. Once that hedge was lowered, Job was truly helpless and hopeless because his hidden enemy was assailing him from every angle, an enemy of which he was ENTIRELY ignorant.

I am sure we would all agree that the New Testament WAY is NOT to sit passively by while obvious Satanic attacks are destroying our children, friends, finances and health. The New Testament way is to STAND and CONTEND against Satan, whom we are commanded to "resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9). BUT, how could Job "resist" and "rebuke" Satan, as Jesus did in Matthew 17:18, if he wasn't even aware that he existed as an enemy of God? And more importantly, why oh why would we ever paint Job as a Scriptural model to follow when it comes to rightly responding to personal disasters? Jesus is our model for combat, not Job. Jesus IS the "whole armor of God" ---- living armor always ready to "quench ALL the fiery darts of the evil one." Ephesians 6:16.

So, what does the Book of Job ACCURATELY tell us about the nature of Satan? First, it confirms Satan's sphere of influence is HERE as he travels "to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Job 1:7; 2:2. The New Testament confirms this when it calls Satan "the God of this world.... and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19 (NASB).

Second, the Book of Job confirms that Satan operates destructions in the earth by using three deadly weapons ---- MEN (1:13-15, 17), NATURE (1:16, 18-19), and SICKNESS (2:7). Satan first inspired violent men, the Sabeans and Chaldeans, to murder Job's servants and flocks by the sword. Satan then manipulated nature, "great wind" and "fire from heaven" (lightning), to kill Job's children as well as the remaining servants and sheep. Satan then finally infected Job with "boils" from head to toe. The New Testament confirms that Satan is able as "the Prince of the power of the air" to influence nature to try to kill (Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 8:26). Satan also entered into Judas, Pharisees and mobs of stoners seeking to provoke them to kill Jesus at various times. Finally, Jesus cast out thousands of demonic spirits of infirmity during His earthly ministry.

Third, the Book of Job rightly describes that Satan operates all his DESTRUCTIONS only "OUTSIDE" of the PRESENCE OF GOD. Job 1:12; 2:6-7. Please review the chapter entitled TRACING THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD for a more in-depth

discussion of this dynamic. Where the Lord is MANIFESTLY present, Satan cannot destroy or even penetrate the "hedge" of Holy Ghost protection surrounding the righteous. Obviously, the Lord is OMNIPRESENT, which means He is invisibly present everywhere at the same time. But, God is ONLY MANIFESTLY PRESENT where faith is operating to convert and catalyze God's available omnipresence UNTO OPEN MANIFESTATION.

In Mark 6, Jesus went back to Nazareth ready to do all the mighty works of God. BUT their unbelief "quenched" Jesus' power to OPENLY APPEAR and MANIFEST, "And He could there do no mighty works." God was fully present there in the person of Jesus, but that presence was not openly manifesting the power of God for all to see and encounter. And Jesus "marveled at their unbelief."

The point here is that Satan only steals, kills or destroys where Jesus' MANIFEST PRESENCE has been rejected, neglected, or unselected. "Quenched away," in other words. Here, the Lord's remaining OMNIPRESENCE will marvel, just as Jesus did, at the unbelief which keeps the Kingdom of Heaven from fully manifesting NOW into the current situation for all to see.

All across the world right now, the Holy Spirit is marveling at the collective unbelief which hinders Him from fully demonstrating His loving power and presence to mankind. When Peter says we can "hasten the day of the Lord," he is acknowledging that our faith can enable the will of God to manifest more quickly upon the earth as it is already manifest in Heaven.

Fourth, the Book of Job is correct in that Satan does accuse us in the Heavenly courts. Job 1:10-11; 2:4-5. The New Testament confirms this in Revelation 12:10, where Satan is described as the "accuser of our brethren," who is to be "cast DOWN, which accused them before our God day and night." There is some sort of courtroom imagery going on here, but Job omits one very important participant ---- Jesus.

"And if any man sin, we have an ADVOCATE with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," (1 John 2:1) which is to say we all have a DEFENDER, a champion, a hero who offers us protection in the Heavenly courts. Jesus demonstrated this to Peter when He told Him, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not..." (Luke 22:31-32). Do you see? Jesus "lives to intercede" and protect us, that our faith will fail not. If we pay diligent heed to our "so great a salvation," we will receive the divine strengthening of Jesus. But, "if we neglect our so great a salvation, how shall we escape" the attacks of Satan. Hebrews 2:3. Pretty clear isn't it?

So what was the Book of Job missing in its description of the Heavenly courtroom scenes in the first two chapters? Most importantly, it was missing the protective presence of Jesus which has always been at the right hand of the Father, always seeking to "hedge" us with His divine presence. Job had the "hedge" but did not recognize that it was the "living hedge" of Jesus seeking to protect and surround him

with divine favor. Satan our accuser versus Jesus our advocate. The Book of Job does not properly convey this dynamic.

Moreover, the Book of Job when "literally" read has the wrong tone of the interactions between God and Satan. This is because ALL Old Testament authors, including the Book of Job's, did not see Satan as an enemy devil but rather as a servant angel. Does anybody really believe that God arbitrarily chose to lower Job's hedge so that He could win some friendly wager with Satan?

Does anybody really believe that the dead "letter" of Job 2:3 is accurate when it says that Satan "moved God" against Job, "to destroy him WITHOUT cause..."? Likewise, is it conceivable that God would ever say to Satan, "All that Job hath is in thy power," as stated in Job 1:12 or that, "Behold, Job is in thy hand," as stated in Job 2:6? Certainly not. The first two chapters of Job give the appearance of WAY too much accommodation and cooperation between God and Satan. The New Testament does not give Satan the place or power to EVER "move" God to "destroy" men's lives "without cause." Jesus knows better than that and so do we.

Deep breath. Honestly, can your heart imagine such arbitrary abandonment on the part of Jesus? Jesus would never turn us over to Satan to win some kind of perverted cosmic bet. NEVER! Is that New Testament love as described in 1 Corinthians 13? We certainly might turn OURSELVES over to Satan's power through our neglect or disbelief, which would then partially "quench away" Jesus' protective hedge. Then Satan would attempt to fill the vacuum with his destructions. But the moment we start repenting and believing again, the hedge returns to repair, renew, and restore.

And what are the benefits of that hedge? Let's hear what Satan says to God about the "hedge," because this may be the only absolutely true thing Satan ever said in the Scriptures: "Hast Thou not made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." Job 1:10. Again, that hedge is Jesus. So the question is this ---- what action on the part of Job caused Satan to be able to penetrate that hedge? That is our next key.

KEY NUMBER THREE: JOB WAS CLUELESS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF HIS OWN FEAR

The author of Job did not have a New Testament understanding to perceive the real reason Job's protective "hedge" came down. So, instead, he just attributed it to the mysterious will of God as it was "moved" by Satan to "destroy" Job "without cause." There was a cause which gave Satan access, but it wasn't God. It was the same cause that has always empowered Satan to wreak his destructions in this fallen world. That cause is the mother of all Satanic power. What is it? FEAR!

There is a reason Jesus said "fear not, only believe" to Jairus in Luke 8:50. Fear gives Satan access to steal, kill and destroy. Hebrews 2:14-15 suggests that Satan keeps mankind "all their lifetimes subject to bondage" through "FEAR of death." William James famously said, "Fear of death is the worm at the center of the core of every fear." "God has not given us the spirit of FEAR; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7. Isaiah tells us "thou shalt be FAR from oppression; for thou shalt NOT fear" (54:14). Paul tells us we have "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father," and thereby have "NOT received the spirit of bondage AGAIN to FEAR." Romans 8:14-15. Jesus came to deliver us FROM fear TO faith.

The presence of "fear" in the human heart invites and incubates Satanic attacks. The New Testament is clear that WE are the ones who give access to Satan. Ephesians 4:27; John 14:30; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:16. FEAR is the primary access. This works both on individual and corporate levels. Sometimes our fear gives Satan access to afflict us individually. Other times our fear gives Satan access to afflict others nearby. Just like firsthand smoke can kill the one smoking, secondhand smoke can kill those nearby who inadvertently inhale. So too with fear. It not only corrupts us, but those around us.

So, how do we know Job had deep fear issues? Two major reasons. First, he admitted he did. "For what I fear has come upon me. And what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes." Job 3:25-26(NASB). This is perhaps the most accurate description of general anxiety ever given. No rest. No safety. Pure turmoil. Obsessive worrying. Voicing fears of worse case scenarios. And what happened? WHAT he feared came upon him in full force.

The second evidence that Job had major fear issues concerned his anxiety over his children. Job 1:4-5 paints a disturbing picture. Job was so insecure regarding his children's relationship with God that he actually FEARED the following: "It MAY be that my sons have sinned, and CURSED God in their hearts. Thus Job did CONTINUALLY."

What a horrible thought to CONTINUALLY struggle with. Job was obsessed with the fear that his children were secretly cursing God. No wonder Job had no rest, no inner peace, no security. Job offered continual daily sacrifices for his adult children because of his fear, NOT because of his faith toward God. And what happened? What Job most feared eventually came upon him ---- his children were killed, as well as his servants and flocks. His finances were plundered and his health broken. Fear draws oppression like honey draws flies.

The above passages show that Job's fear opened the door for all the Satanic attacks. Fear diminished the "Jesus Hedge." Satan attacked. Satan destroyed. Job initially got bad counsel. Job later got good counsel from Elihu. Job then experienced the presence of God. Job quickly repented, prayed for his errant friends, after which he was fully restored. Doubly restored in fact.

At the beginning of the Book, Job had no clue that Satan was an enemy of God OR that Satan feeds on the fear of men OR that he himself had profound "fear strongholds" which empowered Satan. No wonder Job was essentially helpless and hopeless during the first 40 chapters of the Book. The New Testament gives much instruction on fear, faith, and resisting evil by rebuking Satan. Sadly, Job knew none of this New Covenant wisdom. And it cost him, but praise God, only for a season.

The Book of Job explains why we needed Jesus to show us a better way of overcoming evil powers. "There is no fear in love; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." 1 John 4:18. Jesus was made perfect in love because he had no fear. In contrast, Job was in torment, especially concerning his children, because he had not allowed perfect love to cast out HIS fear. Jesus trumps Job.

KEY NUMBER FOUR: JOB'S FRIENDS' OPINIONS WERE ALL CLUELESS EXCEPT ELIHU

Amazingly, only ONE person in the whole Book of Job came away unscathed as a true prophet of God's nature. It's not Job, who wrongly said "Behold, GOD will slay me; I have no hope: Nevertheless I will maintain my ways before Him." Job 13:15(ASV). It's not Job's wife, who cruelly said to her husband, "Curse God and die." Job 2:9. It's not Job's three friends, who "did NOT speak the thing that is right" about the Lord. Job 42:7-9.

No, the only person who actually spoke righteously in the first 40 chapters was Elihu. He was the youngest of all who spoke. He was the last to speak. He was the only speaker God never rebuked as wrong. In fact, his great speech in Chapters 32-37 prophetically ushered in the presence of the Lord in Chapter 38. This is what a prophetic utterance should do ---- connect the audience with the manifest presence of God.

Before we look at the heart of what Elihu said, let's quickly summarize the erroneous "bottom lines" of both Job and his three friends ---- Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. It's very simple really. Job's three friends all believed Job DESERVED the afflictions God sent BECAUSE of various theological reasons. God, so they said, was right to oppress Job, either because of Job's open or hidden sins. God, they believed, would not have sent wrath unless it was deserved on some level. The fact that God sent it meant that Job deserved it, regardless of how righteous Job's life appeared to be on the surface.

In contrast, Job's main argument was that he didn't deserve the destructions that came. He believed himself to be righteous and undeserving of the afflictions he suffered during this period. Most scholars believe that the whole book of Job took place over a nine month period of time.

So, the bottom line of Job's three friends was that Job deserved his suffering. The bottom line of Job was that he didn't deserve his sufferings. But, the bottom line of Elihu

was this ---- "Touching the Almighty... He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: HE DOES NOT AFFLICT." Job 37:23. Do you see? Job and his three friends focused on whether or not man deserved the suffering that comes in life.

Elihu, however, focused solely on the GOODNESS of God. Not every thing Elihu said is perfect New Testament theology, but he largely focused on the key point ---- God is good, God is powerful, God is merciful and God is fair. Elihu tenderly noted, "But none sayeth, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" His point was that everybody was so busy either complaining or explaining Job's life away, that nobody was actually seeking the Lord's good presence to set all things right. His theology was simply that GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT!

This same dynamic occurred in John chapter 9 concerning the man born blind. The crowd was all about assigning blame for the poor man's suffering. They wanted Jesus to enter their discussion by getting Him to assign blame for the man's blindness to EITHER the man's own sin or that of his parents. Jesus refused. Instead, He deflected the issue to God. His response was basically, "Neither is responsible for this, nonetheless let the glory of God be revealed!" Elihu did the exact same thing. How different our lives would be if we did the same thing.

When we start ascribing strength to God, He appears and delivers us from all evil. But, when we ascribe strength to evil sufferings, or to the afflictions of the world, or to what we do or don't deserve, we become Job-like instead of Jesus-like. Don't get me wrong, Job was righteous, far more at the end of the Book than the beginning, but even at the start he had some admirable qualities. Job was a righteous man who was sincere in his beliefs, but sincerely wrong. Nonetheless, James 5:11 does commend Job's "endurance," so that begs the question, in light of Job's 40 chapters of "bad theology," what did Job "do right" for those 40 chapters to earn a commendation for his "endurance?"

To his great credit, Job did not "sin with his lips," or "attribute folly to God" by cursing God as evil, even though his wife wanted him to do just that. Job 1:22; 2:9-10. Had Job said "God is evil" or "I curse God for His foolishness" or "God is a fool," then Job would have sinned with his lips. Job remained faithful to this concept: God knows best. Job did "endure" great sufferings without caving in to cursing God. This at least allowed him to remain open to repentance and restoration when it presented itself. Had he cursed or rejected God, then Satan might have been able to totally destroy his life and faith. Job did hang in there until God could rescue and bless him.

However, Job lacked knowledge about Satan and the problem of evil. This gave him a huge blind spot which Satan exploited. And exploited. And exploited. Job had no answers for his pain, other than that God sent it. This caused Job to then self-justify rather than God-magnify. Job 32:1-3; 40:1-2, 6-8. It sent him deeper and deeper into his great sadness. But, when Elihu suggested that GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT, the dawn of a new spiritual day came to Job's heart. In came the presence of a good God, and out went the destructions of an evil angel.

One last point here. Many believe Job was “perfect and upright” because God appears to say so in Job 1:8 and 2:3. Yet, the Bible says that all have sinned and fallen far short of “perfection” and that none are “upright” in their own righteousness---none, that is, except Jesus.

For Job, as with all who are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s dear son, the Father sees us as “perfect and upright” because He sees the end from the beginning. The Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world covers all past and future saints with the blood of His grace. The Father sees all who are called and chosen, be they Old or New Testament saints, only and always through the righteousness of His son Jesus. NONE are “perfect and upright” except those who are covered by His righteousness. Only Jesus has ever been “perfect and upright”.

The Father sees all saints through HIS PERFECTION AND UPRIGHTNESS. These passages merely show that God the Father prophetically sees all saints as “perfect and upright” because the elect are all already seated with Christ in Heavenly places. Ephesians 2:6.

CONCLUSION: GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT

The JOB-STOBE is over. Our eyes have now been opened to the always abiding light, movement and momentum of God's goodness. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17.

No more shuddering or flickering understanding of His goodness. No more shoulder shrugging. No more fear. No more helplessness. No more BLAMING God for evil, suffering or disasters. Satan is ALWAYS the killer and accuser, not Jesus. We can trust Jesus ---- never to harm us, always to arm us ---- with weapons of righteousness in our left hand and in our right. 2 Corinthians 6:7.

Be of good cheer! Jesus has OVERCOME the world, not Job! OUR faith in THAT fact is what allows US to overcome our world. Jesus trumps Job! Job is not the last word on the problem of suffering. Jesus is! The last word and the first, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end! He is our HERO. Take heart! Just like He did for Peter, though Satan desires to sift us, Jesus has prayed for us that our faith won't fail. And it won't!

CHAPTER 16-- FOUR REASONS THE EARLY CHURCH DID NOT BELIEVE "HELL" LASTS FOREVER

Today, many people disagree on how guilty criminals should be treated. Is the purpose of punishment, the argument goes, to rehabilitate the criminal by reforming his character? Or, rather, is the purpose of punishment to inflict eye-for-an-eye retaliation on the wrongdoer? Put another way, is our motive for punishment revenge or rescue?

This same analysis can be applied to God's purpose for Hell. Is God's motive in allowing sinners to go to Hell a form of "revenge" upon the sinner, or is God's motive rather to ultimately "rescue" the sinner from his own fallen nature? Which purpose better aligns with the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ?

Well, the majority of the early Church believed that Hell was place where God would rescue, reform and reconcile all lost sinners back unto Himself. The process of Hell was intense, thorough, critical, painful, agonizing and anguishing. But, it was ultimately restorative as each and every sinner was led through and past their own Hellish valley of sin and death, and into a deep and heartfelt place of Godly repentance.

The early Church had a significantly different view of Hell than much of the Church does today. Hell's purpose, for the majority of the Church fathers, was seen as purifying rather than punishing, restoring rather than torturing, healing rather than destroying. They believed Hell was "God's crisis-management for lost souls." Hell was for all those who did not authentically receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior during their earthly lives.

The early Church believed God's Hell-fire was not inflicted to destroy the lost, but rather to ultimately save them. God's "fire" was WISE in that it revealed, cleansed and cured the lost soul of all the false identities accumulated during their fallen lifetimes. The "wood, hay and stubble" of these false identities would be "burned off" of the lost soul, but they themselves would "be saved, yet so as by fire." 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

Hell, from this viewpoint then, was a rocky but redemptive journey to repentance and restoration. Hell was still seen as infinitely intense and unimaginably painful - - just not eternal.

Ebenezer Scrooge's nightmarish journey as described in the classic "Christmas Carol" would be an illustration of what such a redemptive journey through Hell might look like. For Scrooge, his journey was intensely revealing, painful and heart-breaking, but ultimately redemptive. Scrooge was not even aware that his own repentance and redemption was the Lord's endgame. He was too busy suffering at the realization of his past, present and future sins. And, in fact, Scrooge's journey appeared to be outside of time as we know it. His whole pitiful life was played out before him in just a few earthly hours, yet for him it appeared to last a very long time.

Would God not have the same type of cosmic "elbow room" to take our souls on such a "Scrooge-like" post-mortem journey to repentance? Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, certainly allowed for this possibility: "God forbid that I should limit the time of acquiring faith to the present life. In the depth of the Divine mercy there may be opportunity to win it in the future." Martin Luther's letter to Hanseu Von Rechenberg, 1522.

Here is a quick historical survey of the EARLY CHURCH regarding their beliefs about HELL:

THE FIRST 500 YEARS: In the first five centuries there were six known theological schools. Four of them taught that all men would EVENTUALLY be rescued from Hell: these being the theological schools at Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea and Edessa/Nisbis. One school, Ephesus, taught Annihilationism (that sinners are totally incinerated into nothingness in Hell). Only one theological school, Rome/Carthage taught eternal punishment. Source: The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Universalism Entry, p. 96, Baker Book House.

1ST CENTURY: PAUL. It is interesting to note that Paul never used the word Hell in any of his writings, though he was considered the theologian of the New Testament. He spoke of God's post-mortem purging fire in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, but never of Hell per se. The Gospel of John, the disciple perhaps closest to Jesus' heart, never used the word Hell in his Gospel. It is also interesting to note that the Book of Acts never mentions the word Hell, except to speak of Jesus' liberation FROM it. Acts NEVER uses the word Hell to describe any part of the Christian message which established the Church. The following passages suggests Paul's seminal thinking on the eventual and ultimate salvation of all men: Romans 5:17,18; 10:9-17; 11:25-33; 14:11; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 15:22-28; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 4:10; Eph. 1:10; 4:1-10; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:20, 23; Heb. 2:9.

2ND CENTURY: CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA. Clement was the first to speak of God's fire as a "wise fire" which purges the sinner unto salvation. "God's punishments are saving and disciplinary (in Hades) leading to conversions, and choosing rather the repentance than the death of the sinner, and especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly because of their being no longer obstructed by the paltry flesh. We can set no limits to the agency of the Redeemer to redeem, to rescue, to discipline, is His work, and so will he continue to operate after this life." Clem. str. 5:14.90.4-91.2; see also 5.1.9.4; and hyp. (frg. In Stahlin, Clemens Alexandrians, 3:211).

3RD CENTURY: ORIGEN: "When the Son is said to be subject to the Father, the perfect restoration of the whole creation is signified, so also, when enemies are said to be subjected to the Son of God, the salvation of the conquered and the restoration of the lost is in that understood to consist."Origen, De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 5, Section 7, Anf, Vol. 4. Origen was the first Christian Systematic Theologian. A fundamental and essential element of his theology was the doctrine of the universal

restoration of all fallen beings to their original holiness and union with God. God's mercy and goodness are all-inclusive and ultimately irresistible. Hellfire is corrective and purgative, not punitive and eternal. This doctrine was called Apocatastasis, "the restitution of all things" per Acts 3:21. Origen was the greatest enemy of Gnosticism (per his *Against Celsus*) and is considered the greatest theologian of the early Eastern Church. "There is hardly a major thinker who is not deeply indebted to Origen. From the middle of the Twentieth Century, focused scholarly symposia of the Greek and Latin Church have once again begun to study and critically expound the rich Origenian legacy." *The Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology*, WJK.

4TH CENTURY: GREGORY OF NYSSA: "What therefore is the scope of Paul's argument in this place [1 Cor. 15:28]? That the nature of evil, at length, be wholly exterminated, and divine, immortal goodness embrace within itself every rational creature; so that of all who were made by God, not one shall be excluded from his Kingdom. All the viciousness, that like a corrupt matter is mingled in things, shall be dissolved and consumed in the furnace of purgatorial fire; and every thing that had its origin from God, shall be restored to its pristine state of purity." *Tract, in Dictum Apostoli, Tunc etiam ipse Filius subjicietur*, and c.p. 137, and seqq. Gregory was one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers who protected the doctrine of the Trinity from the Arians at the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople.

5TH CENTURY: Theodore of Mopsuestia. "They who have chosen the good, shall, in the future world, be blessed and honored. But the wicked, who have committed evil the whole period of their lives, shall be punished till they learn, that, by continuing in sin, they only continue in misery. And when, by this means, they shall have been brought to fear God, and to regard Him with good-will, they shall obtain the enjoyment of His grace." *Assemani Biblioth. Orient. Tom. iii. Par. i. p.323*.

Church history is fairly clear that this view of Hell was not just the view of a few, but rather was the majority view of the Church.

Basil the Great (329-379) said that, "The MASS of men (Christians) say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished." *De Ascetics*.

Saint Jerome (347-420) said, "I know that MOST persons understand the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate forgiveness of the devil and all rational creatures." *Homily on Jonah*.

Lastly, even Augustine (354-430), who vehemently opposed Universalism, acknowledged, "There are VERY MANY in our day, who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments." *Enchiridion cxii*. (The Latin for "very many" is *imo quam plurimi*, which can be translated "majority").

When the Church rejected this high view of God's goodness and replaced it with a view of God as an eternal torturer, the dark ages began, almost to the day. Ever since, there has remained a small, constant and stubborn strand of those imbedded in the Church

who believe Hell is not an eternal torture chamber, but rather God's final crisis-center, a cosmic ER station where God performs complicated, intense and painful surgery on our souls in order to remove all our false sin-identities accumulated over our lifetime.

The belief that Hell is "ultimately remedial and restorative" rather than "eternally torturous" can withstand any Scriptural challenge if you accept four premises, the same four premises widely accepted by the early Church.

PREMISE #1- JESUS DID NOT PREACH "ETERNAL PUNISHMENT" IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT!

"Eternal Punishment" is the term used in the English translation of the Bible on which most people base their view of eternal conscious torment in Hell. The term in the Greek is "kolasis aionios." If this term does indeed mean eternal punishment, then Hell would seem to be foreverrrrrrrrrrr.

But, such is not the case. Let's first consider the opinion of the great Greek scholar William Barclay, who was professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University and the author of many commentaries and books, including a translation of the New Testament and the very popular Daily Study Bible Series. Barclay discusses this point regarding Matthew 25:46 in his well-known autobiography:

"One of the key passages is Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is 'kolasis,' which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature 'kolasis' is never used of anything but 'remedial punishment.' The word for 'eternal' is aionios. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be aionios. The simplest way to put it is that aionios cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give."

Aristotle supports Barclay on the meaning of "kolasis." The only word in the Gospels for "punishment" with regard to God punishing evildoers is "kolasis," which according to Aristotle, who knew Greek word meanings better than anybody who ever walked the planet, said that "kolasis" is the kind of punishment which "is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer," which means it is for the betterment or improvement of the person being punished. This is contrasted with "timoria," which Aristotle said is the kind of punishment which is "inflicted in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction." (Rhet. 1369b13).

G. Campbell Morgan, nicknamed the Prince of Expository Preaching, and one of the great Bible scholars in Church history, also agrees with Barclay: "We cannot conceive of

a Creator who knows the end from the beginning, one who is Love, who has infinite wisdom, and infinite power, giving to any being life, life which is never to end, but to continue in suffering to all eternity. THE BIBLE DOES NOT TEACH IT ANYWHERE IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES. God's punishments are remedial and take place within the span of the ages during which he is accomplishing the making of man in His image and likeness. Punishment will last no longer than is necessary to bring man to hate his sin and be reconciled to his Saviour." G. Campbell Morgan Pastor, "Sermon: The Cross and the Ages to Come," Westminster Chapel, London.

In addition to Barclay's opinion above, let's consider some other respected sources about the proper translation of "aionios:"

The Rotterham Emphasized Bible translates "kolasis aionios" in Matthew 25:46 as "age abiding correction."

Young's Literal Translation translates "kolasis aionios" in Matthew 25:46 as "punishment age."

The Concordant Literal Translation translates "kolasis aionios" in Matthew 25:46 as "chastening eonian," or "chastening age" in other words. Our English word "eon" derives from the Greek word "aionios." Eon, as we use the word, speaks of ages or cycles of indeterminate amounts of time. The term is often used in the plural form, such as "It's been eons since we've talked," or "Eons ago the universe was formed." The point is that we don't even use the term today to refer to "everlasting" in the sense of never ending. Think how silly it sounds to pluralize "everlasting" into "everlastings," yet "eon" is pluralized into "eons" all the time.

The best translators of the New Testament Greek text would be the Greek fathers of the church over the first 500 years. They were Christian. They were scholars. They lived nearest to the time the New Testament was written and would have a better grasp of grammatical nuances of recent generations. Koine Greek was a lost language for hundreds of years and it is somewhat presumptuous for modern scholars to think they know Biblical Greek better than the Greek-speaking Church fathers did.

The Church fathers and writers who used the term "aionios" in their writings to refer to an indefinite "age" and not to an "unending" or "everlasting" eternity are: Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hermogones, Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Avitus.

The Emperor Justinian in A.D. 540 tried to extinguish Origen's teachings by defining Catholic doctrine at that time. "The Holy Church of Christ teaches an endless aionios (ATELEUTETOS aionios) life to the righteous, and endless (ateleutetos) punishment to the wicked." Aionios was not enough in his judgment to denote endless duration, so he employed ateleutetos. The point is that "aionios" by itself did not mean "everlasting." It needed to be strengthened with another word to in fact mean "endless," like "ateleutetos."

Jews who were contemporaries with Christ, but who wrote in Greek, show that "aionios" was not used to mean "everlasting." Josephus the historian used "aionios" to refer to temples which were already destroyed (and thus not "everlasting"), indeterminate prison sentences and time lapses between historical events. He never used the word to denote "everlasting," but rather to mean an indeterminate period or season. The Jewish writer Philo always used the words *athanaton*, *ateleuteton* or *aidion* to denote endless and *aionion* for temporary duration.

Augustine, who knew no Greek, claimed for years that the only meaning of "aionios" was "everlasting," yet even he had to acknowledge his error when visited by the Spanish presbyter Orosius, who convinced Augustine of his error. Augustine relented, but only to the extent that "aionios" did not only mean "everlasting." Augustine still believed it means "everlasting" with regard to Hell.

To summarize then, Greek word "Aionios," which is sometimes translated as "everlasting" in Scripture (as in "everlasting punishment"), does NOT in fact mean "unending or everlasting in quantity of time." Rather, "Aionios" speaks to an "indeterminate age set by God alone." The word refers to a certain quality (not quantity) of being - - whether it be "aionios life" or "aionios remedial-punishment." Aionios is always qualified by what it is describing.

For instance, the word "great," when applied to a merciful sentence imposed by a kind-hearted judge, might refer to a small amount of time in jail. Conversely, "great," when applied to an atrocious crime, for which the judge "throws the book" at the defendant, might refer to a life-sentence in jail.

Similarly, the nature and quality of aionios, applied to the life of God, is entirely different than when it is applied to the chastening or punishment of God. "GREAT life" in God is certainly unending, since death will have been completely defeated, but the unending length is not the primary essence of that "GREAT life." Rather, the limitless quality of love and peace which come from being totally at one with the Lord is the key aspect of this "GREAT life." On the other hand, "GREAT punishment" by God will not be unending since He punishes to correct and rehabilitate and He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Pet. 3:9.

Life in God is not everlasting because it is aionios, but rather aionios is everlasting because it is referring to life in God. Conversely, aionios punishment is not temporary because aionios means temporary, but rather aionios is temporary in this context since God's chastening is curative and incapable of being eternally resisted. "For his anger is but for a moment; His favor is for a life-time: Weeping may tarry for the night, But joy 'cometh' in the morning." Psalm 30:5.

Aionios then, by itself, means an "indeterminate age," not an "unending age." Only the context of the passage provides guidance as to the actual quality and duration of the age.

PREMISE #2- HELL AND HEAVEN ARE "OUTSIDE OF TIME" AS WE DEFINE IT!

Time to God is not the same thing as time to man. "Kairos" is the Greek term generally used to describe God's perfect timing. It is not run by a clock, but by the heart of God. "Chronos," by contrast, is the Greek term used to describe man's fallen timing. Kairos is measured by love and meaning. Chronos is measured by clocks and calendars.

Kairos is measured by relational events, renewed thoughts, repentant hearts and acts of love. Chronos, by contrast, is man's time measured apart from God. Chronos is linear clock time which is running down this fallen world like a time bomb waiting to explode.

Chronos is the sand of our lives slowly but surely emptying out our life force. Chronos is the process of dying. Chronos doesn't caress, doesn't change and doesn't forgive. Chronos ages us, disappoints us, crushes us and ultimately kills our bodies. Kairos, by contrast, cures us, restores our youth and allows us to be fully present in "the now" with our God.

The problem arises when men apply Chronos concepts to Kairos events. To label Heaven or Hell as "endless" means that it is being measured by man's time, which can't begin to grasp the Kairos reality involved.

Heaven is not Heaven because clocks will be ticking and ticking for all eternity without interruption. This Chronos concept that we will be sitting around stroking our harps forever and ever is not eternal life in the Kairos sense.

Eternal life in the Kairos sense means life of infinite quality and blessedness. It is life which has evicted death altogether. Chronos doesn't even exist anymore where Kairos life exists. This life doesn't extend time, it transcends it altogether.

So too, with Hell, it is not a Chronos reality but a Kairos event which will be determined by God alone. That God doesn't view time from Chronos' viewpoint is established by 2 Peter 3:8 which states, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In fact, Revelation 10:6-7 says that when the seventh angel declares that "the mystery of God should be finished," that "there should be time (literally Chronos) no longer!

Isn't it clear that both Heaven and Hell exist outside of time and space as we know it? Eternity is just a term to describe the limitless life of God which operates apart from the constraints of time and space.

To use four dimensional terms (length, width, height and time) to describe 100 dimensional realities is completely inadequate. A Christian writer and theologian, Edwin A. Abbott, once wrote a book called "Flatland." It is a science fiction novel about a planet called Flatland where the inhabitants have only two dimensions - - length and width. Since they lack height, they all appear as lines to each other. Some have more sides than others, but all still appear as simple lines.

One day, a three dimensional being enters their world. He tries to explain three dimensional reality but the flatlanders can't understand it because all they know is two dimensions. Ultimately, the three dimensional messiah lifts one of the Flatlanders up and out of his two dimensional reality. The flatlander now is astounded with the Heavenly reality of height that has always existed both above and beneath him. The two dimensions the flatlander did know have now been blended with the Heavenly truth of height which now gives everything he knows limitless depth and beauty.

In this same way, we who live by Chronos can't grasp the eternal essences of Heaven and Hell until our Messiah lifts us up to spiritual realities which transcend the time and space limitations of our flatland. Do we really believe that when Jesus descended into Hell to lead captivity captive and disarm all the demonic principalities and powers (Eph. 4:8-10; Col. 2:15), that this was done in linear Chronos time?

No, Jesus died once for all. What He did was outside of time and space. He died for ALL men-- past, present and future. He preached (literally, evangelized) to all the dead in Hell - - past, present and future (1 Pet. 4:6). If Jesus had done all this in Chronos time, we could assume only that He paid for the sins of those who were in Hell as of 33 A.D. Since we know this can't be the case, we must toss Chronos considerations out of our definitions of Heaven and Hell.

As A.W. Tozer said in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*: "Because God lives in an everlasting now, He has no past and no future. When time-words occur in the Scriptures they refer to our time, not to His. When the four living creatures before the throne cry day and night, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come, they are identifying God with the flow of creature-life with its familiar three tenses; and this is right and good, for God has sovereignly willed so to identify Himself. But since God is uncreated, He is not Himself affected by that succession of consecutive changes we call time."

The work of Jesus by and through the Cross began in man's time (Chronos), but ended in God's time (Kairos). Jesus died once for all men for all times for all sins. Heaven and Hell are realms OUTSIDE of this present Chronos time.

When Jesus led captivity captive, He simultaneously rescued all men from every past Hell, every present Hell, and every future Hell. We must not apply terms of fallen time to describe God's limitless time. Chronos terms of "quantity" of time, like unending or everlasting, simply do not properly define Kairos events like "aionios punishment" or "aionios life," both of which speak to "quality of time" rather than "quantity of time."

PREMISE #3- GOD'S FLAMES OF JUDGMENT SEEK TO HEAL US, NOT TORTURE US!

Like the fig leaves Adam and Eve wore to hide their nakedness from God, men wear sin-masks to keep their "real" naked selves covered and hidden from God. The ugly truth is that there is something rotten in our soul at a subconscious level that wants to ignore and avoid God.

Satan helps us here by providing demonically empowered masks to blind and deform our hearts and minds. Like the disturbed teenager who self-mutilates by knife cuts into the flesh, we self-mutilate our soul created in the image of God by disfiguring it. We do this by donning demonic masks lined on the inside with razorblades of fear, doubt and lust. God wants these sin-masks removed once and for all.

So, what becomes of our sin-masks, either in this life or the next? How are these masks dealt with, both in the short term and long term? Is there a way that in this lifetime we can rip all our masks off? Sure, this is what the Scriptures call sanctification.

Through the renewing of our minds by the Holy Spirit, we are able to progressively shed all our false selves, prideful pretenses and forged identities. Those who persist in achieving this authenticity in the Lord receive rewards in this life and the next.

But, what about those masks we never successfully cast away during this lifetime? What happens to our blindspots, the masks we never recognize and remove? What about the areas of hypocrisy that we never allow to be fully evicted? What happens in the hereafter to our masks? Are we, along with our masks, cast into the Lake of Fire to die the second death?

Or is there another solution? Can God in future ages somehow perform critical and extensive spiritual surgery on our souls? Can He burn off, cut out and cast away all our sin-masks which, all too often, have rendered us lying leeches, fearful followers, and doubting disciples?

When we are judged after we die, is it all or nothing? If in any area of our lives, we have never dealt with a particular mask, does that doom our entire spirit, soul and body to eternal fire? What if we sanctified our souls to be "mask-less" at home, but still wore masks at work, or church, or with certain friends, or on certain occasions? Is this the way an all-powerful God deals with His children? Or is there a better way? A more divine way? A more loving way?

Do any Scriptures point to these sin-masks being removed by God's judgment WITHOUT the necessity of casting the entire person into the eternal flames as well? Oh yes! 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is quite clear:

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he

buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; EVERY MAN'S WORK shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be REVEALED BY FIRE; and THE FIRE SHALL TRY EVERY MAN'S WORK, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS, BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE."

This passage above refers to the judgment of "Every man's work" (verse 13). The Revelation passage about the Lake of Fire in chapters 20-21 ALSO refers to the judgment of every man's works: "the dead were judged... according to their works" (Revelation 20:12). So, Paul and John were both describing the same event, the judgment of every man's works, but from their slightly different perspectives. Now, note what Paul says ultimately happens on the other side of every man's work being judged: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE."

So, what exactly do we know about the Lake of Fire? I have heard theologians of all ilks agree to never build a firm dogma on just one passage in Scripture, particularly if that passage is in the smack dab middle of Jewish apocalyptic section of the Bible like the book of Revelation. The reason is that this form of literature, unlike the epistles and the Gospel, are full of heavily symbolic language and feverish activity. They are more poetic and visionary than they are doctrinal. There is only extended passage that ever even talks about the Lake of Fire, and that is in Revelation 19-21.

All we know about it is:

- the devil is cast into along with the beast and the false prophet(19:20)
- those that worship the image of the beast(19:20)
- that the devil (a false identity of Lucifer?) is tormented forever (20:10)
- death and an emptied Hell are cast into it (20:14)
- and whosever's not found written in the book of life is cast into it(20:15)
- and the fearful, unbelieving, etc. shall have their PART in it(20:8)

Curiously, no particular individual is named as being cast into it. Symbolic figures are cast into it, beasts and false prophets and the devil. Nobody by proper name is mentioned. Not Herod, not Pharaoh, not Hitler, not Nero. Some "part" of our sinful being is cast into it, but does other Scripture help us better understand what that is exactly? I say yes. Scripture helps interpret Scripture.

The reasons I believe 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Revelation 20:12-15 are referring to the same event is because of several factors.

- both are referring to a postmortem experience
- both refer to themselves as "the judgment of men's works"
- both explicitly refer to "every man" man being so judged
- both use the imagery of "fire"

----both refer to some sort of dividing which includes "suffering and loss"

Do you see? The man himself shall be saved, yet he shall SUFFER LOSS, YET SO AS BY FIRE. But, WHAT EXACTLY is it that is "BURNED" off and in the process causes the man to "SUFFER" and experience "LOSS?" The answer is clear: THE MASKS ARE BURNED OFF AND AWAY FROM US! In this context, the "wood, hay and stubble" of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 represents the various types of false masks we have co-created with Satan and worn as the primary motivating forces behind our actions and works. Instead of performing "righteous works" that will endure, works of "gold, silver, and precious stones" (v. 12), works done under the Holy Spirit's leading and anointing (Romans 8:14), we have masked the real motives for our works with that which is from below and not above--- motives which are false, demonic, and self-centered.

Each and every wood-mask, hay-mask and stubble-mask a man has wrongly allowed to be grafted onto his soul will have to be burned. The result is that he will experience the "wrenching and painful loss" of having huge parts of who he "thought" he really was over the course of his entire life completely burned away with white hot fire.

Like the most intense form of chemotherapy we know in the physical, yet multiplied a thousand times in painful intensity in the spiritual, every mask will be irradiated and destroyed with the fire of God. The man suffers a searing "identity crisis" which, though in the long term will bring great positive transformation, is in the short term painful beyond words. The length of time for the burning process may vary. "Wood" takes longer to burn than "hay" or "stubble," so wood-masks are the most dangerous.

These false identities caused the man during his time on earth to operate outside his authentic self, and instead assume the sin-identity of a lust-mask, or a pride-mask, or a legalism-mask. The man may have grafted on a "religious" mask and thereafter thought he was serving God, and that all his good works were in the service of the Lord, when in truth he was only serving his own self-righteousness (Matthew 7:22-23). Or, the man may have been serving his own fleshly desires while wearing a mask of "carnality." Finally, the man could just be wearing "the pride of life" mask which prevented him from humbly submitting to the Lordship of the Spirit by operating in self-will.

Regardless, these masks "warp" the core motive of every man and cause them to be someone they are not, someone they were never created or called to be by God. To the extent these masks corrupt the purity of our identities in Christ, they MUST go.

So, how are they removed? In this lifetime, by sanctification, repentance and the self-judgment that comes through prayer and communion. Paul said that if we judge ourselves NOW by removing every inner sin-mask, we will not be judged later. But, IF these sin-masks are still grafted onto our souls at the time of death, which means we never dealt with them fully during our lifetime, then the Lord deals with them at the judgment of every man's works, "yet so as by fire."

The Lord uses, what the church Fathers Clement and Origen called God's "WISE FIRE" to burn off and away all the false masks we have lived out of, the Satanic strongholds which have blinded, twisted and deformed us. The masks are the result of the MISUSE of our freedom combined with the Devil's temptations and lies.

Seen from this angle, judgment is a good thing, not a fearful thing. The Greek word for "judge" means "to separate or put asunder." God "separates" our true self from all our false selves. He "tears asunder" the masks from our true identity. And then what becomes of all our masked identities? THEY ARE CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE, NEVER AGAIN TO BE PUT ON BY US OR ANYBODY ELSE!

This is a good thing, not a bad thing. I long for the day all my false selves (Richard the fearful, Richard the doubter, Richard the oppressed, Richard the lustful, Richard the liar) are FOREVER FAR REMOVED from my true self, my best self, my authentic self, my Christ self, my new man created in righteousness and true holiness.

God has a name for each one of us that only HE knows. This name is who we are called to be, who we WILL be for all eternity. These false selves CAN be burned off in THIS lifetime IF I submit myself fully to the Lord's sanctifying Spirit. But if my heart falls short, God is greater than my heart. He WILL see me delivered in the ages to come.

The great sculptor Michelangelo famously said, "The statue lies within the stone." He believed that all the sculptor does is chip away the exterior stone to reveal the interior truth. Or, put another way, the artist removes the masked false in order to reveal the naked real. For us, we have the chance to use this life to chip away all our false masks with our Spirit-led chisel of faith. But to the extent we fail in this lifetime, God will use the righteous chisel Himself in the ages to come to perfect and reconcile all things to Himself. As the greatest artist of all, He will chip away the masked false to reveal the naked real.

It seems that God is all about name changes, or what I like to call mask-removal through name-renewal. On the positive side, the ugly mask known as Saul was burned off to reveal a mask-less Paul created in righteousness and true holiness. Likewise, in Genesis 17:5, Abram was de-masked to reveal Abraham, the father of many nations.

Revelation 2:17 tells us that God has given to each man who overcomes all worldly and demonic masks a white stone with a name on it only the Lord knows. This name is our mask-less self which ONLY the Lord can reveal to us. On the flip-side, the angel Lucifer became the masked Satan. Satan as a "mask," certainly the deadliest and densest mask of all, will definitely be cast forever into the Lake of Fire. But, whether God will, at the end of all the ages, restore Lucifer back to his original God-created identity by wrenching away his devil mask is an open and intriguing question. Toward Satan, I have nothing but righteous hate and violent opposition on every level. But, towards the angel Lucifer who fell so very far, I must confess a stirring of pity.

Being a father of seven, I have often thought that if I were an all-powerful Father, I don't think I would ever give my children enough freedom to destroy themselves, not forever and ever and eeeeevvvvvvveeeeeerrrrr.

I would certainly give them enough freedom to learn real gain and loss, the nature of love and cost of evil, and the nature of faith and doubt. But, I would never give them the keys to a car which could destroy them eternally.

I would give them a lot of elbow room to learn and grow, but I would not create an environment where they could destroy themselves for all time. And I don't think God does either. He might allow these masks of rebellion to deform us for a season, but it is hard to conceive He would allow the masks to stay attached to us for an eternity in the Lake of Fire. On the contrary, I see Him using the Lake of Fire as the place where He separates from us all the enemies of our soul, and then destroys forever all the things that have harmed and deformed us.

Under this view, the Lake of Fire is not a torture chamber where anybody's essential self, spirit or body are cast into flames for eternity. Rather, the Lake of Fire is God's final deliverance of those souls who "neglected their so great a salvation" by not taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. These souls have allowed "enemy grafting" to occur in their heartland. And now they are in the crisis of Hell because of it.

But God will not pull them by up their roots and destroy them totally. GOD WILL INSTEAD PRUNE BACK WHATEVER BRANCHES ARE NOT OF HIM. He will then hurl these branches into the Lake of Fire. What will be left is a transformed man, a born-again man, a man with no mask. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 clearly envisions such a separation.

For Christians who win the crown of an overcomer, there is little if any wood, hay and stubble to separate and burn by flame. However, for the lost, the burning will be intense and they will lose much, but they themselves will be saved. The lost will have their part in the lake which burneth with fire, but their part will be their wood, hay and stubble and not their "essential selves." Rev. 21:8.

PREMISE # 4: GOD OVERCOMES ALL EVIL ONLY ONE WAY-- WITH GOODNESS!

God's nature overcomes evil only one way-- with GOODNESS! Romans 12:21; Matt. 5:43-48. It simply could not be in His nature to eternally torture any of His children, no matter how prodigal they have become. God's goodness will ultimately, irresistibly and totally overcome and reconcile all forms of evil.

As George MacDonald wrote, "Nothing is inexorable but love. . . . Love is one, and love is changeless. For love loves into purity. Love has ever in view the absolute loveliness of that which it beholds. . . . There is nothing eternal but that which loves and can be loved, and love is ever climbing towards the consummation when such shall be the universe, imperishable, divine. Therefore, all that is not beautiful in the beloved, all that comes between and is not of love's kind, must be destroyed." George MacDonald: Scotland's Beloved Storyteller, by Michael Phillips, p. 201 (1987).

What then is Hell, where did it come from and how are we delivered from it? William Law's answer is simply this:

"There is no Hell but where the heart of the creature is turned from God, nor any heaven but where the heart of the creature worketh with God....Purification therefore is the one thing necessary, and nothing will do instead of it. But man is not purified till every earthly, wrathful, sensual, selfish, partial, self-willing temper is taken from him. He is not dying to himself til he is dying to these tempers, and he is not alive in God til he is dead to them." Selected Writings of William Law, by William Law.

Hell, then, is the heart turned from God and Heaven the heart turned toward God. The crisis of Hell is God's "emergency rescue" of lost souls from their self-made and Satan-generated Hell which has hardened their hearts toward God.

But, they may run but they can't hide in Hell. God will go after and save them from themselves. It will be painful and agonizing, but it will ultimately lead to repentance, redemption and life.

As the Theologia Germanica states, "Nothing burneth in Hell but self-will." This echoes William Law's statement, "Nothing separates us from God but our own self-will. Rather, our own self-will IS separation from God." George MacDonald famously said, "The one principle of Hell is, I am my own."

C. S. Lewis said, "Hell's gate is locked from the inside." But, praise God, Jesus has the keys to both death and Hell. He is truly the stronger one who enters Hell, binds Satan, and saves us from our own destructions (Matt. 12:28-29).

This is the HEROIC view of God which is most consistent with His revealed nature in Jesus Christ. John A.T. Robinson summed it up best when he observed that the idea of God's deliverance from Hell for all men "comes from insight rather than foresight."

In other words, an insight INTO God's love makes the permanency of Hell impossible. It is not based on the foresight of what exactly Hell WILL be, but rather is based on an insight into what God's character IS as revealed in Jesus Christ. The early Church fathers had this insight and so can we. So MUST we!

PARABLES AND ANALOGIES

SCARECROW PARABLE: There is a Batman villain from the comics named Scarecrow. His evil power was to spray a toxic gas which would produce fearful hallucinations in whoever breathed it.

In this delusional state, every perception was twisted into fearful torture. If anybody moved to help these infected people, the helpers would be perceived by the infected as monsters on the attack. No matter how harmless and helpful the gesture, it would be perceived as an act of aggressive terrorism.

What if God's love is perceived the same way by lost souls after death? These souls are guilt-ridden minds. The loving arms of Jesus to them might appear as monstrous appendages seeking to kill them. C. S. Lewis adopted a similar theme in *The Great Divorce*, where Heaven seemed horrible to the inhabitants of Hell due to their self-created delusional states.

If this is the case, we can see God's challenge in trying to minister to these deluded souls so that, bit-by-bit, the effects of the Scarecrow gas dissipate so that true repentance can come. One gets the flavor of this dynamic in Romans 12:20-21. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom. 12:20-21.

INSANE ASYLUM: What if Hell, from God's viewpoint, was a medical facility for the criminally insane, the fearfully delusional and the murderously mad? What if Hell, from God's view, was man-made - - fig leaves of delusions behind which the fearful and unbelieving hide from God?

What if God patiently endures and ministers to these sick people in, through and around their delusions? What if God uses the spiritual "shock treatment" needed to awaken these poor souls to the truth - - a truth which will set all men free - - God loves them and gave His life to cure them from their sicknesses?

Let's consider Adolph Hitler as an illustration. Hitler was one of the most evil men who ever lived. But, what if God took Hitler's soul on a cosmic journey right after Hitler's soul left his body? What if this journey had a purpose - - to take Hitler back to the point where it all went wrong, to show him the gravity and immense sufferings he caused, to reveal all the bitter roots of his evil. What if this journey, because of Hitler's intense will to evil, APPEARED to take months, years, or centuries by our measurements, but in the reality of God's timing could take place in a wink of an eye.

But what if God's irresistible goodness eventually, ultimately and totally outlasted and overcame Hitler's defiance. Hitler's "wood, hay and stubble" would be burned off and he would suffer much loss, but he "himself would be saved, yet so as by fire." Similar examples of this dynamic can be seen in *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens; Joseph's treatment of his brothers (Gen. 42-45); and in the movie *The Three Burials*.

Let's not be like Jonah, who was "angry" with God when Nineveh repented. Let's not be like the older brother in the Prodigal Son story, who was angry when his father fully forgave and restored the younger brother who had been lost in sin. Let's be open to the idea that God will reconcile all things to Himself without the use of eternal torture. Let's use our sanctified imaginations to believe a better ending to Jesus' story than to believe the vast majority of humans who have ever lived will ultimately spend eternity writhing in Hell with no hope or possibility of reprieve. God is better than that, MUCH BETTER!

CHAPTER 17-- THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD: "CHRISTUS VICTOR!"

Alexander the Great used to sleep with a copy of Homer's Iliad under his pillow. This was because he so revered the tales of courage and heroism it contained. He wanted to absorb the spirit of courage by osmosis during his sleep.

We should all figuratively put a copy of the Christus Victor story under our pillow. It tells the epic tale of what Jesus did for us during the three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection. Sleep on it, wake on it, dream on it, dwell on it. You might be surprised at what you absorb by osmosis--- divine courage, a gladiator's resolve, and an epic revelation of the hero-God we serve.

Christus Victor, aka The Ransom Theory of the Atonement, was the prevailing view of the early Church for the first several hundred years, and it needs to become so again.

At the outset, I realize that some see the Ransom Theory as separate and distinct from Christus Victor, but I see them as synergistic theories with a slightly different emphasis. The Ransom Theory focuses on Jesus offering Himself as a Ransom paid at the gates of Hell unto Satan, in return for which Satan released his hold on all humanity from the covenant of sin and death which we have all corporately entered into with the devil.

Christus Victor acknowledges the Ransom paid by Jesus as a type of "Trojan Horse offering," but which in reality just allowed Jesus direct access to defang and disarm all the demonic powers. Simply put, Satan couldn't handle the Ransom. As the old saying goes, be careful what you ask for. The Ransom was more than Satan bargained for.

The huge Trojan Horse appeared to be a sign of abject surrender and obeisance by the Greeks to the power of their Trojan enemy, but in reality the Horse contained resourceful troops hidden within its belly who would soon escape and cause the gates of Troy to be forever breached FROM WITHIN.

So too, Jesus was a "cosmic Trojan Horse," appearing to be a sign of abject surrender to the devil, but all the while containing within Him the power of an indestructible life to ultimately gut and conquer Satan's Troy. Jesus was able to breach Hell's gates from the inside! Christus Victor lays out an EPIC STORY, a heroic meta-narrative of Jesus' Ransom and subsequent "Harrowing of Hell" from within.

Christus Victor focuses more on the story of Christ as a narrative rather than a theological theory. Instead of supposedly sacrificing Himself to be killed BY the Father's wrath toward us, as the prevalent Penal Atonement Theory claims, Christus Victor instead believes that Jesus presented Himself as a ransom paid TO the devil in order to break OUR "covenant of death" which had stitched us into Satan's clutches.

Isaiah 28:15-18 clearly explains that we have "made a covenant with death and with Hell," but that the Lord declares that the death covenant shall be "disannulled, and our agreement with Hell not stand."

But how? The Lord promises we will be saved because he will "lay in Zion a foundation of stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation," which 1 Peter 2:6 identifies as our faith in Jesus. In other words, our faith in Jesus disannuls our covenant with Satan. And although Satan is not explicitly named in this Isaiah passage, Hebrews 2:14 informs us Satan "had the power of death," not God. Thus, the covenant of death is, by necessity, a covenant with Satan.

Satan literally owned a part of our freewill which we had voluntarily delegated and defaulted to him when we partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan operates the death-causing spirit which rules in the knowledge of good and evil.

This is why the serpent was wrapped around that particular tree to begin with. "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, Jesus also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14-15.

Do you see? We were kidnapped by Satan, yet willingly so. He didn't snatch us away. He lured us way. We willingly followed our kidnapper, and followed, and followed. James 1:13-17 describes this dynamic of our being lured away by our own lust into then conceiving WITH Satan's spirit to then give birth to sin. this is why John 8:44 and 1 John 3:8 both tell us that when we sin we are "OF our father the devil" and that it is "his lusts we are committing."

The Stockholm Syndrome describes the sick psychological dynamic where the victim actually falls into toxic and codependent love with their kidnapper. These victims end up not wanting to leave their kidnapper. More than that, they refuse to leave their kidnapper because they are not WILLING.

And THIS is the Lord's challenge. How does a non-coercive God save an unwilling victim who refuses to be saved? How can God save men that "they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will." 2 Timothy 2:26. There was only one way-- by offering SOMETHING to the captor in return for him releasing the prisoners' from his control.

In this case, there was only one thing Satan would trade for his ownership of men--- the life of Jesus! Satan wanted unhindered access to corrupt, crush, conquer and control God--- well, either control Him or destroy Him. We can clearly see these Satanic intentions in the wilderness temptations.

Satan first sought to corrupt Jesus to misuse His power, then Satan sought to lure Jesus to come under his worldly control, and then Satan finally tried to trick Jesus into

destroying Himself by jumping off the Temple. The bottom line is that Satan wanted full access to destroy Jesus' body on the cross, to destroy Jesus' soul in Hell, and to ultimately rule His Spirit in Heaven.

The Penal Atonement Theory sees it differently. This theory has the Heavenly Father angrily smiting Jesus both on the cross and in His subsequent three days of suffering in Hell. This theory says Jesus absorbed the Father's killing wrath against us for our sin, so that we could then be brought back into right relationship with Him. Satan has no significant place in this theory.

Christus Victor, by contrast, has Satanic forces smiting Jesus on the cross and in His subsequent three day descent into Hell. Every fallen principality, fallen power, fallen throne, fallen ruler, fallen angel, as well as Satan himself ALL rushed to crush, torture and destroy Jesus when they saw Him nailed to the cross.

At the cross, for the first time, Satan's kingdom had full access to attack and afflict Jesus unhindered by His righteous hedge of protection. Jesus willingly laid His soul on the chopping block for Satan to seize, incarcerate and torment in Hell. In return, Satan had to release mankind from the covenant of death we willingly entered into with him.

But things did not go as planned. The principalities and powers could NOT take Jesus down and out. They thought they could corrupt, crush and destroy Jesus totally--- "operation annihilation" in other words. But they failed. They took their best shot, and couldn't do it. They shot their wad, and lost. They expended every bit of their their murderous power, but it was not enough.

For Jesus to descend into this enemy lair not only unarmed with His Spirit hedge, but also chained with all our soul-sins, is almost too horrible to contemplate. Jesus' suffering in Hell for these three days is unimaginable, yet it is captured in the Messianic images of Psalms 18, 22, 31 and 69 (and several others).

These Psalms portray Jesus' suffering for our sins in Hell, particularly when these passages all describe various aspects of the crucifixion. The Gospels in fact quote many of these verses as fulfilled prophecy. Psalm 22:1 and Mark 15:34; Psalm 22:13,16, 18 and Luke 23:34 and John 19:23-24; Psalm 31:5 and Luke 23:46; Psalm 69:21 and Matthew 27:34 are four such references, but there are many more. Psalm 18 in particular describes on its face Jesus' battle as the "sorrows of death and hell" and "the floods of ungodly men" compassed Him (verses 3 and 4).

C. H. Spurgeon commented on Psalm 18 as follows: "In poetical language, the psalmist describes experiencing Jehovah's delivering power. Poetry has in her treasures no gem more lustrous than this sonnet. The sorrow, the cries, the descent of the Divine One, and the rescue of the afflicted are set to music worthy of the golden harps. The Messiah our Savior is, over and beyond David or any other believer, the main and chief subject of this Psalm. We have grown more certain that every line has its deepest and profoundest fulfillment in Him." Treasury of David, p. 110 (Nelson).

After having been literally flooded and attacked by all our sins for all time; after being tortured by demonic powers known allegorically as the “strong bulls of Bashan” (Ps. 22:12; Col. 2:15); after paying Satan's ransom for every sin committed past, present and future; after all this, the price had been paid without Jesus sinning or being destroyed Himself. Jesus had the power of an indestructible life. His virtue was stronger than our cumulative sins.

We must see this crucial point. When Jesus was sinless upon the earth during His thirty three years of natural life, no harvest of demonic destruction or sinful oppression was able to enter into His body-gate to afflict Him. “Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” Jn. 14:30.

Yet, when He descended into Hell, His gates were voluntarily opened wide allowing all sinful destruction and demonic oppression to come into His soul like a flood. Yet, like a champion boxer, He would not go down! With His hands tied behind His back by our cords of sin, punch after demonic punch, claw after demonic claw buffeted His defenseless soul.

Millions, billions, trillions of blows struck, gored and mauled Him. Yet, He would not go down! He took the full brunt of ransom past, ransom present and ransom future. Yet, He would not go down! He kept His focus during this hellish torment on two things – His covenant love for His Father and His covenant love for us.

When the ransom had been paid for all sins for all time, the cords started to loosen. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Acts 2:24. Strength started to return - - covenant strength. The ransom had been paid! Now it was time for resurrection! And not just resurrection, but a swashbuckling military maneuver of derring-do where Jesus disarmed and defanged all demonic principalities and powers once and for all!

Below are the New Testament passages which tell the story of the ransom paid, the victory made and the triumphant parade.

"The Son of Man did not come to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28.

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45.

"Christ Jesus...gave himself a ransom for all , to be testified in due time." 1 Timothy 2:5-6.

"Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who did give himself for us, that he might ransom us from all lawlessness, and might purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:13-14. Young's Literal Translation

"And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man...whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

For David saith concerning him...THOU WILT NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN HADES, NETHER WILT THOU GIVE THY HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION....

Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David... he foreseeing 'this' spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that NEITHER WAS HE LEFT UNTO HADES , NOR DID HIS FLESH SEE CORRUPTION. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts 2:21-36.

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men. Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that HE MIGHT FILL ALL THINGS." Ephesians 4:8-10.

"And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. HE DISARMED THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." Colossians 2:13-15.

So, lets review. The "covenant of death" referred to in the Isaiah 28:15-18 passage discussed earlier was first made between Adam and Satan in the garden, a covenant confirmed by Adam when he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had previously warned Adam that if he ate from that tree, he would then die in that very day.

And Adam did die--- spiritually. He died to being wholehearted to God. He died to being able to walk and abide in the garden of full intercourse with God's Spirit of love. In the same way an adulterer dies to his wife when he becomes one flesh with another, Adamic mankind committed adultery with Satan's spirit and has been in a continuous codependent love affair with him ever since.

Adam may have started the affair, but every generation of man since has fully ratified the affair by continuing in spiritual intercourse with Satan through abiding in fear and

unbelief. Though some men are only engaged in this intercourse at the subconscious level, many others become consciously aware of this death covenant through the Law's exposure of all men's ungodliness. Still others are brought to awareness of this death covenant through Holy Spirit conviction. But once aware of the death covenant, the question becomes HOW to break it.

Here is the dilemma: whenever we commit spiritual or physical adultery, how do we then recover the portion of our freewill devotion we have given to the other. Until we do recover it, we are unable to be wholehearted in our devotion with our first love. We may try to make it up to our first love by acts of contrition, tears of regret and slavish obligation, but that totally masks the problem.

The real problem is that we have given a portion of our freewill devotion to another. Part of our heart then goes missing because another covenant relationship has been formed which has stolen something precious and needed from our first love. That precious pearl is wholeheartedness. Another interloping entity now actually owns a part of our freewill, therefore we are unable. Obligation then replaces true love, condemnation replaces confidence, and shame replaces joy.

I think an overlooked part of the ransom theory is that it incorporates the free will of men and angels. Satan had a claim on us, not because his power rivaled God because it clearly does NOT, but rather because we all have FREELY submitted ourselves to him through the misuse of our freewill. The ransom was needed because of our right to freely select the spirit with which we have intercourse. Jesus was the price Satan demanded to break the spiritual contract/covenant of death Adam made, and which we all have ratified. The Father paid it to break our contract with the devil.

God originally gave man freedom with warnings attached. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in essence a "warning buoy" that man should not "swim past" by misusing their freewill. To misuse their freewill by swimming past the warning buoy would ultimately result in their losing a portion of that freewill to another. Man violated those warnings and misused his freedom to enter into a contract/covenant of death with Satan. We willingly gave ourselves over to Satan's dominion. We spiritually divorced God and then married Satan's spirit on a deep subconscious level which we are now only remotely aware of on a conscious level.

Jesus came to deliver us from our abusive husband/kidnapper. The problem is that we had all already given a portion of our freewill over to Satan when we had intercourse with his spirit. Satan possessed it as a freewill offering from us. God couldn't just yank back that freedom from Satan without becoming coercive himself, something He will never do.

Without our entire freewill restored to us, we could never enter into a full relationship with God where we could wholeheartedly love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might. So Satan, as a Stockholm Syndrome type of kidnapper, had a portion of our freewill which we had freely given and that he now possessed and could use to block us

from ever being wholehearted and wholeminded toward God. That was his bargaining chip with God.

God had to get Satan to FREELY release us of our covenant and give us back our capacity for wholehearted freewill. Satan's ransom price demanded was the life of Jesus. What then happened to Jesus at the Cross was Satan's exercising his right to afflict, torment, oppress and destroy Jesus to the same extent WE had given him access to destroy US through our freewill offering to him.

Satan got his ransom price, but he wasn't strong enough to handle and destroy Jesus. He tried, but Jesus' goodness and virtue exceeded all Satanic power and access our sin had cumulatively given him. Satan's ransom plan backfired.

Again, the famous Trojan Horse is a great analogy here which bears repeating. History tells us the Trojan Horse was a huge wooden horse, a symbolic tribute the enemy Greeks left in front of the Trojan gates to signify the Greek surrender. But, in reality, the Trojan Horse was full of hidden Greek soldiers waiting to plunder the enemy city once the gloating and unsuspecting Trojans pulled the Horse within the gates. As the Trojans slept after a raucous night of celebration, the Greek soldiers would slip out of the Horse. They would first open the gates to the city so that the rest of their army forces could enter the city. Then the Trojan enemy would be quickly subdued and thoroughly defeated.

Jesus is the Trojan Horse of apparent defeat presented by the Father to Satan as a ransom payment in exchange for Satan releasing our enslaved wills which we had freely yielded to him. But, there was more to Jesus than met the eye, even Satan's eye. Even in Jesus' weakened state, Satan simply couldn't destroy Him, couldn't subvert Him, couldn't convert Him, and couldn't pervert Him.

Once again, as always, Satan underestimated the goodness of God, His valiant virtue, His invincible ideals and relentless resolve. Satan simply got more than he could handle. It's like the old saying, "Be careful what you ask for, you might just get it." Jesus' heroic goodness was simply too much for Satan to deal with up close, even with the unfettered access our sins gave Satan to torture and terrorize Him. He took his best Satanic shot, and failed.

Jesus then was able to blow the doors off Hell from the inside and lead captivity captive in the biggest prison break of all time. He truly possessed and obliterated the gates of His cosmic enemy. Satan was deprived of the power of death and Hell once and for all.

One last point to remember. Jesus paid the blood "ransom" for us. Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6. "Ransoms" are paid to hostile kidnappers, not to loving Fathers. The Ransom Theory of the Atonement, which the early church favored, says Jesus paid the ransom to Satan to free us from the devil's evil clutches.

Do you see? The Ransom was paid BY the Father, not TO the Father. We are worth everything to Him. He was willing to pay anything to win us back, even the precious blood of His flawless son. John 3:16.

Sometimes the first idea is the best idea. Christus Victor is the first and best idea which captures the scope and majesty of Jesus' epic exploits at the cross. Christus Victor! Keep it under your pillow! Keep it over your heart! Keep it on your tongue!

GOD VERSUS EVIL # APPENDIX: ANSWERS TO 70 TOUGH QUESTIONS

INDEX TO QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SATAN'S FAVORITE DISGUISE?

QUESTION 2: IS THE "LESS EVIL" OPTION STILL EVIL?

QUESTION 3: WHO IS THE ONE JUDGING US "HERE" ON EARTH---GOD OR SATAN?

QUESTION 4: ARE THE LAWS OF NATURE ALWAYS FROM GOD?

QUESTION 5: WHY IS IT "REALLY" BETTER TO TURN THE OTHER CHEEK?

QUESTION 6: WHAT IS RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING?

QUESTION 7: WHY DID GOD PUT THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THE GARDEN?

QUESTION 8: WHAT IS THE ONE THING GOD CAN'T DO?

QUESTION 9: DID JESUS JUST STAND BY AND LET LAZARUS DIE?

QUESTION 10: HOW DOES GOD VIEW SIN?

QUESTION 11: IS JESUS THE LION OR THE LAMB?

QUESTION 12: DOES OUR IMAGE OF GOD NEED "DECLUSTERING?"

QUESTION 13: WHAT DOES JESUS' BLOOD AND SPIRIT EACH REPRESENT?

QUESTION 14: IN WHAT SENSE IS JESUS OUR HEALER?

QUESTION 15: DID JESUS NEED TO DIE ON THE CROSS TO SAVE US?

QUESTION 16: JESUS VERSUS MOSES: WHO WOULD WIN AN ARM WRESTLING MATCH?

QUESTION 17: WHAT SHOULD WE NEVER TELL THE CHILDREN OF DISASTER VICTIMS?

QUESTION 18: DID GOD EXECUTE KING HEROD?

QUESTION 19: WHAT IS THE ONE THING JESUS SAYS WE ARE NEVER TO FORGET?

QUESTION 20: DID JESUS DROWN ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE WORLD WITH A KILLER FLOOD? OR WAS IT SATAN?

QUESTION 21: DID JESUS ENDORSE VIOLENCE BY HIS CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE AND HIS CURSING OF THE FIG TREE?

QUESTION 22: "CSI" JERUSALEM: WHO MURDERED ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA?

QUESTION 23: DOES THE BIBLE SAY WE ARE TO "FEAR GOD WHO IS ABLE TO DESTROY BOTH BODY AND SOUL IN HELL?"

QUESTION 24: IS SATAN INVOLVED IN EVERY EVIL OCCURRENCE?

QUESTION 25: WHAT ABOUT ALL THE WRATH IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

QUESTION 26: HOW DO WE TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PAUL'S "PHILOSOPHY" AND PAUL'S "EPIPHANIES" ?

QUESTION 27: RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

QUESTION 28: WHAT WAS THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

QUESTION 29: WHY DIDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT PATRIARCHS EVER MENTION SATAN?

QUESTION 30: DID GOD VIOLENTLY BREAK JACOB'S HIP DURING AN ALL-NIGHT WRESTLING MATCH?

QUESTION 31: IF SATAN HAS "ALREADY" BEEN DEFEATED BY JESUS, WHY IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE STILL GOING ON?

QUESTION 32: DID GOD "REALLY" TELL MOSES TO STONE A POOR MAN JUST FOR PICKING UP STICKS ON THE SABBATH?

QUESTION 33: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW THE BIBLE TO BE SOOO MISUNDERSTOOD BY SOOOO MANY?

QUESTION 34: DID GOD SEEK TO KILL MOSES FOR FAILING TO CIRCUMCISE HIS SON?

QUESTION 35: WHAT IS THE IDOLATRY OF LANGUAGE?

QUESTION 36: DOES GOD GIVE PERMISSION SLIPS FOR EVIL?

QUESTION 37: WILL EVIL ALWAYS BE POSSIBLE, EVEN IN ETERNITY?

QUESTION 38: WHAT IS THE ABSOLUTE BEST BIBLE TRANSLATION EVER?

QUESTION 39: WHY DOES PRAYER FOR HEALING SOMETIMES FAIL?

QUESTION 40: WHAT ABOUT THESE TWO TOUGH PASSAGES ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

QUESTION 41: WHY SHOULD WE READ THE OLD TESTAMENT?

QUESTION 42: WHY WAS THE MAN BORN BLIND IN JOHN 9? IS THIS A BLESSED QUESTION?

QUESTION 43: HOW DOES THE LORD "SCOURGE" US AS HIS SONS?

QUESTION 44: WHY WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST THE GREATEST "OLD COVENANT" BELIEVER?

QUESTION 45: WHAT IS THE SEVERITY OF THE LORD?

QUESTION 46: DOES THE VIOLENCE IN THE PARABLES SUGGEST THAT GOD IS ALSO VIOLENT?

QUESTION 47: JUST WHO IS THE "GOD OF THIS FALLEN WORLD?"

QUESTION 48: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S BLINDNESS? WHAT ABOUT ELYMAS' BLINDNESS? WHAT ABOUT ZACHARIAH'S MUTENESS?

QUESTION 49: DID GOD ACTUALLY TELL ABRAHAM TO SLIT ISAAC'S THROAT AND BURN HIS CORPSE IN THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE?

QUESTION 50: DID ABRAHAM, MOSES AND DAVID REALLY "TALK GOD OUT OF" KILLING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE?

QUESTION 51: TWO KEY QUESTIONS: 1) IS GOD AGAINST ALL VIOLENCE? 2) IF SO, WHY DID HE SEEM TO FAVOR VIOLENT MEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

QUESTION 52: WHO "REALLY" DESTROYED SODOM AND GOMORRA? WHERE WAS GOD? WHERE WAS SATAN?

QUESTION 53: WHAT MAKES US "VULNERABLE" TO SATANIC DISASTERS?

QUESTION 54: DOES GOD REALLY HATE ESAU'S GUTS?

QUESTION 55: WHAT IS THE "FEAR" OF THE LORD?

QUESTION 56: DOES GOD HAVE SOME "PURPOSE" IN "PERMITTING" SATAN TO AFFLICT US?

QUESTION 57: IS THERE ANY REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "CAUSING EVIL" AND "ALLOWING EVIL?"

QUESTION 58: WHY COULDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS HANDLE THE TRUTH ABOUT SATAN?

QUESTION 59: BUT AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO READ THE BIBLE "PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT AND LINE UPON LINE?"

QUESTION 60: ARE WE ALLOWED TO WITHSTAND PETER TO HIS FACE?

QUESTION 61: RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

QUESTION 62: DID JESUS TELL US TO BUY AND BEAR SWORDS?

QUESTION 63: WHAT IS FREEWILL?

QUESTION 64: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH?

QUESTION 65: IF GOD IS ONLY GOOD, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THESE FIVE PASSAGES?

QUESTION 66: DID JESUS EVER APPEAR TO CONTRADICT OR CORRECT THE PLAIN "ON ITS FACE" MEANING OF OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES?

QUESTION 67: IS IT WRONG TO CALL JESUS "SUPER-HEROIC?"

QUESTION 68: WHAT ABOUT THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS?

QUESTION 69: HOW DO WE PUT ON THE MIND OF CHRIST? USE "ABDUCTIVE REASONING!"

QUESTION 70: WHAT DOES THE MOVIE "PINOCCHIO" TEACH US ABOUT FREEWILL?

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SATAN'S FAVORITE DISGUISE?

What if Satan didn't hide his sinister presence somewhere BEHIND you? What if Satan didn't lurk secretly BESIDE you, either at your left or right side? What if Satan took a DIFFERENT approach? What if He boldly stood right in FRONT of you, right UNDER your nose? What if Satan stood disguised and you didn't recognize him? But disguised as who or what?

What if Satan assumed the most audacious disguise of all--- a mask bearing God's image of light? What if Satan stood directly in FRONT of YOUR image of God? Not just to the right or left of God's image in your heart, but DIRECTLY in front of your heart's-eye view of God?

What if, by doing this, Satan's plan was NOT to get you to "disbelieve" God, but rather to "misbelieve" God? His plan would be to first disguise himself as God. Then, he would start distorting, twisting and misrepresenting God's true nature. Gradually, your perspective of God would be so poisoned that you would start thinking unworthy thoughts of Him. Your heart would soon become hard, wrathful, and judgmental, while your faith would mutate into something measly and ineffective. And all the while, you would believe your view of God was accurate.

Could this be true? Could Satan be hidden in plain sight, right on top of our image of God? Yes! The prefix "anti" in anti-Christ literally means "instead of." The true anti-Christ seeks to to disguise himself "AS GOD." Whether as Lucifer or the Serpent, Satan's mindset ALWAYS seeks to REPLACE God.

So, where is Satan located right here and right now? Let's look at some verses which reveal Satan's current posture and location.

"Be sober , be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil , AS A ROARING LION , walketh about , seeking whom he may devour ." I Peter 5:8.

"In whom THE GOD OF THIS WORLD hath blinded the minds of them which believe not , lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ , who is the image of God , should shine unto them ." II Corinthians 4:4.

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world , according to THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR , the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience ." Ephesians 2:2.

"And no marvel ; for Satan himself is transformed into an ANGEL OF LIGHT ." II Corinthians 11:14.

"We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." 1 John 5:19.

Now, if we string these descriptions together, we come up with the answer as to Satan's CURRENT posture and location:

First, Satan postures himself as a "devouring lion" ready to CONSUME YOUR LIFE.

Second, as "the god of this world," Satan seeks to BLIND YOUR MIND to the Gospel.

Third, Satan is a "spirit" whose POWER INVISIBLY HOVERS in "the air."

Fourth, Satan DISGUISES HIMSELF in "God's image."

Fifth, "the whole world" LIES IN SATAN'S POWER.

So, where does Satan hide in plain view? SHOCKINGLY, He mainly hides in our image of God. He seeks to snare us to misbelieve God's true nature, misbelieve God's true goodness, and misbelieve God's true love.

The Lord of "wrath, fear, intimidation and condemnation," who frequently invades and infests our view of God is really..... are you ready.....SATAN IN DISGUISE!

Satan wants you to think God is the ultimate author of evil. Satan wants you to think that ALL things come from the Heavenly Father's hard judgments: sickness, oppression, destruction, disaster and death. Satan wants you to think God is an "eye-for-an-eye" judge who, though He may not "stone" you to death and Hell in this lifetime, He certainly will in the next unless you stay in fear and dread toward Him to keep ALL His commandments.

So, how do we remove Satan from our image of God? How do we rip his deceptive disguise off of our thoughts so that we no longer accept and believe unworthy, unloving and dishonorable things about God?

Well, forewarned is forearmed. Now that you know that Satan is "blocking the entrance" to your inner image of God, you must resolve to plow him over, trample him under and split him asunder.

Like Goliath blocked all Israel from passing by him and possessing the Promised Land, Satan obstructs you from seeing past him to behold your Promised Land--- GOD AS HE REALLY IS. One of the Hebrew names applied to the devil means "the obstructor" or "hinderer." WHAT is it Satan "obstructs" and "hinders" you FROM? Simply this--- the devil blockades your vision of God! We must steel ourselves to press past. push through, and pummel his lies about God to the dust.

So, like an ECLIPSE blockades the sun's light to varying degrees, Satan's spirit has blockaded each of our inner-views of God's light to varying degrees. Satan has some men's view of God's glorious light so FULLY blocked that they abide in complete darkness. In contrast, other men's views of God Satan may only have PARTIALLY blocked. These men perhaps can see God's light shine toward them around the edges of Satan' blockade, but the central shafts of God's light still are being blocked.

But, for those who walk in the Spirit, the day of the eclipse is OVER. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." -1 John 1:5. These men have spoken to the devil's eclipse and told it to "GET BEHIND ME SATAN!"

A. W. Tozer rightly believed that we tend "by a secret law of the soul" to gravitate toward and grow to resemble our mental image of God. Thus, Tozer was convinced that what comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.

High thoughts of God bring us into pure worship and a sanctified walk, while low thoughts of God defile our hearts and corrupt our walk. The bottom line is that you become what you believe about God.

To remove Satan's "veil" from our image of God is not just so we can behold God clearly, but also so that we can be transformed into His likeness.

"But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18.

"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for WE SHALL SEE HIM EVEN AS HE IS." 1 John 3:2.

The core revelation needed to see PAST Satan's disguise and INTO the real image of God is THIS - - God didn't create evil, God doesn't use evil, and God won't allow evil. God is good. Only good. Always good. His only connection with evil is to disallow it through the power of the cross. In fact, God has already disarmed and disallowed every form of evil. Why evil still occurs is due to man's individual and corporate neglect of Jesus' "so great a salvation." This neglect invites Satan's eclipses to continue by falsely accusing God of evil.

But, not so! Jesus Christ is God's perfect cure for evil, a cure which overcomes evil one way and one way only - - with good. Jesus, as God in the flesh, came to reveal the true nature of God as being good, love, light, truth and Spirit. No Old Testament saint saw the perfect goodness of God. Only Jesus accurately reflected, and still reflects, the true nature of God. Don't allow Satan to disguise this truth!

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John 1:18.

Sooooooooooooooooooooo GET THEE BEHIND US SATAN!

QUESTION 2: IS THE "LESS EVIL" OPTION STILL EVIL?

We have been duped!

We have downloaded into our hearts a HUGE Satanic lie, a wrong way of thinking, a numbing mindset which dumbs us down to a place of NOT believing for God's absolute best. This menacing mindset is akin to rearranging furniture on the deck of the Titanic. While the rearranged deck may temporally look improved, the ship is sinking.

So, what is this wrong mindset straight from the devil's arsenal of deception? Merely this: rather than believing for God's absolute goodness to overcome the evil in the world, we wrongly use evil's fire to stop evil's fire. Instead of believing for God's flawless good to TOTALLY overcome evil circumstances, we start engaging in "lesser evil" thinking.

What is "lesser evil" thinking? It is a mindset which uses evil to stop evil. It uses violence to try to stop violence. It uses coercion to stop coercion. It uses lesser evil to stop or diminish greater evils. But what it doesn't do, and in fact can never do, is eradicate evil altogether. And that is why Satan wants to keep us bound by thinking this way.

Let me give a few examples. WARS may be "less evil" than allowing tyranny or chaos to rule unresisted in their place. SPANKING our children with rods, belts, or our hands may be "less evil" than letting them run amok unrestrained and hurting themselves and others. EXECUTING murderers may be "less evil" than allowing them to live out their full life spans and possibly endangering other future potential victims. LYING may be "less evil" in the short run than telling a harsh truth. LUSTING in our heart may be "less evil" than committing physical fornication. PORNOGRAPHY may be "less evil" than committing physical adultery. HATING secretly may be "less evil" than committing physical hate-crimes.

But then again, all the above options may NOT be "less evil" than the alternatives. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made no distinctions between lesser and greater evils. All sin to Jesus was unbelief. John 16:9; Romans 14:23. And THAT is the problem. When we process reality through the lens of lesser and greater evil, we end up trapped "living off" the cursed and poisoned fruit of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We end up never "living off" the blessed fruit of The Tree of Life because we are scurrying about frantically leaping at the "less evil" options. Unfortunately, governments, families, society and other institutions tend to all operate on the "lesser evil" principle rather than the dynamic of "God's greater good."

All of us can come up with reasons to justify retaliation, revenge, punishment, lust, violence and cruelty. We call these reasons "needful," "good" or "necessary," but in reality we are just using evil to combat evil. We pick an evil which we deem less immediately destructive in our view, a lesser evil which in truth only slows down or replaces a greater evil. And while, on some pathetic level, destroying ourselves with a lesser evil in a "slower burn" is preferable since it gives us more opportunity to ultimately repent, this is not God's best by anybody's reckoning.

This is NOT God's goodness. This is not God's solution. This is not God's way.

God never ordains a "lesser evil" to combat a "greater evil." He is our loving Heavenly Father who never gives us a scorpion when ask for an egg, a serpent when we ask for a fish, or a stone when we ask for bread. Rather, God opens up the vaults of Heaven to give to every man that asks. Luke 11:9-13. In Him is light and NO darkness at ALL, no

variableness or shadow of turning, the Father of lights from whom comes only good and perfect gifts from above. 1 John 1:5; James 1:17.

So, what are the reasons that God's good and perfect "evil-free" gifts from above are NOT being released unto open and full manifestation? Why are so many STUCK in "lesser-evil" mode?

First, many men hope for God's good WITHOUT ever actually "asking" for it from God. We have not because we ask not. James 4:2. Our actual ASKING yields OUR sphere of influence over TO Him. This enables God to then manifest His Spirit to overcome all our evil situations with His perfect goodness. God has given us freedom, and He will never force or coerce us into yielding to Him. Our asking is a way of allowing Him access to fully take dominion over the circumstances.

Second, many ask WITHOUT faith, but rather ask with doubt and double-mindedness. He that wavers in unbelief should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. James 1:6-7.

Third, many ask WITHOUT "importunity." Luke 11:1-10 teaches us to pray with "importunity," which in the original Greek literally means "over-boldness" or "shamelessness." My own definition of importunity is "passionate patience." Like the man in the parable of this passage, we knock louder and louder and louder, without regard to how we look to others, all the while knowing that our loving Father will open Heaven's door at the optimum moment. We are patient, but with ever-increasing intensity and confidence. In our patience we possess our souls, and through faith and patience we inherit ALL the promises of God. Luke 21:19; Hebrews 6:12.

Fourth, many ask WITHOUT first "putting on" the mind of Christ. Romans 13:14. 1 Corinthians 2:16. As John Wesley said, "We have the mind of Christ, and ALL the mind of Christ." Galatians 2:20 says that the life we NOW live we are to live by the faith OF, OF, OF, OF the Son of God. Jesus' faith, His mind, His thoughts, His passion, His confidence, His love from and for the Father. It is all ours to "live by" right here and right now. Our faith will always fail, but Jesus' faith will ALWAYS overcome all evil with the power of God's perfect goodness. Or put another way, the Holy Spirit IS the gift of Jesus' faith sent to indwell us to "live by" in all our ways. The sons of God are those led by the Spirit of God. Romans 8:14.

The bottom line is that we must not let the snare of LESS EVIL trap us, or we will never experience GOD'S GREATER GOODNESS! Don't accept less than God's perfect will and power toward any situation. Keep knocking louder and louder with importunity and faith. Don't slum around with ANY evil. Less evil is STILL evil. Hold out for the good and perfect gifts from above. "All Evil" can only be totally overcome with "All Goodness."

We need a daily OVERHAUL of God's goodness, not just half-measures of "lesser evil" adjustments.

QUESTION 3: WHO IS THE ONE JUDGING US "HERE" ON EARTH---GOD OR SATAN?

I want to make a proposal. Satan judges us in THIS lifetime. God judges us in the NEXT.

All the sickness, oppression, disasters and destructions we see in THIS lifetime, and which are normally called "acts of God," in TRUTH come solely from the "GREAT WRATH" of Satan. Revelation 12:12. These judgments are demonic arrows of affliction solely shot at us from the bow of the Accuser. Revelation 12:10. Because, through Adam's fall, we have corporately forfeited OUR dominion authority over TO Satan, he NOW has and uses OUR authority against us to wreak havoc here in this world.

This is why Satan is referred to as "the God of this world" by Paul, and "the ruler of this world by Jesus." 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. "Death" rules all things in this world, and contrary to popular opinion, Satan has the power of death, NOT God. Hebrews 2:14. Paul is perfectly clear that Satan destroys the flesh of men, NOT God. 1 Corinthians 5:5.

Satan has access to destroy us because WE misused our God-given freedom in foolishly giving Satan the "keys to the car" of creation. We transferred and forfeited our God-given dominion over this earth to Satan. Satan has used it ever since to work death in the world. Jesus came to earth as "the Son of man" to take back dominion and authority from Satan and restore it to the Sons of Men by enabling them to be reborn as Sons of God. Matthew 18:11; Mark 10:45; Luke 5:24; John 1:12; 5:27; 6:53.

Satan is the "tempter" who first lures us to sin by using the Law to incite our desires. Matthew 4:3. Then, he helps offer us opportunities to "consummate" the sin we have been struggling with. 1 John 3:8; James 1:13-15. Then, Satan crushingly "condemns" us afterward for doing the very things he incited us to do in the first place. Revelation 12:10. Finally, in the wake of all this, Satan then floods us with the Deuteronomy 28 curses which our sins render us vulnerable to under the Law. His sole ambition to "destroy" us. 1 Corinthians 10:10; John 10:10.

Satan's judgments are cruel, destructive and non-restorative.

Sooooooooooooooooooooo, what about God's judgment?

Jesus was clear that neither He nor His Father judges us HERE upon the earth, but He most certainly DOES judge Satan upon the earth.

JESUS JUDGES SATAN, NOT MEN!

"I judge NO man." Jesus in John 8:15.

"The Father judges NO man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son..." Jesus in John 5:22.

"Now IS the JUDGMENT of this WORLD; now the RULER of this world will be cast out." Jesus in John 12:31.

"...the ruler of this world IS judged." Jesus in John 16:11.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8.

The only judgment Jesus exercises HERE is against Satan, his works and his demons. We need to remember that Satan is the one we need to enforce God's judgment upon, not man. Remove Satanic darkness and influence, then all men will eventually come to the light.

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

But God WILL judge all of us in the future to come. But, not in the same way Satan judges here and now. Paul describes this in the following passage:

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation [with] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the FIRE WILL TEST EACH MAN'S WORK, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on [it] endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

This is exactly the same judgment described in Revelation 20:12-13, where all men are judged "according to their works." Reading these two passages together, we get a clearer picture of God's future judgment. This fiery judgment results in the "false identities" we have created for ourselves being "burned off us" ("he will suffer loss"), but with our essential self still being saved ("but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire").

After Hell is forever emptied in Revelation 20:14, "death and Hell" are then thrown into the Lake of Fire. Then, all the "false identities" which are NOT written in the Book of Life, and which have been burned off of us are cast into the Lake of Fire as well--- our wood, hay and stubble "selves." BUT, BUT, BUT, we ourselves "shall be saved." It is crucial to read Revelation 20 together with the 1 Corinthians passage quoted above.

God's future judgments are corrective, restorative and purgative. He does NOT judge the way Satan judges. Satan judges to destroy. God judges to save.

Bottom Line: don't confuse Satan's judgments with God's judgments. They are two VERY different things. The judgment we see out in the world NOW is of Satan. Resist it, rebuke it, overcome it. The judgment we will encounter in the future age is a judgment of love which will forever cure and restore us to our loving Father. The prodigals return home!

QUESTION 4: ARE THE LAWS OF NATURE ALWAYS FROM GOD?

Don't automatically believe every law you see working in nature is a law created by God. As the poet Tennyson said, "nature is red in tooth and claw"--- violent and cruel in other words.

Mudslides, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, cancer, ms, birth defects, plagues, famines, and drought all operate death, destruction and tragedy. And all are part of mother nature's laws. Mother nature can be a cruel witch.

In the animal, insect and sea kingdom, many either prey upon others or are preyed upon by others. Parents frequently eat their young. Mates sometimes bite their partner's head off after mating. Many species are cannibalistic in that they eat their own kind. Most species feed entirely off other species. The "law" of evolution calls this natural selection, survival of the fittest, etc. Hitler tried to apply this law to the human race when he killed the Jews en masse. He thought it right for the strong to live off the weak.

Here is the point. In Messiah's kingdom, wolf lies down with lamb, and infants stick their hands down snake-holes without being bitten. Isaiah 11:6-9. All survive here. There is no death, no violence, no cruelty, no hostility. All feed off the Lord (and maybe veggies and fruits). All know the Lord. All are at peace.

We need to consider the possibility that many of the laws of "fallen" nature are NOT from God. Just because the laws appear to be natural does not mean God created them. Fallen nature has fallen into the lap and control of Satan. Evolution, biology, sociology, anthropology, psychology, physiology may all operate by what appear to be laws of nature, but don't assume that God created all the laws these sciences have identified.

Death works in all these natural laws, and death is NOT from God. Hebrews 2:13-15. Death is an enemy of God, the last enemy to be destroyed. Oh, what creation will look like when that happens!

We need to stop calling death-dealing nature a "mother," at least in the traditional sense of the word. She might be a mother of another kind, but not in a complementary sense.

Calling natural disasters "Acts of God" is a misnomer. "Acts of Satan" is a more accurate description when dealing with nature's cruel and tortuous assassinations.

Obviously, whatever is good and beautiful and noble in nature is the Lord's doing, His residual fingerprint for us to appreciate in awe. But whatever steals, kills, and destroys is nature gone-wild after Satan's corruptions. Not all laws are from God. If the law gives life, it was created by Jesus. But if the law takes life, it is from Satan, no matter how scientific or natural it appears to be.

QUESTION 5: WHY IS IT "REALLY" BETTER TO TURN THE OTHER CHEEK?

Do you know why it's best to turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, give the additional coat? Do you know why it's better to pray for your enemies and bless those who curse and spitefully use you? Why are all these things better than eye-for-an-eye revenge, tooth-for-a-tooth retaliation and hate-for-hate cursing toward those who offend us? See Matthew 5:38-48.

It is not JUST that turning the other cheek keeps us from sinning, although it does. It is not JUST that praying for our enemies is the noblest thing we can do, although it is. And it is not JUST that blessing those who hate, curse and spitefully use us makes us Christ-like, although it certainly does.

No, the REASON "loving our enemies" is the best thing we can ever do is that it gives us the maximum POWER to ultimately overcome all their evil for THEIR sake.

Let me put it another way.

What if OUR own religious judgment of sinners actually worked to DISTANCE their hearts even FARTHER from the Lord?

What if OUR own religious condemnation toward sinners worked to FURTHER harden their hearts toward God?

What if OUR own religious wrath against sinners actually boomeranged back and made our OUR own hearts DISTANT and HARD toward the Holy Spirit's leadings?

What if OUR own religious finger-pointing GRIEVED and QUENCHED the Holy Spirit even more than the sinner's actions we are seeking to judge?

But, on the other hand, what if OUR own steadfast posture of mercy and non-judgment actually greased the grace gears, oiled the repentance wheels and helped release Heaven's flood of goodness, repentance and restoration toward the sinner?

WHAT IF.....?

When somebody victimizes YOU with condemnation, hatred, cursing, lying, violence or betrayal, you know what you then become? You become the most powerful intercessor on earth for that PARTICULAR person. This is a Spiritual law imbedded by God in all creation. Whenever you are wronged, you are AUTOMATICALLY given EXTRA mojo, power, authority, anointing, and access to pray blessing and Holy Ghost "conviction" UPON the heads of the wrongdoers.

The absolute best blessing you can pray for the enemy you have TRULY forgiven is to fervently and tenderly "pray down conviction" upon their souls, which Romans likens to "hot coals" searing their consciences with the urge and need to repent. I call these "soul-coals." "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Romans 12:20.

An eye-for-an-eye spirit of condemnation, revenge and resentment against your enemies will HINDER and OBSTRUCT their conviction to repent. But, a turn-the-other-cheek Spirit of love and non-judgment will MAXIMIZE and OPTIMIZE the conditions for their Godly repentance to occur. Whereas an eye-for-an-eye "spirit" causes you to call down fire on your enemies, just as the misguided disciples did in Luke 9:51-56, the turn-the-other-cheek "Spirit" causes you to pity your enemies for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34.

Talk about victims' rights! We have the right and increased power to help save those who wrong us--- to save them to the uttermost from sin, Satan and themselves.

God has weaved an invincible dynamic into creation that always gives those who are victimized the most powerful force in the universe to wield at their disposal--- forgiveness. But biblical "forgiveness" is not just "mercy" to graciously overlook the wrong. Biblical "forgiveness" in the original Greek language means complete "deliverance" for the sinner FROM the bondage to the sin itself.

In other words, "perfect forgiveness" ULTIMATELY works "COMPLETE deliverance." This "power of good" to ultimately "overcome evil" and thoroughly PURGE evildoers of all sin-bondages works absolutely and without exception. Sometimes it works quickly. Sometimes it works slowly. Sometimes it works in THIS age. Sometimes it will work in the age to COME. But it ALWAYS works.

In our patience and faith in this Scripturally-promised dynamic, that of overcoming all evil with good, we will truly "possess our souls" as we count it all joy when we are "victimized" by persecutions. Luke 21:19; James 1:2-4. The reason we can rejoice is that IF and AS we truly forgive, bless and love our enemies, we are literally "saving them" from Satan's clutches.

But, on the other unfortunate hand, our toxic resentment and desire to retaliate against our enemies will only worsen the situation, both ours AND our enemies. It may well be that there is so little true deliverance FROM sin because there is so little true forgiveness OF sin by those who have been victimized. But, us learning to fully and actively "forgive," JUST AS the Father and Jesus "forgive," is the KEY thing we are now called to realize and walk in.

Do you see? The strongest intercession FOR particular evildoers potentially comes from those who are victimized BY those same evildoers. This is why, "Jesus liveth to make intercession for them." We are "them." Jesus is our champion intercessor BECAUSE He became the champion victim. He turned His cosmic cheek the other way in love rather than retaliate against us in wrath. And because of this, He truly is all powerful in Heaven and earth. His mercy ransomed us from all evil.

Jesus is easily the MOST victimized person to ever walk the earth. He was completely sinless, yet bore the full brunt of victimization for EVERY sin ever committed. He was victimized by all OUR misguided evildoing in thought, deed or word. Our mental, verbal, emotional and physical violence, all inflicted UPON Jesus at the Cross gave Him the the most powerful intercessory influence the world has ever seen.

So, even if we fail to fully forgive, we still have a cosmic safety net---- Jesus! Jesus is the savior of the whole world, which in the Latin is expressed as "Salvador Mundi." Jesus is the perfect intercessor, and His love shall not fail to eventually overcome and rescue all men trapped in sin. He shall overcome them with His flawless goodness, whether it be in this life or the next.

But, let's don't just count on His safety net of mercy to make all things right in some FUTURE age. Let's join in the "fray" of forgiveness right HERE and NOW. As warriors of virtue, let's battle all wrath by learning to "forgive" with a vengeance! When we learn that God's only "vengeance" is to "wholly heal" His enemies, then our hearts will be primed and ready to fight the good fight of faith.

QUESTION 6: WHAT IS RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING?

Christians are called to righteous suffering, but WHAT is righteous suffering? The answer might surprise you.

First, let's look at the call to suffering Scriptures exhort us to embrace:

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS being made conformable unto his death." Philippians 3:10

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are PARTAKERS

OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy . . . Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." 1 Pet. 4:12,13,19.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we SUFFER WITH HIM, that we may also be glorified together." Rom. 8:16-17.

So, what exactly is the righteous suffering we are called to? Well, the above verses call us to experience the "fellowship Christ's sufferings," to be "partaker's of Christ's sufferings," and that we are to "suffer with Him."

So the question becomes HOW did Christ suffer? Prepare to be shocked:

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that HATH SUFFERED in the flesh HATH CEASED FROM SIN..." 1 Pet. 4:1.

First, according to this verse, we are to "arm ourselves" with THIS purpose of mind ---- our righteous suffering in the flesh defeats sin. Suffering is the mark of the man who has ceased from sinning.

Here then is the formula: "SUFFERING IN THE FLESH" produces "CEASING FROM SIN."

But, what kind of suffering in the flesh is being talked about in this passage? Here is the answer--- suffering AGAINST sin. "Ye have not YET RESISTED unto blood, striving AGAINST sin." Hebrews 12:4. Do you see? THIS is the suffering of Christ, SUFFERING in the battle against and all temptation. JESUS' SUFFERING "IS" THE RESISTING OF SIN.

Jesus resisted all sin to the point that He literally sweated blood in Luke 22:44. Because of His persistent and resistant suffering to sin, He has now become our High Priest. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews. 4:15. He is now able to fully sympathize with us because He has been touched with all our infirmities.

Because Jesus was touched BY all our sins without succumbing TO them, He is now ABLE to help us likewise defeat ALL sin and sin-effects in our lives. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is ABLE to succor them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:18. Again, Jesus' sufferings came from RESISTING sin, and NOT from submitting to their power.

"Though he were a Son, yet LEARNED HE OBEDIENCE by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all

them that obey Him." Hebrews. 5:8-9. Jesus learned perfect obedience to the Father by continually hearing the Father on how to overcome each and every temptation He faced. Jesus now stands ready, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, to empower us to resist all the power of sin and its deadly effects, just as He did.

Here then is the SHOCKING TRUTH about righteous suffering. Righteous suffering is the pain we endure while ACTIVELY AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY RESISTING persecution (2 Tim. 3:12) and all forms of temptation: sin, sickness, sorrow, lack, oppression, fear, and all the other curses of Dt. 28.

We encounter numerous battle-scars of pain and discomfort while we fight to NOT surrender to symptoms of sin, oppression and sickness - - to get up out of bed, to press through the pain, to praise God regardless of our symptoms, to NOT go quietly into the night, but to fight, fight, fight in the strength of our Lord! Resistance is NEVER futile in the Spirit realm.

We experience painful pressure from Satan as we continue the FIGHT to not give-up or give-in to attacks of oppression - - at home, work and fellowship. Righteous suffering is not staying down for the count, giving up or giving in, and it is not accepting or accommodating sickness OR oppression OR disaster OR death OR destruction as Gods will--- EVER! We resist the enemy by putting on the full armor of God and resisting sin and Satan with every ounce of "guts" we possess.

So many today WRONGLY believe righteous suffering is just meekly submitting to WHATEVER happens. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away--- blessed be the name of the Lord." WRONG! That is Old Testament thinking, not New Testament truth. Satan is the one who takes away-- stealing, killing and destroying all he can. But NOT God. God ONLY gives life-- and that abundantly. John 10:10.

These misguided souls seek to glorify God by passively submitting to their sin, sickness and suffering in a non-defiant tone. They meekly accept God's will as the SOURCE of their weakness, sickness, oppression and destruction. They believe it is somehow "noble" to embrace the disasters that come from their way from a sin-fallen world. But not Jesus. Acts 10:38 tells us how Jesus NEVER caved in to defeat: "He went about doing good, healing ALL oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him." He did this because He was was "anointed with the Holy Ghost and power," and so are we.

Surrendering to sin, whether it be our own sin, somebody else's sin, or the world's collective sin, is NOT righteous suffering. Battling ANY form of unbelief, whether it be our own or another's, we must nonetheless resist, resist and resist until victory is manifest. If we perish, we perish, but we will go down swinging so that we can rise up singing, knowing that we have fought the good fight of faith.

Some today are suffering sickness and oppression because of their OWN sin. Some today are suffering oppression and sickness from the secondhand smoke of OTHER people's sins. Others suffer because this is a sin-fallen and sin-ravaged world. Still

others are suffering because of pure Satanic attack. It is often impossible to know the exact cause, but that is not the issue. Rather, as Jesus said in John 9, "Let the glory of God be revealed" by OVERCOMING the sickness, oppression and temptation in the POWER of the Lord!

Suffering WITHOUT resisting is unrighteous suffering. Suffering BY resisting sin is the fight of faith that perfects us.

Here, we must distinguish battle-scars from battle-wounds. Battle-scars are sources of our boasting in the Lords past victories. A battle-scar is a former bondage which the Lord has now liberated. The battle-scar is now a "healed over" trophy of God's rescue. A battle-wound, in contrast, is an area where we continue to suffer affliction and defeat. A battle-wound is an area where we still are infected and affected and still desperately need to receive the Lords healing.

Again and again the New Testament calls us to battle-resist the sin-effects and sin-dynamics of this fallen world:

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Jas. 4:7.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." Rom. 6:6-7.

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Romans 6:12-13.

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called." 1 Tim. 6:12.

"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Matthew 11:12.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole arm our of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Ephesians 6:10.

QUESTION 7: WHY DID GOD PUT THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THE GARDEN?

If partaking of this tree caused man to fall into sin, why oh why did God put it there in the first place? Why not rather let Adam and Eve live in a garden WITHOUT a death-causing tree?

Well, let's start with a basic truth: if God did it, it was necessary. His will is necessity. Despite the danger, God had a greater purpose in mind when He placed the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden.

But what was God's purpose for the poisonous tree?

Before I answer this question, I want to point out a truth about vegetation in general. Whether used as a metaphorical or literal dynamic, this truth about trees reveals a vital truth about God and man.

Many plants and trees are made to eat from. Delicious fruits, berries and seeds abound in nature as wonderful food sources for mankind. But many other plants and trees are poisonous and unfit for human consumption. But, these poison-bearing trees are still beneficial because they provide other benefits to mankind.

Trees alter the environment in which we live by moderating climate, improving air quality, conserving water, and harboring wildlife. Climate control is obtained by moderating the effects of sun, wind, and rain. We are cooler when we stand in the shade of trees and are not exposed to direct sunlight. In winter, we value the sun's radiant energy. They also serve as wonderful boundaries, marking where forests end and begin. So, even poisonous trees have great benefits, just as long as we don't eat from them.

Air quality can also be improved through the use of poisonous trees and shrubs. They greatly contribute to photosynthetic creation of breathable air. Their leaves also filter the air we breathe by removing dust and other particulates. Rain then washes the pollutants to the ground. Leaves absorb carbon dioxide from the air to form carbohydrates that are used in the plant's structure and function. In this process, leaves also absorb other air pollutants—such as ozone, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide—and give off oxygen.

Some examples of poisonous trees and bushes are: LABURNUM, HOLLY, OLEANDER (Nerium), IVY (Hedera Helix), COMMON BOX (Buxus), PRIVET (Ligustrum), HORSE CHESTNUT (Aesculus), and RHODODENDRON also known as AZALEA. Most of these serve as great BOUNDARY MARKERS for various landscaping purposes

*****HERE IS THE POINT: God did NOT put the poisonous tree in the garden to be eaten. He put it there NOT to be eaten. The tree served a positive purpose, but that purpose was not in the eating of it.

So what was the reason for the tree? Why was it necessary? Well, the moment God declared a partially free creation, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil became necessary. In the beginning, God ordered a wonderful world where man was given a measure of mental and emotional "elbow room" to explore, to create, to imagine and to ponder colorful alternatives and powerful possibilities.

But, wherever partial freedom is granted, there must always be a boundary set so that the parameters of that freedom are properly understood and recognized. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was the boundary God placed on earth to set a "marker," a "buoy" so to speak, beyond which man could no longer freely travel without being poisoned. To go beyond this boundary was to misuse that freedom to man's own detriment by internally consuming a "death-dealing" agent.

God certainly wanted man to use his partial spiritual freedom to explore the infinite possibilities of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, Adam was free to contemplate Kingdom growth and expansion into the newly formed creation, over which man had been given dominion. But God did not want us to go beyond the spirit-realm into the soulish and deadly realm of the knowledge of good and evil.

Nonetheless, Adam ignored the "buoy," disregarded the Lord's "boundary" of safety, ran over the Lord's "marker" and committed a criminal trespass of the deadliest kind. In this forbidden territory of mind and heart, Adam foolishly breathed in the noxious gas of self-centeredness and cavalierly consumed the perilous poison of lust. And creation fell.

So again, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil became a necessary tree the moment God formed a free creation. Without it, man could have NO actual freedom. Righteous freedom ALWAYS has a righteous boundary. Freedom gone too far is bondage. So, the tree was not there to eat, but it was there NOT to eat. It served as a symbolic warning NOT to eat of its fruit, not to misuse our freedom by trespassing into forbidden and poisonous territory. So then, this tree wasn't made for human consumption but for human rejection.

Let me use another analogy-- the male's wedding ring. This token of marriage was NOT made to ever take off, but rather to ALWAYS keep on. When a man takes off his wedding ring, there is a problem. He is looking for trouble. He is misusing its original purpose.

So too, God gave us the "wedding ring" of "freedom" to put on and keep on at all times as a covenant symbol of our love and marriage to Him. But, our eating of the forbidden fruit is us "taking off" our wedding ring so that we can "misuse our freedom" by committing adultery with the Satanic serpent wrapped around the deadly tree. Satan is always entwined around the boundary markers of the Lord, enticing and luring men to trespass.

The bottom line is that the creation of a "wedding ring" is made with the sole purpose of "keeping it on" at all times. But, the creation of the ring itself "necessitates" the

possibility that it COULD be taken off if wrongly used. By our steadfast denial to ever partake of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we are using our "wedding ring of divine freedom" the right way, by keeping it on at all times and places.

But, when Adam partook of the deadly tree, he wrongly removed his "wedding ring," thereby misusing his freedom and falling into Satanic bondage. Only Jesus, as the second Adam, kept the divine wedding ring on at all times. He never "pocketed" His covenant ring in order to unlawfully "mess around" with another serpent-spirit wrapped around a death-producing tree. And because He didn't, we have been healed!

QUESTION 8: WHAT IS THE ONE THING GOD CAN'T DO?

Answer: He won't and can't violate His own flawless nature.

At some point in the divine nature of God, "can't" and "won't" merge into the same thing. Scripture says it is "impossible" (Titus 1:2) for God to lie. Yet, how can this be?

Doesn't God have the innate freedom to lie if He wanted to? He is all-powerful, after all. Doesn't that give Him the right, the power, the authority, the capability to lie whenever, wherever, and to whomever He wanted to?

Even if we are just talking hypothetically, couldn't God tell a big fat whopping lie if He decided to? No! No way! Not if the Scriptures are true which say it is IMPOSSIBLE for God to lie. How can this be?

Well, there is only one workable explanation. If God won't do something, then He can't. "Won't" and "can't" mean the exact same thing to Him. The Lord is so purified in perfect purpose, so lavished in loving light, and so constant in consistent character, that HE "WILL NOT" AND "CANNOT" VIOLATE HIS OWN NATURE----- NEVER----- EVER!

This distinction is not mere semantics. We, as humans, all frequently lie to varying degrees, to ourselves, to others, to God, by both omission or commission, by exaggeration, minimization or distortion. Let God be true and every man a liar. Romans 3:4.

As opposed to God, OUR "won't" and "can't" does mean two entirely different things. We CAN lie at any time and place, and we often DO. Sometimes we WON'T and DON'T lie in particular situations, but if enough added pressure were applied, we certainly COULD at the drop of a hat.

But, God's perfect character has rendered sin "impossible" for Him. His nature has transcended beyond sin as even a hypothetical possibility. Jesus proved that by remaining sinless on the earth, sinless as He harrowed Hell, and sinless as He ascended to Heaven.

We too will ultimately achieve the same state of sinless perfection where our "won't" merges with our "can't." We "won't" sin because we "can't" sin. This is what the end of our faith walk is all about. This is the sanctifying work of the Spirit which Jesus said grows and grows and grows from within us until our "whole" being is "leavened" with the Kingdom of God. Luke 13:21.

And this dynamic just doesn't apply to lying. It also explains why God doesn't EVER coerce, kill, maim, oppress, afflict or act in ANY other unworthy way toward us. It simply is not in His nature. He won't do it because He can't do it. He can't do it because He won't do it. The words mean the same thing BECAUSE God is flawlessly unified and seamlessly weaved in purity and perfection.

"How can you be omnipotent, O God, if you cannot do all things? How can you do all things if you cannot sin-- if you cannot lie, if you cannot make false what is true? If you are unable to sin, you cannot claim to be alike to do all things. Or is it that sin stems not from power, but from powerlessness? For those who commit sin have so little power over their own natures that they actually harm themselves. They are at the mercy of forces which they cannot oppose....

The more people have power to commit sin, the more they are powerless. So Lord God, you are in fact more truly omnipotent because you cannot act through powerlessness." Saint Anselm, Prosologion, Chapter 7.

As Anselm says, God is omnipotent only within the context of His character. He IS all-powerfully good, compassionate, heroic and merciful BECAUSE this is the core nature of light and love Jesus reveals. But, He is NOT all-powerfully wrathful, violent, cruel and hateful BECAUSE He can't and won't operate in these toxic and unworthy motives and purposes.

Once we understand the "won't" and "can't" of God in a clear way, we are now ready to understand the "can" and "will" of God's goodness. "Can" and "will" also mean the exact same thing to God. God ALWAYS hastens to "will and to do" the highest available good.

QUESTION 9: DID JESUS JUST STAND BY AND LET LAZARUS DIE?

In John 11, when Jesus was told that His friend Lazarus was seriously ill in nearby Bethany, Jesus appeared to dawdle for two days (v6) before finally traveling to Lazarus. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already died, been embalmed and buried.

A hasty reading of this passage makes it appear that Jesus' two day casual delay in coming caused Lazarus to die without the help, healing or comfort of the Lord. Is it possible that Jesus purposely ALLOWED Lazarus to die when He could have easily prevented it by rushing to Lazarus' side before he expired? Did Jesus say "no" here to

Mary and Martha's messengers who asked Him to help heal their sick brother so that he WOULDN'T die? Did Jesus just purposely let Lazarus suffer and die so that He could later raise him up at his convenience in order to better impress a crowd of onlookers? Would Jesus play this kind of callous game of life and death?

No, no, no, no, never, no way! Jesus would never dawdle or delay to help a friend in life-threatening pain. Let's look at this passage carefully and see some wonderful nuggets.

Here is the KEY point: Lazarus was ALREADY dead when the messengers reached Jesus. The reason we know this is that vv17,39 both tell us Lazarus had already been dead and buried in the ground FOUR DAYS when Jesus arrived.

Bethany was a one day's journey from where Jesus was staying in Perea, east of the Jordan River. Scholars agree that it would only take one day for the messengers to travel to Jesus with the news of Lazarus' sickness. Jesus then waited two days. Then it would take a day for Jesus to travel back there.

The arithmetic is easy, which is why most all commentaries agree Lazarus died just after the messengers left Lazarus but before they reached Jesus. The four days here is the key. Jesus supernaturally knew from the Father Lazarus was already asleep/dead when the messengers arrived with the news of his sickness.

So, why did Jesus wait the two days. Well, obviously the Father had something in mind. I think God wanted to give all the unbelieving mourners time to come from Jerusalem to shoot their collective wad of unbelief. There was a common belief by the Jews of the day that the spirits of the dead hovered around their corpses for three days for possible resurrection. After that, death was considered irrevocable. Perhaps Jesus wanted to make sure there were no loopholes, no excuses, no explanations OTHER than the pure, unadulterated, unmitigated POWER of God working in and through Jesus. He defeated death at its strongest point in this situation.

Who could read verses 25-26 and think Jesus could ever use or allow death in any way? "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" John 11:25-26. The only thing that Jesus stands by and allows to die is death itself!

Bottom line: if Jesus supernaturally knew Lazarus was already dead at the time the messengers arrived, then there was no hurry. Lazarus was in no pain. He was, as Jesus said, in the sleep of death waiting to be awakened. The question then becomes the kairos moment chosen by the Lord to manifest the most glory, which in this case was four days post-mortem. No OTHER power could explain this miracle except the divinity of Jesus.

QUESTION 10: HOW DOES GOD VIEW SIN?

I am getting a new HUGE revelation about HOW "grace" views "sin." I am convinced grace sees sin far differently than the law does, far differently than man does, and far differently than Satan does.

So many people right now are suffocating in sin's condemnation. No matter how many times they are told they are forgiven by God, they still eventually return to their vomit by seeing themselves as nothing more than wretched sinners deserving of eternal torment. This self-loathing shame prevents them from coming boldly to the throne of grace to obtain help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16.

The reason people can't get their "sin" totally behind them is that they identify themselves as its AUTHOR, its COMPOSER, its CREATOR, its FATHER. Once they so identify themselves WITH the sin, they become the living personification OF the sin. Even if they have repented and try to fully believe God has forgiven them, they still ultimately see and define themselves as nothing more than "a loathsome sinner saved by grace."

Like a scarlet letter tattooed on the inside of their eyelids, their residual self-image is AS a liar, AS a murderer, AS an adulterer, AS a thief, AS an addict, AS a wretched sinner saved by grace. As King David lamented, "My sin is ever before my eyes." Psalm 51:3. But is this right? Is this spiritually healthy? Is this how God sees us? Is this how eyes of grace see us?

Surprisingly, Jesus never said that men were the authors of all sin, the composers of specific sins, the creators of every sin---- the "father" of their own sins in other words. Rather, Jesus said in John 8:44 that the Devil is the "FATHER" of all sins, murders and lies. "Ye are of your FATHER the devil, and the lusts of your FATHER ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the FATHER of it." The same Apostle John reiterates this truth in 1 John 3:8, "He that commits sin is OF the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

I think the beloved Apostle John saw this truth more clearly than the other New Testament writers. He certainly emphasized it more. His points in the above passages are three. 1) Satan, from "the beginning," has always been the "FATHER" of all sin. 2) Whenever we sin, we are "OF the devil." 3) The "lusts" we "will" to "do" are Satan's lusts, not ours.

Now, we certainly may have, at various times, unwittingly allowed ourselves to be "adopted" by Satan, to then become his children and the instruments of his evil "lusts." But, we did NOT originally compose or "father" the sinful acts we commit. Satan did. They were his idea, not ours. And we must never believe otherwise or it will eventually cripple us. God never meant for us to share that burden, for it is far too heavy. There IS a burden and responsibility for sin we ARE to bear and repent over. But, it is not for the

creation of the external sin-act itself, whether it be murder, idolatry, adultery, robbery, covetousness, lying, etc.

So, if Satan is the TRUE author-composer-creator-father of all sin "actions," then what are we? What is our role in the process? What is our responsibility? What is our need for repentance based upon? Jesus sums it up perfectly from the Cross in Luke 23:34, "FATHER FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

Simply put, we allow ourselves to be misled by Satan due to our neglect, unbelief and lukewarmness toward God, BUT when it comes to the sin-act itself, we don't know what we are doing. We are not the creators of the sin, but rather the victims of our own neglect. We are dupes who are duped by the master dupe. We are merely deceived subscribers who, by repeated misstep, become devoted readers of Satan's hourly updates, Twitter recipients of his various lusts, and Facebook followers of his demonic threads of doubt-fear-unbelief-condemnation-accusation.

When I committed a serious sin two years ago, I struggled because I saw myself as its author-composer-creator-father. A titanic wave of condemnation continually crashed down on me daily, drowning me in despair and doubt. This oppression caused me to feel like I had violated all ten commandments at once: murder, idolatry, sabbath-breaking, coveting, adultery, lying, stealing, dishonor of parents, etc. all at the SAME time. All the weight of the law came down on me BECAUSE I saw my self as its author and creator rather than it's misled victim.

God wants us to take responsibility of wrong believing, BUT we are NOT take the full responsibility for the sin creation itself. You see, I was being driven mad by the idea that I created it, I could never undo it, and that it made me forever guilty of transgressing the ENTIRE law.

As James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." I never understood that verse until I felt the full force of the law's condemnation over the last two years, but it is absolutely true IF we accept ourselves as being the FATHER of the sin, its AUTHOR-CREATOR-COMPOSER. That responsibility IS unbearable. This is why people so easily believe in an ETERNAL Hell, because IF you think you are the lone and absolute creator of your sin, then there can never be a full deliverance from it in your mind. This is because you have defined yourself BY the sin, and thereby forever joined yourself WITH it at the hip.

But, thank God John taught us that whoever sins is NOT of themselves, but rather is "of the devil." This is so big. God has been showing me to "own" my own wrong-thinking, my own lukewarmness, my own neglect in falling into Satan's snare, but I am NOT to own the sin act itself--- that is Satan's doing not mine. This helps me understand Jesus statement from the Cross to "forgive them for they know not what they do." Satan knows what he does, not us. And God wants us to see that or we will never be fully free.

We are to disown Satan and his works. Our ONLY sin is NOT believing on the son of God, NOT living by faith in other words. Satan creates the actual outlets. So we must disassociate ourselves from the sin itself, or else we will forever identify and define ourselves by it. We need to "OWN" our own neglect and unbelief by repenting of it, but we are to "DISOWN" the works of the Devil. Jesus came to destroy Satan's works, NOT to have them forever attach themselves to our self-image.

I know with my own kids, when they do wrong, I just want them to fix their believing. I never permanently hold what they DO against them and would never want them to define themselves by it for all eternity. Condemnation is the world's number one killer.

Jesus NEVER condemned the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-12. He saved her. He never even mentioned the word "adultery." The FIRST thing He wanted the woman to know was that He had saved her by supernaturally dispersing all her would-be killers. "Woman, where are your accusers?" Jesus wanted the woman to acknowledge and believe that HIS power and presence had just intervened to save and protect her.

After she responded that her accusers had fled the scene, the SECOND thing Jesus wanted her to know was that HE didn't condemn her, "Neither do I condemn thee." After showing Himself as her rescuing hero, Jesus lovingly revealed His divine nature as non-condemning.

THIRD, after previously establishing His saving power TOWARD her and His non-condemning love OF her, Jesus exhorted her to "go, and sin no more." He wanted her to believe in His power to save her from ALL condemnation, so that when He thereafter exhorted her to leave her sin behind, she could trust to travel on the power of His word. In other words, His word to her "carried" His power and authority to enable her to successfully follow it with her faith.

Jesus then confirmed this message by declaring the following, "I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." This takes us to the very definition of "sin" according to Jesus. In John 16:9, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will convince the entire world "Of sin, BECAUSE they believe NOT on me...." Romans 14:23 summarizes this basic sin-dynamic as follows, "Whatever is not of faith is sin."

Faith in what? Faith in the Son of God. Again and again Jesus emphasized disbelief in Him as our personal savior is the only "sin" we actually commit which allows Satanic condemnation to afflict us. Jesus said in John 3:18, "He that believeth on me is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 6:28-29 "Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Do you see? Our only part in every sin is NOT "believing on Jesus," NOT "being led by His Spirit," NOT "following the light and love of Jesus shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." When we sin, we are being NOT-HEADS. We are NOT living by faith, which is our only and every sin. Our sin has NOTHING to do with breaking external rules or laws, or by performing this evil act or that evil act. Rather, our sin is based entirely on the neglect of an unbelieving heart toward Jesus. We either live by the faith of organic belief, or we live in sin by "neglecting our so great a salvation." Hebrews 2:3.

Whew! What a relief!

QUESTION 11: IS JESUS THE LION OR THE LAMB?

Jesus' nature. To know Him, not as EITHER lion or lamb, but as both simultaneously.

Jesus is ferocious without being vicious, decisive without being damning, violent without being harmful, brazen without being brutal, visceral without being vindictive, aggressive without being argumentative, and forceful without being frightening.

Jesus has muscular-based meekness, testosterone-charged tenderness, power-laden patience, passion-infused peace, and vigor-enhanced calm.

Jesus heroically heals, fervently forgives, tenaciously teaches, roaringly renews, endlessly enables, victoriously validates and daringly delivers.

Jesus is a swashbuckling pirate who with great derring-do raids Satanic vessels of all their booty. He is a Robin Hood who takes from the demonically rich to give to the spiritually poor. He is the Spartan King Leonidas who, with a faithful few brethren, stand and contend at the Hot Gates of Thermopylae against a world wide empire of evil. He is Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King setting all the captives free at the cost of their own blood.

Jesus is Samson smashing Philistine lies with His jawbone of truth. He is the young shepherd David charging the enemy by smashing the rock of faith into Goliath's forehead of arrogance. He is the old warrior Caleb ready to seize the mountain of His inheritance from enemy forces. He is the fearless Jonathan climbing a high cliff to fight a taunting troop. He is Benaiah who jumped down into a pit to fight a lion on a snowy day.

Jesus is the faithful Ruth who would not abandon Naomi in her time of need. He is the valiant Jael who drove the nail of righteousness into Sisera's evil head. Jesus is Hannah who steadfastly prayed for miracle conception. He is Miriam who joyfully sang great

songs of victory in the wake of the Red Sea crossing. He is the wise Zipporah saving her husband from death by uncircumcision. He is Rahab who dropped the scarlet cord of salvation for all to see.

He is hero! He is God! He is lion! He is lamb! He is all in all! He is here! For us! With us! In us! Hallelujah!

QUESTION 12: DOES OUR IMAGE OF GOD NEED "DECLUSTERING?"

Our image of God in Western Christianity suffers from what the military calls "cluster foxtrot" (some soldiers substitute a more vulgar synonym for "foxtrot"). This occurs in the military when personnel and resources which should NEVER be kept in close proximity nonetheless get disasterously entwined, confused and conjoined.

The result is that chaos rules. Poorly prepared soldiers end up getting harmed by both friendly fire and enemy fire. The soldiers then become totally confused about the true locations of danger seeking to kill them as well as the true sources of protection seeking to help them.

The term "cluster foxtrot" also describes a phenomenon in ancient Roman orgies. In these sick and sordid ceremonies, there were so MANY bodies entangled and entwined together in close proximity, that the people could not tell for sure who their sexual partners actually were. Confusion of identities rendered these decadent activities all the more chaotic.

The application of this dynamic to the Spirit realm is so powerful. God is calling US to DECLUSTER our image of God. Satan has long deceived us into believing GOD is the true killer of all men, that GOD is the true eternal torturer of most men, and that GOD is the true oppressor of all mankind through His use of famine, war, disasters and sickness. Satan meanwhile, remains largely unrecognized, unopposed and undefeated.

Traditional Hebrew and Calvinistic thought both have wrongly joined the images of God and Satan together at the hip in a sick "good cop, bad cop" dynamic. Under this view, Satan is seen as either a servant angel of God, at worst, doing God's dirty work, or, at best, as a rabid dog on God's chain who only does what God expressly allows and commands him to do.

But this is so wrong! Satan's personality, works and power MUST be "declustered" from our view of God, or we won't know which end is up. We will get sick and think God sent the sickness. We won't fight it as a missile from the enemy, but rather passively accept it as God's supply for us. We will see disasters, death and destruction as friendly fire from God, when in truth Satan, as the roaring lion and fierce hater of our souls, is behind each and every oppression we encounter.

The Eastern Church, under the great influence of Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and others, kept their image of God largely declustered from Satan. The West, under Tertullian, Augustine, Calvin, and many others have allowed a bipolar vision of God to cluster and corrupt our image of Him.

I now believe our first call of duty is to DECLUSTER our image of God in every situation we encounter. Satan and God have been dangerously mixed together in our souls, both in our conscious and subconscious, both in apparent and hidden ways. We must be sure we are not looking at the face of Jesus while at the same time interacting with Satan by wrongly thinking they are one and the same. What could be more chilling than our falling victim to this kind of "cluster foxtrot?"

It is time for us to allow the Holy Spirit to separate the vile (Satan) from the precious (Jesus) in our minds and hearts so that we can accurately see and serve God in truth and Spirit. God is light and in Him is no darkness. ONLY He is to be allowed in the bridal chamber of our heart. No Satanic strangers allowed. The God revealed by Jesus Christ is only and always good-- no exceptions---- PRAISE GOD, NO EXCEPTIONS!

QUESTION 13: WHAT DOES JESUS' BLOOD AND SPIRIT EACH REPRESENT?

There is a mysterious relationship between THE BLOOD OF JESUS and THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST! 1 John 5:8 says the BLOOD and the SPIRIT are two things upon the earth which "agree in one." 1 Peter 1:11 and Romans 8:9 both call the Holy Ghost "the Spirit of Christ" who lives "IN" and "WITHIN" us, and that we have "nothing" without His indwelling. The New Testament further teaches us that the BLOOD OF JESUS not only cleanses us from all sin, but it provides us BOLD access to intimacy and communion with God (1 John 1:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16; Ephesians 2:13; Hebrews 10:19). So, the BLOOD and SPIRIT both bear witness to our internal union WITH God, as well as our free and complete access TO God's throne.

I noticed a very interesting fact some time ago. What the New Testament says the BLOOD does, it also says the SPIRIT does. The blood justifies (Romans 5:9), the Spirit justifies (1 Corinthians 6:11). The blood sanctifies (Hebrews 13:12), the Spirit sanctifies (1 Corinthians 6:11). The blood cleanses (1 John 1:7), the Spirit cleanses (1 Corinthians 6:11). We drink the blood (1 Corinthians 11:24-25; John 6:55-56), we drink the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). The life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), while the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). We are to have "faith in His blood" (Romans 3:24-25) and are to have "the Spirit of faith." I think that on some level, the blood of Jesus and the Spirit of Christ are synonymous in some literal and mystical way.

I think the BLOOD of Jesus is too often thought about JUST in reference to the forgiveness of sins, but it has a much broader and more dynamic application than just that. The term "forgiveness" is not the most accurate translation of the Greek word "aphesis" which is used in verses like Luke 24:45-47; Acts 2:38-40; 5:29-31; 13:35-39;

26:15-18; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:12-14. In all these passages just cited, the King James translation uses either the words "REMISSION of sins" or "FORGIVENESS of sins" to translate the Greek word "aphesis," which in truth simply means "freedom." Aphesis is also translated in the New Testament as "DELIVERANCE" or "LIBERTY." Its primary definition is "to release from bondage or imprisonment" (Thayer and Smith). Aphesis derives from the Greek word "apheimi" which means "to send away," as in "a husband divorcing his wife."

Factoring all this together then, the better translation of this Greek term used in the above referenced verses is not "FORGIVENESS OF SIN," but rather "FREEDOM FROM SIN" or "DELIVERANCE FROM SIN." This phrase literally speaks of our rescue and release FROM our bondage to sin. God is declaring us divorced from our "menage a trois" marriage to sin, Satan and the spirit of the world. Certainly, God has no unforgiveness toward us, and we need to know that, lest our hearts condemn us from boldly coming to the throne of grace in time of need. But, the blood of Jesus wasn't spilt so that God would no longer be disgusted, hateful, or mad at us. Rather, Jesus allowed His blood to be shed so that we ALL could and would have complete full and final DELIVERANCE from every vile cause and effect of sin.

So here is my point. If we substitute "FREEDOM FROM SIN" or "DELIVERANCE FROM SIN" for "FORGIVENESS OF SIN" in the New Testament passages cited above, then the Cross becomes clearer in scope and purpose. Jesus came to earth to restore mankind to full fellowship with God by delivering ALL men from ALL sin for ALL time. THE WORK OF THE CROSS WASN'T JUST TO ASSURE US WE ARE "FORGIVEN FOR" OUR SINS, BUT RATHER TO SHOW US WE ARE "DELIVERED FROM" OUR SINS. I can know I am forgiven of a sin, and that is great, but I can still be in utter bondage to the sin itself and go on repeating it till the cows come home. Consider addicts, alcoholics and wife beaters, who though are repeatedly forgiven by those they harm, continue to engage in the destructive conduct. Jesus came, died and rose again SO THAT we would be COMPLETELY rescued from any and all sin-bondages. Again, knowing we are "forgiven" is wonderful, but knowing we are "delivered" from the POWER of sin, death and hell is even better.

Seen from this angle, we now can see how the blood of Jesus and the Spirit of Christ are one. The delivering power of the indwelling Holy Spirit IS the blood of Jesus at work. Jesus' life, His Spirit, His blood, His anointing, ALL speak of providing us the same thing----- our FREEDOM FROM SIN. This freedom comes from an exchange of inner cores, a complete remodeling of our hearts' Holy of Holies. Ezekiel says the New Covenant consists of God first giving us a "cleansing," then a "new heart," then a "new spirit" and THEN "His Spirit" to live within us, and that it is HIS SPIRIT which will empower us and "cause" us to "walk" in God's ways. Ezekiel 36:25-27.

The imagery here, one that Andrew Murray frequently used, is one of God first cleansing our Temple, then restoring our inner courts, then renewing our interior Holy of Holies. The end result? We are now a proper Temple of God READY TO RECEIVE the Spirit fully into habitation. "What? know ye not that your body is the Temple of the Holy

Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" 1 Corinthians 6:19. So when Jesus poured His own Holy blood (see Hebrews 9) on the Heavenly "mercy seat" when He ascended to His Father, was Jesus not also simultaneously pouring His Spirit out onto OUR inner "mercy seats" to indwell us with His love and power. His blood shed FOR us now becomes the Holy Spirit living IN us. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US" Ephesians 3:20.

I see the blood of Jesus as a "delivery system" of God's salvation. Any manifestation of power must have a delivery system. Blood literally serves as a delivery system for the human body to DELIVER oxygen to the various tissues of the body. I see the blood of Jesus delivering the full access and oxygenation of the Spirit into every corner of our being. The definition of the word "Spirit," interestingly enough, means breath, which of course is how we intake oxygen into our blood stream. What the blood delivers, the Spirit manifests. What the blood transports, the Spirit provides. What the blood accesses, the Spirit strengthens. Jesus sweated blood resisting sin. He sacrificed His blood to give US access to His Spirit, the EXACT SAME access He had as the Son of Man. As with most things I see these days, this whole issue is about effectively receiving the permanent indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

The BLOOD OF JESUS is God's "delivery system" of salvation to all of us. It delivers us FROM sin and death TO holiness and love. The MAJOR part of this deliverance was Jesus REPLACING the rotten double-minded core in our soul WITH Jesus' healthy single-minded core in His soul. He first absorbed all our radioactively toxic soul-cores on the Cross. THEN, when He poured out His own blood on the Heavenly mercy seat, the pouring continued at Pentecost as Jesus' poured out His Spirit as described in Acts 2. At Pentecost, Jesus poured out His Spirit onto and into the hearts of men.

At the Cross, Jesus shed His pristine blood FOR us. But at Pentecost, Jesus' blood transmuted to become His Spirit living WITHIN us. Jesus, through this sacrifice, took away our sin-natures and replaced them with HIS pristine faith, HIS pristine mind, and HIS pristine nature. We were enabled by Jesus to become "partakers of the divine nature" 2 Peter 1:4. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

Do you see? The one crucial thing we were missing was the one crucial thing Jesus dared and died to deliver to us---- the ability to become a Temple of God by permanently HOUSING the Holy Spirit within us. No Old Testament saint COULD do this. Every New Testament saint CAN do this. But this is ONLY because Jesus sacrificed His blossoming soul FOR our withering soul. Jesus modeled this for us as the Son of Man. His soul PERFECTLY POSTURED AND PERMITTED the Holy Spirit to descend upon Him and permanently reside within Him. See Matthew 3:16-4:1.

Before the Cross, man's problem was that his soul's core was rotten in it's Holy of Holies, rotten in the sense that it would not allow/believe/receive God to centrally inhabit

its most vital part-- its throne room reserved for God only, the Holy of Holies. We were created to be Temples of the Holy Ghost, but Temples that could only be permanently filled through wholehearted and willing intercourse by faith with our Husband-Creator. Mankind instead chose to let Satan, aka the spirit of the world, be our soul's lover and the INHABITER of our Holy of Holies.

Until this spirit of the world could be ENTIRELY removed and evicted from our Holy Place, men simply could not wholeheartedly receive the seed of God permanently into the core of their being. Men might be longing for God on some level, but when God would move to penetrate them, their thoughts and corrupt core desire sooner or later would return to their object of true affection--- the spirit of the world--- its ways, its lusts, its thinking, its pride. God's attempted intercourses (whether it be through the giving of the Law, the building of the Temple or through countless saving deliverances or penetrating prophecies) would then be rejected/pushed away.

The Old Testament saints simply could not receive the intercourse with God necessary to become living Temples of God.

The tragic result was that God's saving seed was never fully received by men, all because at their deepest core levels, they never achieved wholehearted orgasmic desire for God. The great commandment tells us that only the orgasmic desire of our ENTIRE being can possibly and properly receive the Holy Spirit into our free soul. Anything LESS than the orgasmic desire of our whole being means some part of us is still in love with our cosmic kidnapper in some sick sort of Stockholm Syndrome dynamic.

In the OT, the outer court of man's soul could conduct SOME religious activity, and on occasion God's Spirit could even touch the inner court of some Old Testament saints like David, Abraham and Moses. But God's Spirit NEVER permanently inhabited ANY Old Testament saint in the CORE of their soul, their Holy of Holies in other words. In John 14:17, Jesus clearly says that the Holy Spirit was WITH the the disciples THEN (prior to the Cross and Pentecost) but not yet IN the disciples. But Jesus promised in that same verse that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would SOON come to be INSIDE them in an abiding and permanent sense, a promise fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to inhabit men as Temples of God.

So, man's corporate dilemma was that he was, at the core level in his soul's Holy of Holies, ultimately UNWILLING and thus UNABLE to be a Temple of God. No man was wholehearted, wholeminded, or wholebodied enough to make an ABIDING ROOM for GOD to RESIDE IN CONTINUALLY. Man's soul could receive temporary visitations for God's Spirit, but these were all partial, limited and transitory. Band aids, but no permanent healing from sin was possible, not because God wasn't willing, but because man wasn't.

So, the problem was that man had a diseased core voluntarily given over to Satan's spirit of the world. It Was not so obvious that all men consciously loved Satan by name, but they all certainly loved Satan's worldly, fleshly and demonic ways of operating. In

fact, they were largely unconscious of Satan's role as the ruler of this world. Like a repressed memory, Satan's actual personage was sunken into our individual and collective sub-consciousness reserved for unspoken fears and dark nightmares. But, though Satan's visage was hidden from our surface perceptions, still all men willingly thrived on Satan's spirit of pride and lust which continued to motivate the destructive actions of men, demons and fallen nature. And Satan ruled.

But then came Jesus to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. Where all men had failed, Jesus succeeded! Jesus' life as the Son of Man modeled constant perfect orgasmic desire for God with His whole free-being. The result? The Holy Spirit was able for the first time EVER to fully house Himself within a man--- the man Christ Jesus. Then, at the Cross, Jesus transacted what theologians call "THE GREAT EXCHANGE."

Jesus exchanged our old corrupt Spirit-rejecting nature with His new divine Spirit-receiving nature. Jesus became our sin that we might become His righteousness. Isaiah 53:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus became poor that we might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9. Jesus became a curse that we might become a blessing. Galatians 3:13-14. Jesus took our sickness that we might take His divine health. Isaiah 53:4-5. Jesus tasted our death that we could taste His life. Hebrews 2:9. Jesus consumed our old corrupt nature that we could partake fully of His new divine nature. Colossians 3:9-10; 2 Peter 1:4. Jesus became the Son of Man that we might become the Son of God. John 1:12; 1 John 3:1; John 3:13-17. In sum, Jesus translated us from Satan's kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light by GIVING US HIS HOLY OF HOLIES, that is to say, Jesus gave us His CORE RECEPTIVITY to the HOLY SPIRIT. Jesus gave us HIS orgasmic desire to love, believe and obey God! This was God's deliverance for mankind. It's time we use it. It's time we believe it.

THE BLOOD AND THE SPIRIT ARE ONE!

QUESTION 14: IN WHAT SENSE IS JESUS OUR HEALER?

POULTICE is a wonderful word. It vibrantly captures Jesus' healing work at the Cross in a new and fresh way. A POULTICE is a soft, ABSORBENT and moist mass, which is often heated and medicated. It is carefully spread over a wound, painful part or infected area of the body. The POULTICE then "draws out" the poison from the wound or body. The end result is that the body is cleansed of harmful toxins. POULTICE is also a term used for commercial products which can remove stains from porous stones such as marble or granite. So, POULTICE carries with it the related concepts of "poison and stain removal."

Snake and spider bites have been treated with poultices for thousands of years. Poison oak, poison ivy and even boils have also long been treated by poultices. POULTICES are called "poison pullers" because they pull poison away from infected areas by ABSORBING THE POISON INTO THEMSELVES. Epsom salt is a poultice, which

combined with a bath and an exfoliating loofah sponge, draws out toxins through the pores of the skin. Other poultices include chewing tobacco, tea tree oil, castor oil, aspirin pastes, baking soda pastes, garlic cloves, raw cabbage, echinacea, ashes, mashed pumpkins, bran, cereals and mustard plants.

Most interesting though, is the fact that bread is one of the more common poultices. This is because of its absorbent quality. Bread is packed into the wound, and then covered with a piece of sacking before being bandaged onto the site. Isn't it amazing that both "salt" and "bread" are common poultices, because Jesus uses these exact two items to describe Himself and us. Jesus refers to Himself as "the bread of life," while He calls us "the salt of the earth."

One application of these terms speaks to the anointing that both Jesus and the Church have to heal the world. It is easy to see Jesus as the ultimate **POULTICE FOR ALL OUR SINS AND SICKNESSES**. Consider the following prophetic passage where Isaiah describes Jesus' absorption of all our sins. "Surely He hath borne our griefs (lit. sicknesses), and carried our sorrows (lit. pains).... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.... because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Isaiah 53:4-5,12. What a perfect passage to describe Jesus as our **POULTICE!**

Jesus, as the bread of life, became the **POULTICE** which was laid over all our sins and sicknesses at the Cross. Jesus then **ABSORBED** our each and every sin-toxin into Himself. He absorbed every affliction of our spirits, souls and bodies. He "pulled out" every poisonous thought, impulse or wicked desire from our minds and hearts. He "pulled out" every sickness which has ever affixed itself to the human body. He "pulled out" every Satanic thorn imbedded in our flesh because of the access our sin gave the devil. He absorbed **ALL** our sins and sicknesses onto and into Himself.

As the Apostle Peter said in referring to Jesus, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." 1 Peter 2:24. So we, as the salt of the world, should quickly and fervently apply by the laying on of believing hands the **POULTICE** of the Gospel onto every sin, sickness or demonic obstruction we encounter. Jesus at the Cross absorbed all evil onto Himself, both its causes and effects. All we have to do to receive this great healing truth is to **BELIEVE** this great healing truth.

As Spiritual medics, we all carry the great panacea for all situations in the pouch of our hearts. Toward all we encounter, we possess the Gospel **POULTICE** of Jesus to tenderly apply to every human wound and firmly apply to every evil circumstance. In fact, the **POULTICE** was already applied 2,000 years ago to **ALL** our wounds. All that remains is our faith's recognition of it.

Once we believe it, the full MANIFESTATION of our healing WILL occur, and that right speedily. We will proclaim, along with King David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine inequities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things so that thy youth is renewed as the eagle's." Psalm 103:1-5. And remember, POULTICES not only absorb the presence of poison, but they also remove the stains left behind. All the stains of our shame, guilt and condemnation are no more. Jesus heroically absorbed away all OUR pain and poison onto Himself. Our Hero from Heaven! Hallelujah!

QUESTION 15: DID JESUS NEED TO DIE ON THE CROSS TO SAVE US?

God, as a being of perfect love, is non-coercive. He gave man a measure of free will, of free being, of free yielding. True love can only exist in this soil of free response, or else we are not capable of experiencing true love. If love is FORCED, then we are, as C. S. Lewis said, nothing more than automatons, mere robots, mechanically following our forced programming.

But, true love NEVER forces the other to love back. 1 Corinthians 13 paints the picture well. The freedom He gives us He will not rape, violate or take back. God will woo us, convince us, exhort us, illuminate us and sing to us in thousand different tones of His matchless love. But He won't and can't EVER force us to receive His love or return our love to Him. He will bless, help and protect us as much as the dynamic of a free creation allows, but WITHOUT ever violating our free response.

Now here is the predicament. The First Adam forfeited our God-given gift of "free-response" ability by giving it "freely away" to another, our kidnapper, Satan. And WE have been ratifying Adam's choice ever since. Worse than that, we have fallen in love with our kidnapper, perhaps not always with a surface awareness, but we have fallen into a sick, twisted, and subconscious love with the Satanic Prince of this world. We have daily intercourse with Satan's feelings, his thoughts, his plans, his negativity, his hostility, his bitterness, his jealousy, his pettiness, his cajoling lies, his oppressions, his diseases, and his spirit of "schadenfreude" which draws perverse pleasure at others' pain.

God "needs" our full and free consent to wholly save, cleanse and rescue us from our kidnapper with whom we have entered into a co-dependent Stockholm Syndrome relationship. So, how does the Cross help meet this need? Well, without the Cross, we are unable to fully consent to God's whole rescue because we have given a significant portion our will, desire and dominion over to the will and control of another--- Satan. We are all, without God's full indwelling and sanctifying power, double-minded doubters who

"oppose themselves" and are in "the snare of the devil...taken captive by him at HIS will." 2 Timothy 2:24.

This is why 1 John 5:18-19 says the whole world lies in Satan's power, because WE have not only freely GIVEN the dominion of it to him, the free dominion God gave Adam originally, but we have also fallen into sick love with Satan and we subconsciously WANT him to KEEP that dominion. Like an abused and battered lover, we keep coming back to our Satanic tormentor because we think we can't live without him.

THIS is why nobody before the Cross could be permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They could repent for a season, partially and temporarily, but their ingrained love for Satan and his ways would always bar God from coming into them at a deep enough level to wholly cleanse and sanctify them. GOD "NEEDS" OUR FREE ACCESS, OUR HEART'S CONSENT, OUR SOUL'S ENTIRE YIELDING TO THE LORD TO DO A DEEP AND PERMANENT WORK IN US. BUT, UNLESS AND UNTIL A RANSOM WAS PAID TO SATAN, MAN'S WILLPOWER WOULD REMAIN IN BONDAGE AND UNABLE TO ALLOW GOD'S SPIRIT FULL AND ABIDING ACCESS. The ransom Satan demanded? Jesus' death.

We are called to be temples of the Holy Ghost, both individually and corporately, BUT we have rejected God from having FREE and COMPLETE and PERMANENT access to us. We have LOCKED our "heart of hearts" away from God and given Satan the KEY.

This is where the Ransom theory of the atonement brings a great truth. Satan would agree to return the key back to mankind so that they could again freely choose who they would wholeheartedly serve again. Satan's price? The death of Jesus on the Cross, physically killed by the very ones He came to help. Jesus came "to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28.

Satan demanded the life of Jesus. God gave it so that the sons of men could be restored to the level of unencumbered freedom they had in the garden. It was a no-lose scenario for Satan by his reckoning. God is killed, or at least part of the Godhead is killed. Men themselves under his domain do the killing out of hatred toward God. And although mankind may "recover" the missing portion of their free wills as a result, Satan was unconcerned because what he had done once in luring dominion away from Adam, he could surely do again. Satan thought it was a flawless plan.

If God had rejected the Ransom price, then things would have remained the same to this day. Pentecost would never have followed. God would still be unable to dwell in man, and we would we all be living under the law, a law which Satan knows we could never fully keep or understand because he still owned the key to our wholeheartedness which we had freely given him. The veil would still be up, all the doors of men still locked to God, and all their hearts and minds still enslaved to Satan. Under that scenario, God might still have partial and remote access into men's lives to bless them to a degree, but He would still always lack their full consent to do the deep work needed to wholly save and restore them.

BUT JESUS PAID THE RANSOM. God's nature would never coerce or force us to change our mind (literally "repent") to take back dominion from Satan. Thus, we were, before the Cross, UNABLE to fully repent and GIVE God the NEEDED permission to sanctify us wholly, spirit, soul and body. But God had a plan to save us, even as Satan had a plan. These plans met at Golgotha. We always need to remember that TWO plans were simultaneously in conflict with each other. God's plan won the day!

God NEEDED Jesus to die as a ransom SO THAT the REST of His plan could then be put in effect, a plan Satan didn't see coming, a plan which would save all His lost children. God didn't send the violence, but He did pay the ransom, which then SACRIFICIALLY allowed the violence to occur. The ransom allowed Jesus to be willingly injected with every sin virus known to the sons of men. He ABSORBED every evil, every sickness, every pain, every oppression, every death-dealing dynamic Satan had created to torture and destroy mankind as the God of this world. All of it was flushed into Jesus veins to kill Him. And it did kill Him. BUT, IT DID SOMETHING ELSE, SOMETHING WONDERFUL... IT BROUGHT BOTH "HIM" and "US" BACK TO LIFE! Jesus' blood absorbed all our sin, then overcame it with the power of life which flows in His veins. Not only was He resurrected from death, but so were we--- forever!

QUESTION 16: JESUS VERSUS MOSES: WHO WOULD WIN AN ARM WRESTLING MATCH?

"For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.... And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant..." Hebrews 13:18-24

These verses above show something drastically different between Moses' vision of approaching God and Jesus' vision of approaching God. Moses' mountain is dark, threatening and frightening. Jesus' mountain is welcoming, accessible and vibrant with life. Same God, but two grossly different perceptions of Him. These two mountains still exist today in every man, like two huge arms wrestling for supremacy within our hearts.

Ridiculous you say! Jesus would never arm wrestle Moses. I have news for you. They arm wrestle every day in your thoughts. The incredible thing is that your faith determines who wins. If you let Moses and the law strong-arm your thinking, then you will walk in the ministry of intimidation, accusation and condemnation (2Corinthians 3:9). But, if you trust in the strong arm and Spirit of Jesus to renew your mind, you will walk in grace, mercy and forgiveness.

When I say Moses, I refer not so much to Moses the man as to Moses the symbol and founder of a particular way of being, a particular way of relating to God, a particular way of approaching God, a particular way of thinking about God, a particular way called the Law of Moses. In other words, Moses is the personification of the Old Testament approach to God.

If Jesus is the New Covenant personification of "the way" into blessing, truth and life (John 14:6), then Moses is the Old Covenant personification of "the way" into cursing, wrath, and death. I know this is a strong statement but it is a crucial New Testament truth. Even though the law of Moses promised it could lead to blessing, it could not deliver because, as James 2:10 tells us, if anyone violates the law in ANY way, they are guilty of failing the whole law in EVERY way. Since Scripture is clear that no man can keep the law entire (Galatians 3:10-11), then Moses' law becomes a huge death trap.

Moses had some great qualities, but he was not a Holy Ghost filled New Covenant believer. Something was deeply lacking in Moses, as it was in every Old Testament believer. They all lived by their OWN righteousness and NOT by the righteousness which is of God (Romans 10:3).

Jesus now imparts His very own righteousness to live within us by the Holy Spirit. Thus, we as New Covenant believers have continual inner access to live BY THE FAITH OF JESUS HIMSELF (Galatians 2:20). We no longer have to strive living by our own efforts, works and understanding. Jesus wants us to rest in his finished work and to receive His greatest gift of all---His very divine nature to dwell within us and guide us in all our ways. Praise God we are no longer under the law of self-righteousness but we are under the grace of Christ-righteousness. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John 1:18.

Moses had a problem. He could not get a 360 degree view of God's goodness. When Moses attempted to see the Lord's goodness, he could only see it from behind and at a distance (Exodus 33:18-23). Why? What was the issue here? If you only see someone's character from behind and at a distance, it can be rightly questioned how well you really know that person. The problem with Moses is that he did not have a full frontal view of God's goodness revealed only in Jesus Christ, so he could not process and manifest the true nature of God accurately and without distortion. Moses would often fill in the gaps of what he didn't know about God's nature with his own wrath and suppositions.

Moses lacked Christ-righteousness and thus lacked the ability to see God in pure form. Moses may have been the best man in the land in his own righteousness, but that was still as filthy rags compared to the righteousness which is of God. Moses had a huge ANGER problem (Numbers 20:1-12; Exodus 2:11-14), which ultimately poisoned his ability to faithfully translate God's character to the people.

In fact, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of this very reason---he misrepresented the nature of God. Numbers 20:1-12 tells the story. God instructed Moses to speak to a desert rock, supernaturally commanding it to gush out water for His parched people. What a miracle of love God sought to display for His people!

But Moses then wrongly mixed God's word with his own frustration and anger at the people. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses violently struck the rock with his rod, thus giving the people the impression that God Himself was angry and disgusted with them. The water did gush, but in a spirit of terror rather than the spirit of awe and love God intended. No wonder the people feared God's temper so!

Makes you wonder how many other times what Moses shared as the word of God was partially tinged with his own wrath. This sin can't be overemphasized for it is what kept Moses OUT OF THE PROMISED LAND INHERITANCE. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, BECAUSE YE BELIEVED ME NOT, TO SANCTIFY ME IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, therefore YE SHALL NOT BRING THIS CONGREGATION INTO THE LAND WHICH I HAVE GIVEN THEM." Numbers 20:12.

Consider the following amazing statements about Moses' Law: "by Jesus everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts 13:39

"the law is not of faith..." Galatians 3:12

"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." 1 Corinthians 15:56

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse..." Galatians 3:10

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law..." Galatians 3:13

"But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith." Galatians 3:11

"the law worketh wrath..." Romans 4:15

These verses show that Moses' law had the same problem Moses did---ANGER. The law works wrath. Wrath works hatred. Hatred works cursing. Cursing brings all forms of sin and death. Had Moses properly translated the law in tone and spirit, without wrath in other words, do you know what would have been written on those tablets Moses came down the mountain holding in both arms? Two words---JESUS CHRIST! Jesus is the pitch perfect tone and spirit of the law. Jesus fulfills the law as the pure manifestation of it. Moses' law is not the LOGOS of God. Jesus is the LOGOS. Moses' law is a distorted translation of Jesus Christ----distorted by Moses' unholy anger and partial belief.

Moses' law produces Moses' mountain described in Hebrews 13 above. It is a dark place where wrath and fear rule. God's image is so distorted here that He seems monstrous and bipolar, saving men one moment, only to kill them the next. This so pervaded the Old Testament that they actually believed they would die if they saw God face to face. They thought they must be super-sanctified BEFORE they were worthy to see God. Sounds pious until the silliness of this thought sinks in.

WE DON'T SEE GOD WHEN WE HAVE MADE OURSELVES HOLY ENOUGH ACCORDING TO MOSES' LAW. RATHER, LOOKING AT GOD FIRST IN FAITH IS THE ONLY WAY TO THEN BECOME HOLY. 2 Corinthians 3:18 verifies this. God longs for all people to ascend Mount Zion to see Him in all His glory. He hides nothing from His children. His goodness awaits to bless you with a thousand charms.

Don't touch Moses' dark mountain with the thoughts of your heart. Let Jesus' strong arm put all thoughts of anger, condemnation and wrath down flat on the table. Jesus' mountain, Jesus' vision, Jesus' goodness, Jesus' love----all is better, stronger, sweeter, higher and deeper than anything and everything found in Moses' law.

When I went through my dark crisis last year, I let bitterness toward and from others move my heart to Moses' dark mountain. Here I could live in wrath and hate and revenge. I could call on God's anger to smite down my enemies and make myself sound the victim, rather than the chief sinner which I was. I desperately needed forgiveness, but I wanted to hate more. I know Moses' mountain all too well.

But in Jesus name, I am now cleaving to the arm of the Lord and to His mountain of goodness. But for me to camp out on Mount Zion, I have to take my enemies with me. I can't let my heart have ill will and leave them back on Moses' mount. Even if they haven't yet ascended Mount Zion themselves, if I keep tender thoughts of blessing and goodwill toward them in my heart, this can release angelic resources to assist them to find Mount Zion for themselves. Plus it keeps my heart pure and free from wrath. I can't really ascend Mount Zion if I harbor anger toward my enemies.

God loves us all on this mountain. God has forgiveness waiting for all on this glorious mountain. Isaiah asked, "Who has known the arm of the Lord?" The answer depends on where your faith focuses in this great arm wrestling match within.

Put your faith in Jesus' arm to defeat Moses' arm in this wrestling match. The victor in arm wrestling matches is said to go "over the top" when he slams his opponent's arm down flat on the table in defeat. Are you ready to go "over the top" with Mount Zion and slam flat Moses' mountain of wrath, fear, darkness and despair. Let "YES AND AMEN" be our daily answer to this challenge!

QUESTION 17: WHAT SHOULD WE NEVER TELL THE CHILDREN OF DISASTER VICTIMS?

Beware today's spiritual Pied Pipers who beguile children with WRATH-INFESTED lies about God's nature and character. Consider this quote from one such famous Pied

Piper as to what he would minister to the devastated children victimized in the wake of the Twin Towers disaster of 9/11:

"I'm coming to those families and I'm saying when they ask me, "Do you think God ordained the death of my daddy?" I say, "Yes. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.... But the very power by which GOD GOVERNS ALL EVILS enables Him to govern your life.... Where would we turn if we didn't have a God to help us deal with the very evils that He has ordained come into our lives?" From the book DESIRING GOD. This particular Pied Piper goes on to say that since even the wind obeys Jesus, He could have "easily blown those planes off course by a little puff of wind, and He didn't do it. Therefore God was right there, ordaining that this happen, because He could have stopped it, just like that."

Now listen to this particular Pied Piper's bog where he recounts a conversation he had with his own 11 year old daughter in the wake of a local bridge collapse where 13 people were killed:

"We prayed during our family devotions. Talitha (11 years old) and Noel and I prayed earnestly for the families affected by the calamity and for the others in our city. Talitha prayed, 'Please don't let anyone blame God for this but give thanks that they were saved.' When I sat on her bed and tucked her in and blessed her and sang over her a few minutes ago, I said, 'You know Talitha, that was a good prayer because when people 'blame' God for something, they are angry with Him, and they are saying He has done something wrong. That's what blame means: accuse somebody of wrongdoing. BUT you and I know that God did not do anything wrong. God always does what is wise. And you know that God could have held up that bridge with one hand.' Talitha said, 'Yes, with His pinky.' 'Yes,' I said 'with his pinky. Which means that God had a purpose for not holding up that bridge, knowing all that would happen, and He is infinitely wise in all that he wills.'" Talitha said, 'Maybe he let it fall because he WANTED all the people of Minneapolis to FEAR Him. 'Yes, Talitha,' I said, ' I am sure that is one of the reasons God let the bridge fall.' I sang to her the song I always sing:

Come rest your head and nestle gently
And do not fear the dark of night.
Almighty God keeps watch intently
And guards your life with all his might.
Doubt not his love, nor power to keep,
He never fails, nor does He sleep."

I said, 'You know Talitha, that is true whether you die in a bridge collapse, or in a car accident, or from cancer, or terrorism, or old age. God always keeps you, even when you die. So you don't need to be afraid, do you?' 'No,' she shook her head. I leaned down and kissed her. 'Good night. I love you.'" DESIRING GOD blog, August 1, 2007.

THIS PIED PIPER'S RIDICULOUS BOTTOM-LINE PARAPHRASED: MY DEAR SWEET CHILDREN, God loves you, but He also ordains some of you to die of tsunami,

earthquake, cancer, rape, molestation, tornado, terrorism or any one of another hundred perils. God carefully chooses which poisons you will suffer and die from. This will make other people fear God when they see what mighty deaths He ordains to happen. Even though God refuses to save you when He so easily could, you are still to worship and bless Him because He will always protect and guard you from danger. Well, not in this lifetime maybe, but certainly in the next. Though He actually sends the earthquakes which kill thousands of kids your age each year, that still doesn't mean He doesn't love you or that He won't always perfectly protect you. Don't you dare think otherwise. Let me sing a song about how much God loves you and will never let any evil befall you. Well, not in this lifetime maybe, but certainly in the next. Here, let me sing another song to you about how much God protects you in all your ways. Just remember this one thing, everything that happens to you is God's will, even if it means losing your parents, losing your arms or legs, being molested by evil men, being drowned, or burned to death. God loves you so much, just remember that. That is why He ordains you to suffer all these evils. Let me just sing another song... (PARAPHRASE ENDED).

WHAT A NIGHTMARE! Jesus warned us against Pied Pipers who would "offend" children away from the truth of God's saving love. I can still hear John Wesley's famous response to the Pied Pipers of His day: "Your God is my Satan." Wesley believed Calvinism, the same doctrine this Pied Piper proudly teaches, was a spiritual cancer which deforms the image of God to such an extent that it makes Him out a monster. These poor children above are being corrupted by these Pied Piper songs, which appear to have sweet melodies but are poisoned with sinister lyrics. And who gets the glory here? The Pied Piper, not God. The Pied Piper is seen as a man of God who nobly preaches for us to accept and endure the hard hand of God's wrathful judgements upon the earth.

This is entirely consistent with this Pied Piper's views on tornadoes, tsunamis and earthquakes. See DESIRING blog entitled "Japan: After Empathy and Aid, People Want Answers." He believes earthquakes are from God, never Satan, because the earthquakes in the Bible were, in his opinion, from God. Piper depicts the earthquake and tsunami which devastated Japan in March of 2011 as, "God's unilateral taking of thousands of lives." This Pied Piper also famously claimed that God sent a tornado to warn the Lutherans not to accept gay clergy. As Greg Boyd noted in his rebuttal on this claim, this writer would have us believe that God caused this tornado to skip over sex-slave houses, abortion clinics, other churches guilty of greed, hypocrisy and apathy toward the poor, just to damage a steeple on a church where people were struggling with issues related to homosexuality.

This Pied Piper teaches, following his mentors John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, that God ordains evil so that people will glorify Him. God's purpose for evil, then, is self-glorification. It is a way of displaying His glory as He dispenses wrath and justice upon the earth by allowing certain people to suffer and die horribly for the evil He put in their hearts to do in the first place.

Consider Calvin's claim: "that thieves, murderers, and other evildoers, are instruments of divine providence, being employed by the Lord himself to execute the judgments which He has resolved to inflict." Institutes I, 17, 5. Consider Calvin again: "The devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as He permits, nay, unless in so far as He commands; that they are not only bound by His fetters but are even forced to do Him service." Institutes I, 17, 11. Thus, according to Piper and Calvin, God was judging the victims of 9/11 using the evil terrorists as His instruments of divine will. The terrorists only did what God COMMANDED them to do according to His divine purposes. God FORCED the terrorists to slit the pilots' throats from ear-to-ear before ramming their planes into both towers and killing thousands. Osama Bin Laden was God's SERVANT in all this horror.

Do you see? Calvinism outrageously claims that all evil which Satan conceives is solely at God's command and initiative Calvin was intellectually honest enough to admit there was no difference in his theology between God causing evil and God allowing evil. God's "permissions ARE His purposes," this Pied Piper claims in his blog cited above. God puts His necessary STAMP OF APPROVAL on EVERY SINGLE rape, molestation, murder, disaster, war, cancer, amputation, famine, plague and horror which ever befalls us. As Calvin said, "All events take place by God's sovereign appointment." Institutes, III, 23, 6.

Calvinism says that even though Satan entered Judas' heart to get him to betray Jesus, God had to first enter Satan's heart to THEN compel the devil to enter Judas. THIS IS INSANE! If God does all this, who needs Satan to begin with? But, this Pied Piper says you better believe this or else. In fact, during a teaching which is posted on YouTube under the title "Why does God allow Satan to live?" at around the 3 minute mark, this Pied Piper says that those who ultimately refuse to believe as he does, that God specifically regulates and ordains ALL evil events, reject the Biblical testimony and will themselves end up perishing forever in Hell.

DON'T LISTEN TO THIS PIED PIPER'S SONGS! DON'T LET HIM SING TO YOUR CHILDREN!

QUESTION 18: DID GOD EXECUTE KING HEROD?

No.

I believe the angel of the Lord came to warn Herod to repent. Like a fireman abruptly and urgently warns those oblivious inhabitants of a burning house to "GET OUT NOW," the angel of the Lord was warning Herod that his spiritual house was NOW on Satanic-fire and that it was about to collapse and crush him to death.

The Bible is full of angels delivering warnings of imminent Satanic wrath. Angels warned Paul, Peter, Joseph, Mary, Lot, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and many others of impending Satanic attack. Mankind, however, has always wrongly tended to shoot the messenger. An angel warning of Satanic wrath to come often gets blamed for bringing the wrath itself. That is as insane as blaming the heroic fireman, who is fervently warning us to escape the fire, for actually starting the fire itself. The Lord's angelic warnings are always given so that the listening party may escape the impending danger, whether it be by quick repentance or simple avoidance.

In a somewhat similar situation, Paul was literally knocked off his high horse by the Lord's light which revealed the gross sin of Paul in "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples" (Acts 9:1). Paul was abruptly warned, just as Herod was, of the gravity of his sin. The Lord revealed to Paul that he, in truth, had been persecuting and murdering the servants of God rather than the enemies of God. Paul was persecuting the Lord Himself!

But, though the severity of Herod's and Paul's sin was comparable, their respective willingness to repent was not. Whereas Herod despaired unto death for five days without finding a place of Godly repentance, Paul pivoted quickly and repented after a Godly sort (2 Corinthians 7:9-11; Hebrews 12:17). Herod, like Esau in Hebrews 12:17, could find no heartfelt place of true repentance, whereas Paul could and did. Herod in great despair "gave up the ghost," whereas Paul in great joy "received the Holy Ghost."

Now, let's take some time to look at the Herod passage more closely.

Satan was about to lay claim and kill Herod based on the access given him by the multitude of serious sins Herod committed. From killing the apostles, to putting himself forth as a god to be worshipped, to failing to give the true God any glory, Herod was in Satanic free-fall.

Herod had so pushed/grieved/quenched away the Lord's protective presence that Herod was now left totally raw and exposed to Satan's missiles. Herod was about to be pushed off a high cliff of pride to crash on Satan's rocks of sharp condemnation. He was about to literally "fall into the condemnation of the devil" (Timothy 3:6). The angel came to smite him with a warning SO THAT he might repent instead of being destroyed. Sadly, though Herod had five days to find repentance, he never did. And he died.

Based on Acts 12:1-25, many believe that this passage teaches that "the angel of the Lord smote" and killed Herod in cold blood. Herod, who was the then political king of the Jews, committed two major mistakes. First, he set himself against the early church, persecuting them through imprisonment and execution. Second, he allowed himself to be worshipped as a god without giving any glory to the Lord. Let's consider this challenging passage:

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of

unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains : and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he SMOTE Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands....

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord SMOTE him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." ~~~Acts 12:1-7, 21-23.

First, did you notice "the angel of the Lord" smote TWO men here, both Peter and Herod. The first "smote" merely woke Peter up so that he could escape his prison. This "smote" was clearly non-lethal and in fact was beneficial. It was an alarm, a warning to "wake up and smell the coffee" and to see what was happening.

However, the second "smote" of this same chapter at first glance appears to have killed Herod. Or did it? Does the verse literally say the angel killed Herod? No. The word "smote" in the original Greek is PATASSO (3960), which can mean to "knock gently." It is believed to be derived from the Greek PAIO (3817), which refers to a sting or hit of a single blow and is considered less violent than the normal term used for hard-hitting blows, which is the Greek TYPTO (5180).

The point here is that "smote" can easily mean nothing more than a non-injurious warning poke. But, didn't Herod die here? Yes, but NOT then and there. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Herod died long after the angel smote him. "He fell into the deepest sorrow; a severe pain also arose in his bowels, and he died after five days of illness." (Josephus, book 19, ch. 8,2). This sure sounds like Esau-like "worldly sorrow" which has many tears and much despair, BUT lacks any true faith and repentance toward God, the kind of Godly repentance described in 2 Corinthians 7:9-11.

Acts 12:23 says that after the angel smote Herod, he was "eaten of worms" and "gave up the ghost," but the passage gives no time context. This Greek word for "worms" is only used one other place in the New Testament, Mark 9:44-48, where its used to describe non-stop hellish torment.

So, whether Herod had literal worms or spiritual worms, he was suffering prolonged despair and deep anguish. This torment eventually resulted in Herod "giving up the ghost," a term used outside the Gospels only in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, two other unfortunates who, after beholding the full gravity of their sin, succumbed to the condemnation of the Devil and surrendered their souls to death. They too could

have repented, but did not. And to Peter's great shame, it was never offered or ministered to them by nearby Christians. Satan's condemnation kills!

This unique expression, "giving up the ghost," can sometimes describe the dead end of depression. For such unfortunate men, when they see the full gravity of their sin, amplified by Satan's spirit of condemnation, they then essentially surrender their lives to despair and worm-infested torment. The only role of an angel in this process is to try to preempt the destruction by first "smiting" these sinners into self-awareness, a sort of final "last ditch" warning to repent.

By splashing the water of conviction in their horrified faces, the angel is giving a final hand of aid to the sinner IF they will but take it. Some, like Paul, will repent before oncoming Satanic condemnation crushes them to death. But, if these awakened sinners reject the road of repentance, then their self-destructive shame take them the rest of the suicidal way.

Remember, God doesn't operate in death. Satan operates in death. (Jn. 10:10; Heb. 2:14). God only operates in life. Death and condemnation flood in to fill the vacuum created when we "quench" the Lord's protective presence away with our neglect and unbelief. Some inter-linear Bible versions call this sin-dynamic "pressuring out the Christ." Herod had continually "pressured out the Christ" by repeatedly sowing evil against His church.

Bad idea. Bad sowing. Even worse reaping to come. Besides killing Christians, Herod allowed himself to be worshiped as a God by pagans. (Acts 12:20-23). Herod was being promoted and worshipped as a god by the crowd at the very moment the angelic warning came.

Herod was a runaway sin-train giving Satan wide access to shoot deadly destructions at him both from the right and the left. The angel was there merely trying to tell him to "duck," but Herod refused. But, because the angel was at the scene of the crime gamely trying to prevent Herod's destruction, men now wrongly blame the angel for the killing. No, Satan's fingerprints are the only ones on the murder weapon of condemnation used here.

Many others believe there is another explanation of this passage which differs from mine above, and they may well be right. If the angel which struck Herod DID directly cause his sickness and death, then it would have to be a fallen angel which was wrongly attributed to the Lord, as was often done in the Old Testament. See THE FORGOTTEN KEY TO THE OLD TESTAMENT chapter for numerous cites on this well established point. I tend to think however, that this angel was "of" the Lord and did not cause Herod's death.

Again, I think the angel was a "last chance" messenger warning Herod of the gravity of his sin and the imminent Satanic wrath to come. As shown above, the word for "smote" was the same Greek word used when the angel "smote" awoke Peter from his sleep

just a few verses earlier. That smite didn't kill Peter, but it just warned him to wake up. Likewise, I think this angel woke up Herod to his sin, just like Paul got rudely awakened to his sin on the road to Damascus. Remember, Herod didn't die right away according to the historian Josephus, but became sick and deeply oppressed for five days before giving up the ghost.

I think this process describes an inner human despair that surrenders to Satanic condemnation and literally gives up on life. Had Paul not repented, I believe the same thing might have happened to him. I saw my mom literally give up on life when she got a cancer diagnosis. She died within days, even though the prognosis gave her well over a year to live. She had no hope.

At any rate, I think the angel was a fireman warning Herod to get out of the house Satan had set on fire all around him, and which was just about to collapse and crush him. Herod, rather than repenting and renewing his mind, stayed hopeless in the house paralyzed with guilt and despair. The house soon fell on Herod and crushed him to death with Satanic condemnation until he finally "gave up the ghost."

QUESTION 19: WHAT IS THE ONE THING JESUS SAYS WE ARE NEVER TO FORGET?

In Mark 6:52, the disciples were said to have "hardened hearts" because they failed to remember something, failed to consider something----- something crucial, something incredible, something powerful. What was the "forgotten" element which hardened them to the supernatural power of a supernatural God? THE MIRACLES OF THE LOAVES!

But why? Why is remembering these particular miracles so critical, so important? The answer lies in Mark 8:13-21. In verse 13, we see the disciples departed in a ship to "cross over" to Bethsaida. The problem was that they all had forgotten to bring bread and had only one loaf to share between them. In verse 17, Jesus discerned that they were REASONING IN UNBELIEF about having no bread. Jesus then challenged them:

"Why reason ye, because we have no bread? Perceive ye not, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? AND DO YE NOT REMEMBER?" vv 17-18.

So Jesus said here that their failure to REMEMBER something is costing them dearly---- costing them faith-vision, faith-hearing, and faith-understanding. The end result is a hardened heart unable to believe God for supernatural miracles. So WHAT was it they were supposed to remember, to consider, to see, to hear?

"When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto Him, twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how

many fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And He said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?" vv19-21.

Do you see? Jesus fed MORE (5,000 versus 4,000) with LESS (5 loaves versus 7 loaves) and had more LEFT OVER (12 baskets versus 7 baskets). Jesus does more with less. JESUS DOES MORE WITH LESS! What was the point the disciples were missing? With the mere one loaf the disciples had in the boat, Jesus could feed thousands, tens of thousands, even millions. With one crumb Jesus could feed the entire world BECAUSE He supernaturally does more with less.

The disciples were NOT considering the SUPERNATURAL POWER OF GOD to meet their EVERY need, even the simplest ones. Having their every need met was only a faith impulse away BECAUSE Jesus was WITH them. But the disciple's hardened hearts seemed to continually forget or neglect the ABUNDANT AVAILABILITY of Jesus' miracle working anointing. Of all His miracles, Jesus believed the Miracle of the Loaves was the most important one for us to constantly remember.

The good news for us is that Jesus is not just WITH us as He was the disciples, but Jesus is WITHIN us by the power of the Holy Ghost. His miracle anointing abides in us in 24/7. But, like the disciples, we too can be soooooo hardened to it. We can be blind, deaf and dull to the supernatural power of God to meet OUR every need. And not only to meet our every need, but also to leave "baskets" of abundance to overflow blessings to others.

Personally, I believe Jesus reveals the master key to the Miracle of the Loaves in the following verse: "And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he BLESSED (literally "eulogeo" meaning "to speak well of, thank, celebrate, bless and praise.") and brake, and gave the the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude." Matthew 14:19.

JESUS FOCUSED ON WHAT HE "DID" HAVE RATHER THAN ON WHAT HE DIDN'T HAVE. He could have said, "I don't have the bread to feed this huge crowd. We are in lack. How will this ever work out? Father, we are in trouble." No, Jesus gave thanks to heaven for what He DID have, the five loaves and two fish. This is the key. When we start from a position of lack by focusing on what is missing from the situation, we start to fret, panic, fear and harden.

But when we are thankful toward, speak well of, and give praise to heaven for the smallest of blessings we do have, THEN the supernatural power of God is released to MULTIPLY that blessing a thousandfold. Recently, I was praying for the Lord to bring me a wave of new clients. He quickly spoke to my heart THROUGH this passage that I needed to bless heaven for the clients I DO have, to value and esteem them, to honor them and speak well of them from my heart. If I did this, then the Lord said He would multiply them and to meet all my needs and more. I then applied myself for four days to do nothing but bless, give and show thanks for my current clients. On the fifth day, a

supernatural flood of new clients rushed into my office ALL DAY LONG, one right after another.

My eyes have been opened to this dynamic truth. I will not focus on lack ever again by mumbling, grumbling, complaining or fretting over what I am not doing or not possessing. Instead, I will pray in appreciation and toward heaven to bless and share what I do possess NOW, this very moment, knowing that God WILL supernaturally multiply it to richly meet every need around me.

This doesn't just apply to finances and food. In relationships, be openly thankful to God for the friends you DO have rather than the ones you don't. Instead of being disappointed in people, give thanks to God for their good qualities you DO recognize, no matter how small they appear. This will allow supernatural multiplication of blessings to spread over both them and you.

If you are struggling with illness, focus on the health you DO possess rather than on the symptoms you suffer from, even if your remaining health is just the size of a breadcrumb. Thank God you can stand, walk, breathe or even think. Start THERE with thanksgiving, blessing and devotion. THEN watch the Lord supernaturally multiply that health to you in all your other areas of need. It will work on every level of your life IF you give thanksgiving IN FAITH to heaven in blessing each and every good thing you NOW have. DONT FORGET THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES!!!!

QUESTION 20: DID JESUS DROWN ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE WORLD WITH A KILLER FLOOD? OR WAS IT SATAN?

SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT...

God drowned millions of babies and children in the worldwide flood in Noah's day.

Then God consigns those same babies and children to writhe in flames of torture for all eternity? Death by drowning followed by torture by fire forevveerrrrr.

Hmmm. Sounds like someone should call the Cosmic Child Protection Agency. And quick! There is a cosmic child abuser on the loose.

OR JUST MAYBE..... We have confused the nature and works of God with the nature and works of Satan. Jesus clears all this mistaken identity stuff up in the Bible if we will just let Him.

Jesus was clear that Satan has been the murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), that Satan has the power of death (John10:10; Hebrews 2:14), and that Jesus came to

destroy Satan's works by infusing divine life into every situation He encountered (1 John 3:8).

"Be not deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." James 1:16-17.

If you believe the Old Testament is to be read "by the letter" at all times, and that each Old Testament Scripture carries the exact same weight and depth of understanding as any and all New Testament Scripture, then you are forced to believe the following. Jesus killed a world full of children in the Old Testament. Jesus killed a nation full of Egyptian firstborn infants and children. Jesus killed a huge city full of children of all ages in Sodom and Gomorra, not to mention all the other children killed in the various Biblical bloodbaths, including even Israelite children under God's killing wrath.

Many would call all these infanticides judgment by a "holy God who cannot allow sin to go unpunished." But, that image hardly fits in with the Jesus the Holy Ghost now reveals, the same Jesus who loved and protected children so. And, as is commonly said, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Jesus saves children, He doesn't drown them, burn them, stone them or smash their heads against rocks as described in the Old Testaments. He is the same forever on this point.

Some would claim that the Old Testament passages I am citing are somehow being taken out of context. No they are not. God clearly killed them all, at least if you read it according to "the letter of Scripture." However, when we read by "the Spirit of Scripture," as Jesus did, and as Paul did when he allegorized numerous Old Testament passages to mean something other than just what they "literally" said, we see something else altogether.

Jesus came in the New Testament to reveal that Satan was NOT God's left hand of destructive wrath. Satan was a cosmic rebel who opposed God's will on every level, and in whose power the whole fallen world lies. 1 John 5:19. Satan was the Old Testament dispenser of death, not God. Hebrews 2:14. Judaism has always considered Satan to be the death angel. Jesus revealed that the destructive works the Old Testament attributed to God were, in reality, the destructions of Satan.

Judaism sees Satan as a friend to God, not an enemy. Do you think Satan was just twiddling his thumbs in the Old Testament while God did all his dirty work? Jesus laid it out for us in no uncertain terms. Stealing, killing and destroying is of the devil, not of God. John 10:10. Satan was the liar and murderer from the beginning, not God. John 8:44. Jesus came to expose Satan's methods, not adopt them. He came to destroy the works of Satan altogether. 1 John 3:8.

So, did God intentionally drown millions of children, women and men in Noah's day? No! Not then, not now, not ever. Then why does the Old Testament appear to say that He did?

Simply put, the Old Testament was written from a perspective which saw Satan as an obedient angel of God with a tough job, but who ultimately was just following the Lord's orders. Jesus, in contrast, revealed in His teachings and tone that Satan was violently OPPOSED to His Father's will RATHER than humbly submitted to it.

Read most any Jewish religious reference material on Satan, and you will see they believe that Satan was the death angel who smote all the Egyptian firstborn, supposedly at the Lord's command. And not just the Egyptians. Jews still believe that Satan is the grim reaper who ultimately kills all men at God's sole command. The book of Job shows Satan kills with sickness ("boils"), with nature ("a great wind"), with other violent men ("Sabeans with swords"), and with supernatural power ("fire from heaven"). Satan is a master assassin who kills a million different ways, but always, the Jews believe, at the express command of God.

As THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says, "Satan...is...identified with the ANGEL OF DEATH. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9.

So, the culprit in the world-wide flood is, according to Jewish thought, Satan. And they are RIGHT about THAT----- Satan's fingerprints are the ONLY ones found on the Genesis flood. But what the Jews, both ancient and modern, are WRONG about is their belief that Satan is an obedient angel merely doing what God expressly tells him to do.

In the New Testament, we get a significantly different picture. While Hebrews 2:14-15 confirms that Satan, as "the devil," does indeed have "the power of death," Jesus' purpose in bearing the cross was to "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Put even more bluntly in this passage, Jesus ascended the cross in order to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Jesus came to destroy the works of the destroyer. 1 John 3:8. But Jesus destroyed them not with His "alleged" counter-wrath, but with His sacrificial love. Jesus came to reveal that all forms of "death" and "violence" were enemies of God and never a part of His divine nature. 1 Corinthians 15:25-28 defines the dynamic of "death" as an "enemy" of God to be "put under His feet" until it's "destroyed."

So, if the Old Testament saints were confused and not able to differentiate the purposes of Satan and God, what does this imply about their ability to distinguish between the voices of God and the devil? Well, it allows for the absolute mother of all mistaken

identities--- confusing the voices of God and Satan--- or, just as tragic, mistakenly combining their TWO voices into ONE bipolar voice.

Like a high static radio, which sometimes receives two different signals at once, the Old Testament saints were hearing from both Yahweh and Satan, sometimes alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit, they could not distinguish between both voices, again just like a radio receiving two different stations although the dial is only on one setting. The Old Testament saints assumed both voices were from God, that both WERE God.

But, Jesus came to correct all misunderstandings about His Father. We have the anointing BECAUSE of Jesus to go back and properly divide Scripture, just like He did in Matthew 5:38-48. Jesus came to reveal His Father's light and Satan's darkness, something the Old Testament saints were clueless about. John 1:18.

So, in regard to the flood, what role did Satan play and what role did God play? Satan did the killing-- all of it. Why do we know this? Hebrews 2:14-15 says Satan has "the power of death," not God. God is not a killer-- period. He could not have sent the flood because the New Testament says He doesn't kill. But, Satan sure does. And I'm sure we agree that Satan was not off somewhere twiddling his thumbs in the Old Testament while God was wiping out the whole earth's population save one family. If God is the killer of evil men, who needs Satan? Jesus called Satan the "murderer from the beginning," not His heavenly Father.

Yet, what exact role did God play in the process?

I believe the event transpired as follows: Men continually sowed wickedness in the earth until their thoughts and imaginations were purely evil (Gen. 6:5). God foreknew their expanding unbelief and that Satan would have greater and greater access to afflict and destroy all evil men in 120 years. This was because they were continually quenching and "pressuring away" the Lord's protective Spirit by increasingly giving their hearts over to the devil (Gen. 6:3).

God warned His righteous Noah to build a protective Ark for Noah and his family to avoid the Satanic wrath to come. (Gen. 6:8-22). Satan continued to "accuse" God that He should repent of ever making mankind and that they had to be wiped out (Gen. 6:6-7). God responded that His righteous Noah would not fail and that his righteous seed would be preserved (Gen. 6:8). Satan released his killer flood and the wicked perished (Gen. 7:10-24). God's protective spirit contracted down to the size of Noah's ark and brought them through the flood and blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." (Gen. 9:1).

I freely admit to excavating, renovating and elevating Moses's version of the flood to comply with the New Testament understanding of God's role in the world. This is the only reading that keeps God from being clearly guilty of death, disaster and destruction. I don't believe the New Testament teaches that God directly causes natural disasters.

Such events are caused by Satan through access given him by men's sinful sowing. God's protective Spirit is eventually quenched away by the unbelief of men. God's protective hedge constricts and a constricts and constricts until the freewill of the men involved finally gets their way in turning themselves over to Satan's wrath. Then God is forced to withdraw and Satan is allowed space to execute his wrath through the curses of the law, a wrath which Revelation 12:12 says is "great upon the earth."

Some may say that 2 Peter 2:4-10 suggests that the New Testament confirms that God brought the flood of Noah on the world of the ungodly. However, in consulting two different interlinear Bibles, one by Paul McReynolds and the other by Jay P. Green, the passage is found to literally say that "the flood the world of irreverent ones having brought on."

In other words, this passage says that the flood was brought on by the sowing of wicked men. Men continually sowed the sin, thereby progressively quenching away and constricting down God's protective Spirit over the next one hundred and twenty years. Satan ultimately brought the full harvest of destruction, but God continued to protect righteous Noah.

Whenever the Old Testament literally, "by the dead letter" in other words, contradicts the New Testament image of God revealed by Jesus Christ, we are compelled and authorized to excavate, renovate and elevate its meaning to align with New Covenant truth. Jesus repeatedly did this exact thing, not only in Matthew 5, the sermon on the mount, but also in such passages as Luke 4:18-20, where Jesus edits the phrase "to declare the vengeance of our God" out of the Isaiah 61:1-2 passage He was quoting to declare the purpose of His ministry. He purged the wrath out of the passage in other words.

Our challenge is to stop reading the Bible just by context, and instead read it by Holy Spirit subtext. I believe 2 Corinthians 3 commissions us to do this very thing.

"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us ABLE MINISTERS of the new covenant, NOT 'of' the LETTER but 'of' the Spirit; for THE LETTER KILLS, but THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE." 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

Jesus is not a child-killer!
A child-thriller yes!
But a child-killer NEVER!

QUESTION 21: DID JESUS ENDORSE VIOLENCE BY HIS CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE AND HIS CURSING OF THE FIG TREE?

These two episodes are discussed together here because they are connected in time and purpose. Mark 11:12-26 indicates that Jesus cursed the fig tree just before entering Jerusalem to "cleanse the Temple" from the thieving "sellers and moneychangers." The next morning, Jesus revisited the fig tree to see that it had "dried up and withered from its roots" due to His earlier curse. Since the cleansing of the Temple is sandwiched between the cursing of the fig tree and its subsequent withering, it is clear these events are vitally linked. But before I explain their connection, I first want to make some preliminary points.

First, this passage is the most common Scripture cited for the proposition that Jesus DID engage in physical violence during His ministry. I once had a wrathful pastor use this passage to confidently claim that Jesus was like the martial arts film star Steven Seagal, violently chopping down opponents with "literal" kicks, punches and machine guns.

Sadly, I could see the unrighteous bloodlust in this pastor's eyes as he used this passage to create a monster I can only describe as KILLER JESUS. The bloodlust I saw in his eyes reminded me of paintings I have seen depicting the Roman gladiatorial games where the rabid crowd gives a frothing "thumbs-down" to fallen gladiators, a sign which required the victors to then slit the vanquished's throats. The crowd wanted violence. The pastor wanted violence. He used this Bible passage to claim Jesus wanted violence.

There is only one problem with that pastor's claim: it is absolutely groundless. Jesus hurt NO human being in this event, for if He had, He could and would have been LAWFULLY arrested, something the Jewish authorities had desperately wanted to happen. Mark 11:18 confirms that the scribes and chief pharisees wanted to destroy Him in this passage, so His breaking of the law by assaulting several Temple Jews would have given them all the ammunition they needed. But, this Scripture at no point claims that Jesus harmed ANY human at ANY time in this story. Jesus "knocked over" some tables and verbally "cast out" a group of profiteering thieves who had no right to be in the Temple in the first place.

And in fact, AFTER Jesus cleared the Temple of the thieves, look at WHO and WHAT immediately took their place. The "blind and lame" came into the Temple courts and "He healed them all" (Matthew 21:14). Then, a large group of "children" came and saw the healings and started "crying in the Temple, and saying Hosanna to the son of David." (Matthew 21:15-16). Jesus rejoiced at this and called what these children did "perfect praise." The point is that Jesus "cast out" the faithless, felonious and fruitless elements present in the Temple courts SO THAT they could be replaced with elements of fruitful faith and fervent worship.

This passage says that ALL there, including the chief priests and scribes, saw "the wonderful things that He did" (Matthew 21:15). This is hardly a mandate for KILLER JESUS is it? No, when we read the context of what REALLY happened here, we see it was a wonderful healing and worship revival rather than some sort of bloodbath where

Jesus is beating and brutalizing people. But, because our wrathful eyes are so trained to focus on violence, we take Jesus' actions totally out of context and ignore the "perfect praise" and "healing" ministry that resulted from Jesus' actions. The Matthew 21:1-17 version of events makes no mention EVER of anybody being harmed. It is as simple as that.

But, didn't Jesus take a whip and beat the money changers away? No, not at all. Matthew's and Mark's respective Gospel versions of this event (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:12-26) never even MENTION a whip. And while John's version does mention Jesus taking "a scourge of small cords" to drive "the sheep and oxen" from the Temple, commentators since the earliest centuries confirm, as have most modern translations, that this passage limits the scourging to just the sheep and cattle, and not to the men. (See Today's English Version; The Moffat Translation; The Darby Bible; The Goodspeed Bible; The Zurich Bible; The New Revised Standard Version; The World English Bible; The Authorized Standard Version; and commentators McGregor, Temple, Plummer and Strachan). These Bible versions and commentators connect the "all" in John 2:15 as referring to BOTH "all" the sheep and to "all" the cattle, but NOT to "all" the moneychangers.

These translators all believe that the proper Greek construction of this passage can refer to EITHER the sellers and moneychangers OR to the sheep and cattle, but not to both. The common sense context here makes the sheep and cattle the only sensible option, particularly since the following verse (v.16) has Jesus orally telling the remaining den of thieves to leave, an action hardly necessary if he had ALREADY whipped them all away. It is obvious that the cord of small knots was for the animals alone. But was this cruel to the animals? Not at all, particularly since they were all about to be sacrificially executed if Jesus had let them be. If nothing else, Jesus was giving the animals a reprieve to live another day.

The term used to describe Jesus' actions toward the moneychangers and sellers was that He "cast them out." To "cast out" merely means that Jesus commanded them out and away from the Temple, and in fact John 2:16 tells us that Jesus VERBALLY commanded the merchandisers to "take their things hence." Remember, Jesus spoke with an authoritative tone in His voice like no one had ever heard before (Matthew 7:29). He even bowled over several troops by just using His voice in John 18:6.

The bottom line is that to use this episode of Jesus cleansing the Temple, wherein He healed the lame and the blind in the midst of a cadre of children crying perfect praise in His Father's house, AS PROOF that Jesus used physical violence on men----- is simply ridiculous. If anything, it proves just the opposite. Jesus cleared the Temple courts WITHOUT sword or fist. Did He use aggression? Yes, certainly, but He did NOT use physical brutality. He was not KILLER JESUS!

Now, what about the cursing of the fig tree? Can this be used to justify the claim that God curses men to wither and die just as He did the fig tree? Certainly not! A plant is

NOT human, NOT sentient, and NOT made in the image of God. To use violence against a plant to justify violence against a human is outrageous and silly.

Moreover, the real meaning behind the cursing of the fig tree is directly connected to the cleansing of the Temple. Jesus, just before entering Jerusalem to cleanse the Temple of the sellers and moneychangers, first passes an unproductive fig tree (Mark 11:12-26). Jesus then tells the fig tree that no man shall ever eat its fruit again. He then proceeds into Jerusalem and cleanses the Temple as described above. He then leaves the city. The next day, Jesus passes the fig tree again and sees that it has dried up from its roots and died, all within 24 hours of Jesus first speaking to it.

So, what does this mean? Jesus was merely repeating, reinforcing and re-demonstrating to the disciples the exact same dynamic He revealed to them when He zealously cleansed the Temple. UNFRUITFULNESS MUST GO!

Jesus purged the unfruitful elements out of both the Temple and the fig tree. Jesus verbally rebuked the false and fruitless authorities out of His Father's house which had made it a den of thieves. He cast them out, then what IMMEDIATELY happens? Fruitfulness RUSHES in to fill the vacuum with the healing of the blind and lame combined with the perfected praise of the children described earlier. Do you see? Unfruitfulness is VERBALLY denounced SO THAT fruitfulness can return. So too with the fig tree. Jesus denounced the unfruitful fig tree SO THAT another fruitful fig tree could grow in that same spot.

This is why I believe the fig tree and the Temple-cleansing form a double-helix dynamic where Jesus is modeling the same exact message twice. He denounced the sellers and moneychangers so that fruitfulness would be restored to His Father's house, which it immediately was. He THEN repeated the lesson by denouncing a barren fig tree so that fruitfulness could likewise be restored to the area being taken up by the worthless plant.

The point of this passage is that Jesus aggressively, but not violently, purges the false identities out of creation which do not bear fruit---- demonstrated here by removing the false motivators out of His Temple, and then by removing the false plant which bears no fruit. Both the Temple and the fig tree had become empty husks---- false identities in other words. Jesus emptied the Temple of the false so He could fill it with the real. Jesus then removed the false fig tree so that a real one could grow in its place. Jesus is zealous that all things Godly MUST bear fruit.

So then, this passage is not about the KILLER JESUS, but rather about the HEALER JESUS! Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

QUESTION 22: "CSI" JERUSALEM: WHO MURDERED ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA?

Were Ananias and Sapphira killed by the Holy Spirit as many claim (Acts 5:1-11)? Well, the passage doesn't even "literally" say that God killed them, so we have to look closer at the passage's subtext to do a fair CSI investigation as to the true cause of their deaths.

Peter asked Sapphira in the literal Greek of verse 9, "Why did the two of you agree to pressure the Spirit?" (Word Study Greek-English New Testament, Paul R. McReynolds, Tyndall, pp. 441 (1999). In other words, why did you two push away the protective presence of God? The implication is clear then that Satan, not God, is the culprit here. Satan "filled their hearts" to lie, then Ananias and Sapphira quenched away God's protective presence with their sin, then Satan filled the vacuum in their hearts with his oppressive condemnation, and they both died.

McReynolds' interlinear translation of 1 Corinthians 10:9 describes this same dynamic. "But not we might PRESSURE OUT the Christ, just as some of them PRESSURED and by the snakes were destroyed." Interlinear translations can be a little awkward to our ear, but they often give us the gold of better understanding Scripture texts.

Do you see what this Acts passage now describes? Ananias and Sapphira's rampant neglect and disbelief toward God, combined with their fear toward their circumstances, all combined to do the following. **THEY PRESSURED OUT THE PROTECTIVE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND WERE DESTROYED BY SATAN.** And just how did Satan kill them? Below, we will see that Satan used his favorite weapons-- fear and condemnation-- to kill these two pathetic people.

But, how do we know God didn't kill them? Because Hebrews 2:14-15 says Satan has the power of death, not God. John 10:10 says Satan kills men, not God. 1 Corinthians 5:5 says Satan destroys the flesh of men, not God.

And actually, the passage doesn't say anybody actually killed them, but they themselves "gave up the ghost" (spirit) AFTER hearing Peter's words of condemnation. It may well be that they feared Peter's words so much that they just surrendered their will to live.

We all know, or have heard of, people who give up on life in despair, some gradually, others in an instant in time. Some "give up their spirit" because of a broken heart, or impending sickness or disaster. Perhaps they were so worried about their sin because it was one of the first of the church age, and they thought it was perhaps unforgivable.

In other words, it appears Annanias and Sapphira were condemned to death. But was this God's will? Was it God's best? Did Peter show them the same grace he himself received when he betrayed the Lord three times in one night? What if somebody in apostolic authority, James or John for instance, told Peter to essentially "drop dead" in the wake of his sin, might he also have given up the ghost?

Did Peter extend God's grace to them to NOT hold this sin to their account, as Jesus did, as the martyr Stephen did, or did he even try to minister repentance to them, to

counsel them, to pray for them, to intercede for them, to lay hands on them to be forgiven and healed, or any of the other things Scripture and later Church practice advised?

What about this passage? "Brethren , if a man be overtaken in a fault , ye which are spiritual , restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself , lest thou also be tempted ." Galatians 6:1.

Why, in Jesus' name, was the space to repent NOT offered to Ananias and Sapphira in this situation by Peter?

Matthew 18:15-17 instructs us how to FIRST go privately to one caught up in a trespass, THEN to go with other witnesses if the private correction is not received by the person, and only THEN to bring public confrontation if the person remains unrepentant. And even then, the worse punishment is excommunication, NOT murder.

Do you see? God's way is to confront a sin WITH the goal of restoration and repentance of the sinner, NOT summary execution. Why wasn't this gracious dynamic followed?

Was the spirit of these merciful passages just cited above followed by Peter? No, Peter appeared to quickly and immediately condemn them, after which he basically just stepped out of the way and let the Devil have them. If lying to the Holy Spirit by holding back some of our resources REALLY mandated immediate Holy Ghost execution, then how many of us would still be standing? How many of us would not have been executed long ago? Perhaps the morale of this passage is more about Peter's mercy-deficit than it is about Annaias and Sapphira's faith-deficit.

Peter was not perfect. He had a well known quick trigger when it came to anger or frustration. He was quick to use the physical sword to cut an ear off an approaching soldier. He was also quick to use the verbal sword, such as when he told Simon the sorcerer to perish on the spot along with his money. Perhaps, Peter was also quick here to likewise thrust a murderous impulse here to Ananias and Sapphira.

If Paul had the guts to "withstand Peter to his face" (Galatians 2:11) for possible spiritual error, shouldn't we too have the guts if, of course, the Holy Spirit so leads?

But, didn't great fear come on the church in the wake of these deaths? It can be argued that the "great fear" that came on the church in the wake of this event, and the subsequent healing of the sick from Peter's cast shadow, came more from men wrongly, excessively and fearfully elevating Peter rather than through the exercising of pure faith in Christ.

If we, as part of a young and inexperienced church body, saw a revered leader such as Peter appear to instill such fear that people dropped dead, literally scared and condemned to death, then we too might start to idolize his "shadow." His presence, word and opinion might supplant or displace our faith in Jesus. We might turn Peter into

an earthly Pope, kiss his ring, worship his shadow, etc. If people got legitimately healed from Peter's ministry, it was despite Peter's anger, not because of it.

And here is another thought. If the common interpretation is correct that God had Peter denounce Ananias and Sapphira to death for withholding truth and resources from the Holy Spirit, then Church history should be full of famous Christians who likewise verbally struck down and assassinated all the millions upon millions who have, at one time or another, withheld truth or resources from God ever since Ananias and Sapphira. In fact, we should still be seeing people regularly executed as a normal part of Church meetings and discipline.

But, that is not the case.

So, again, when Peter appears a little too quick on the trigger to tell people to "drop dead" for their transgressions (Sapphira and Simon in Acts 5 and 8), should we willing to withstand his actions if our conscience compels us?

Do we follow the Holy Ghost or Peter? Jesus or Peter? I honestly can't see Jesus telling anybody to drop dead on the spot. That ain't the way He rolled. Jesus might rattle their religious cage, but He never cursed someone to die on the spot. Be merciful seven times seventy, overcome evil with good, bless your enemy and pray for them that despitefully use you. Don't see "curse them to die or perish on the spot" on that list in Matthew 5:38-48.

And don't get me wrong, I love Peter, but are we to assume he was flawless in his every dealing? Paul sure didn't.

None of us are yet flawless in ministering the mercies of God. After telling Simon to "perish" along with his money, Simon asks Peter to pray for him that the things Peter spoke not happen to him. But, Scripture is silent as to whether Peter then prayed for him. I sure hope he did. I would definitely withstand Peter to his face if he didn't on that issue. Jesus is our model, not Peter.

These are all questions the Holy Spirit wants to minister to us. It is understandable that the infant Church might have less tolerance and patience than a more mature and experienced group of believers. I know when I was newly converted and freshly fervent in the Spirit, my tolerance level for others' unbelief was small. I would have been just as firm and ferocious as Peter. But, with time and maturity, and after suffering through many of my own grievous failures, my patience for people's shortcomings, sins, and failures has exponentially increased. I am not nearly as quick to pull the condemnation trigger as I used to be.

Paul had the courage to "withstand Peter to his face" when Peter was wrong (Galatians 2:11). Perhaps WE should "withstand Peter to his face" in this passage as well. But regardless, one thing is certain. God did not kill Ananias and Sapphira. Satan did. Satan was certainly working lies and crippling condemnation in their hearts, and possibly in the

hardening Peter's heart toward them as well which kept him from ministering protective mercy. But, Satan was the true assassin here any way you look at it.

QUESTION 23: DOES THE BIBLE SAY WE ARE TO "FEAR GOD WHO IS ABLE TO DESTROY BOTH BODY AND SOUL IN HELL?"

No.

This MISQUOTED passage is the perfect example of how we AUTOMATICALLY jump to the conclusion that death and destruction is from God.

First, the word "God" is nowhere in either of these passages.

"And I say unto you my friends , Be not afraid of them that kill the body , and after that have no more that they can do . But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell ; yea , I say unto you , Fear him." Luke 12:4-5.

"And fear not them which kill the body , but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28.

And yet, people seem to always PRESUME it is God to whom these passages are referring. Yet, I submit that once we take a deep breath and consult the Holy Spirit, we will see that these verses are obviously talking about Satan and NOT God.

SATAN is the one whose destructions we are to have a healthy caution of being "killed by," as Jude 9 warns. SATAN is the one who "destroys the flesh of men." 1 Corinthians 5:5; John 10:10. SATAN is the one who has "the power of death." Hebrews 2:14.

Repeat this ten times: SATAN HAS THE POWER OF DEATH, NOT GOD! JESUS TRUMPS SATAN'S POWER OF DEATH WITH HIS POWER OF LIFE!

Some may object to the idea that we are to "fear" Satan on any level. But, we don't need to be so tight in our use of the word "fear." Fear has many nuances attached to it, one of which is "to be wary of." I think the sense Jesus used it here is to "be wary of" Satan who destroys the body here on the earth and, afterward, the disbelieving soul in Hell.

In English, "fear" has many applications, many intensities, and many applications. So too in Greek, fear has many shades of meaning, from "pure terror" to "reverential awe" to "passively be alarmed." The last definition is the one I am proposing. Here is one (among many) nuanced English dictionary definition of fear: "An unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat."

The Greek word "phobeo" translated as "fear" in the Luke and Matthew passages cited above, has many applications. The Strong's Lexicon provided below lists the first application of this word as "passively being alarmed." That is exactly the sense in which I have been using it.

Strong's Hebrew and Greek Lexicons (C)

"5399

φοβέω phobéō

Verb fob-eh'-o

from (5401)

to frighten, i.e. (PASSIVELY) TO BE ALARMED; by analogy, to be in awe of, i.e. revere:--be (+ sore) afraid, fear (exceedingly), reverence.

to put to flight by terrifying (to scare away)

to put to flight, to flee

to fear, be afraid

to be struck with fear, to be seized with alarm

of those startled by strange sights or occurrences

of those struck with amazement

to fear, be afraid of one

to fear (i.e. hesitate) to do something (for fear of harm)

to reverence, venerate, to treat with deference or reverential obedience"

Moreover, below are multiple translations of the same word in 2 Corinthians 7:11, where the same word translated "fear" in the Matthew and Luke passage, is translated "alarm" here. The point is that a "passive state of alarm" is clearly one of the normal applications of this word. This term perfectly matches Peter's warning for us to be "sober and alert" toward Satan who prowls about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

"For see what eagerness this very thing — this sadness as God intended — has produced in you; what defense of yourselves, what indignation, what ALARM (phobon | φόβον | acc sg masc), what longing, what deep concern, what punishment! In everything you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." 2 Corinthians 7:11.

New International Version (©1984)

"See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what ALARM, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter."

New Living Translation (©2007)

"Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such ALARM, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong. You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right."

Weymouth New Testament

"For mark the effects of this very thing--your having sorrowed with a godly sorrow--what earnestness it has called forth in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what ALARM, what longing affection, what jealousy, what meting out of justice! You have completely wiped away reproach from yourselves in the matter."

Do you see? Repentance breeds a state of vigilant ALARM against the oncoming destructions of the devil, NOT the oncoming destructions of God!

Finally, we really need to allow the Holy Ghost to help us select the best and most God-honoring application of the word here. I John says perfect love casts out all fear, yet if the narrow definition is correct, perfect love won't cast out all fear because we will be in continual "terror" towards God for being able to destroy our bodies and souls in Hell. That just cant be right. God is not a torturing terrorist. Satan is.

Let me ask a question. Are we to be wary of (fearful of) oncoming drunk drivers, nearby rapists, lurking murderers, chaotic 18 wheelers suddenly crossing over into your oncoming lane of traffic and colliding into you. Sure we are to be wary of (fearful of) these scenarios, especially if they started to actually occur. This doesn't mean we curl up trembling in the fetal position, but it does mean we stay vigilant and intensely ready to dodge, duck and disarm dangerous situations.

If we think about it, why would and should we EVER be afraid of Jesus? Awestruck certainly, but why ever terrorized with fear? He is our rescuer, not our condemner! Yet, if you believe the original passage is NOT talking about Satan, then the only other interpretation is that God is the destroyer of men's flesh and souls in Hell, a prospect I find much more disturbing.

Jesus came to save us, not destroy us. Do we really believe we are not to be wary of Satan? 1 John 5 says the whole world is in Satan's power. Paul called him the god of this fallen world. Jesus called him the ruling prince of this fallen world. And yet, we are to not be wary, sober minded and cautiously alert to Satan's threat?

Satan is the one who kills both body and soul, NOT God. Jesus saved us from Satan's ability to kill our bodies and destroy our souls in Hell. He gave us the keys to the kingdom. The connection between Satan and Hell is long established in Church history.

Hell "is an intermediate place or state of the soul between death and final judgment." Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, edited by Everett Ferguson, p. 417 (Garland). However, Hell is much more than just the abode of the dead. Satan rules in Hell. Hell is the symbolic capital city of Satan's kingdom of darkness and death.

"I will build my church; and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be

loosed in heaven." Matt. 16:18-19. These verses obviously link "Hell" with "Satan's kingdom" as the very real enemy of His Church.

Moreover, we are empowered to bind this Satanic kingdom with our keys of authority so that men will be loosed from the grip of the devil. William Manson renders "gates of hades" in this passage as "Satan-Hades." (Jesus and the Christian [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967], p.83).

Many ancient Jewish and early Christian writers link closely the concepts of Satan and Hell. (Testament of Reuben 4:6-7; Matt. 16:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:24-27; Rev. 20:7-10, 13-14.) The term "gates of Hades" implies that it is some kind of demonic power center because in the ancient world the rulers and military leaders lived at the city gate where important military decisions were made. If Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of Heaven, then perhaps Satan's message was the bad news of the kingdom of Hades.

The demonic opposite of being "in Christ" is perhaps being "in Hades," whether it's in this age or in the ages to come. God operates in three blessed areas: faith, hope and love. Satan operates in three cursed areas: lies, fear and death. Satan used lies to deceive Adam to fall, thereby allowing fear and death to enter the world. From that time, Satan ruled this earth (1 Jn. 5:19) through our fear by the power of death. His power center of death is Hell.

However, Hell is far more than just Satan's military base of operations. It also houses the biggest POW (prisoner of war) camp of all time. Billions and billions of lost souls are enslaved here and brutally abused and tortured by their satanic warden and demonic prison guards.

Even pagan culture intuitively knows that Satan rules Hell, not God. Satan has always sat enthroned in Hell, not God. It is his power center from which he runs his dark kingdom. Only Christians wrongly believe Jesus is somehow the manager and hooded torture-monger of Hell.

The early Church saw itself as the champion body of Christ, AGAINST whom "the gates of Hell would not prevail." The gates of Hell symbolized Satan's kingdom of darkness. Hell was Satan objectified and Satan Hell personified, much in the same way Jesus is Heaven personified and Heaven is Jesus objectified.

While Jesus certainly carried off the gates of Hell and discarded them at the foot of the cross, He is NOT the landlord of Hell-- its liberator most certainly, its conqueror yes, but not its bloodthirsty supervisor. It's crumbled ruins are run by Satan alone.

As the medieval poet and mystic John Milton wrote in his epic Christian poem PARADISE LOST, Satan would "rather rule in Hell than serve in Heaven." William Law famously said, "Our own will separates us from God. Rather, our self-will IS separation from God." Hell, then, is the ultimate rebellious refuge of self-will and self-rule.

The early church fathers Origen and Clement actually considered the fallen earth to be part of Hades, Hell's foyer so to speak. Origen, *Beg.* 4.3.10.

A well known Jewish book has the coming Messiah heroically descend into the underworld to rescue lost souls from Hell. This story is described in the "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs" dating from about 100 B.C. In it, Messiah enters into the kingdom of Beliar (Baal), the chief of Hell, to rescue his captives.

The third century Christian "Teachings of Silvanus" and the "Gospel of Bartholomew" apply the same basic theme to Jesus. His disembodied soul heroically enters Hell during His three days dead. He attacks the underworld and sets free all the souls Satanically imprisoned there.

The "Gospel of Nicodemus," held as canonical for many centuries, contains the most detailed account of this story. The first written version of this book is from the fifth century, and describes Jesus harrowing Hell, which is described as a dark underground prison administered by Hades, who personifies death, along with Satan, who commands an army of demons. Source: "The History of Hell" by Alice Turner, page 66-68, Harcourt Inc., 1993.

Later patristics variously believed that powers, principalities and demons all moved in and out of Hell, sometimes as prisoners, sometimes as jailers, sometimes as tempters and afflictors of men, and sometimes as rebels to congregate under the banner Anti-Christ. See *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, by Jeffrey Burton Russell, pg 144, Cornell Universal Press, 1981. But there wasn't a uniform belief about the governing dynamics of Hell. That would only come several centuries later under the leadership of Christian mystics and poets.

Christian visionaries and writers of literature ultimately led the way on exploring the governing dynamics of Hell much more than did theologians of the day. "The Vision of Tundale," a minor 11th century masterpiece, led the way for subsequent representations of Satan as the supervisor of Hell's tortures.

Dante (1265), the greatest medieval poet, portrayed Satan as powerful force operating in earth and hell. He formed a series of concentric levels of being with Satan being at the core in Hell.

Satan is the one who kills both body and soul, NOT God. Jesus saved us FROM Satan's ability to kill our bodies and destroy our souls in Hell. He gave us the keys to the kingdom. The connection between Satan and Hell is long established in Church history.

Hell remains run by a defanged devil. Its prison doors are totally unhinged, its weapons completely disarmed, its tortures totally unnecessary. Those who remain languishing there do so by their own choice, not by any eternal decree or constraint of the Father. Jesus came to save us FROM Hell, not abandon us TO it.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Heb. 2:14-15.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8) by taking the keys of death and Hades away from Satan. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (Hades) and of death." Rev. 1:18. Not only did Jesus remove death and Hades from all those who are "in Him" (i.e. covenant unity through His indwelling Divine Nature), Christ also provided His perfect love to abide in us to cast out all unrighteous fear out of our lives so that the devil would truly have no place in us (1 Jn. 4:18).

But righteous "fear"/"alarmed vigilance" is another matter. Like Gideon's valiant 300 who ALWAYS vigilantly postured their eyes on the horizon for possible enemy attack, even when they drank water, so must we keep a fervent eye open at all times for the wiles of the devil. If the alternate translation is correct, and God is to be feared as the destroyer of our bodies and souls, then we SHOULD be in terror of His killing ways, continual terror, agonizing terror, cringing terror. But this simply is not the Jesus I know and believe in.

To NOT be alarmed about Satan's threat to all our lives is, frankly, unfathomable. Ephesians 6:10-17. God doesn't want us cringing in terror at Satan, but He certainly wants us wary of, alert to, alarmed about and sober toward the wiles of Satan. Very few people take Satan seriously today, and THAT is a huge mistake. Jesus trumps Him and destroys His works only if we have the right ready posture, fully armed and prepped for battle. We are called to "enforce and endorse" the victory Jesus has already won at the cross. Why would Paul tell us to don the armor of God daily if we weren't supposed to be in a continual state of alarmed readiness toward our enemy?

In his classic Christian book, Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan portrays Satan as two lions chained on both sides of heaven's highway. As long as we pilgrims stay centered in the Lord's highway, neither lion can reach us because the chains snap taut. But, if we stray from the center of the road, the lions can maul us. Satan is bound, but still dangerous if we neglect our so great a salvation and stray too near to his clutches. And that IS something to be alarmed about. This state of the "eye-of-the-tiger" awareness produces a healthy intensity which allows us to remain diligently centered in the Lord's highway!

QUESTION 24: IS SATAN INVOLVED IN EVERY EVIL OCCURRENCE?

Before we answer that question, lets make sure we know the one party who is NOT involved in ANY evil occurrence--- EVER! That totally uninvolved party isGOD! And by God, I mean God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Here is the Scriptural basis for God's disconnection from ALL evil:

---God is light and in Him is no darkness. 1 John 1:5

---only good and perfect gifts come down from the "shadowless" Father of lights (Ja 1:16-20)

---if earthly evil fathers know good gifts, how much more so does our loving Abba (Lk 11:9-13)

---let no man say God tempts, tests, tries, proves, discipline or entices us with evil (James 1:13-17)

---Jesus has given us authority over ALL the power of the enemy SO THAT no evil can harm us (Luke 10:19)

---no evil befalls us for His angels shall keep us in all our ways (Ps 91:10-11)

---no deadly thing shall harm us (Mark 16:17-18)

---God's armor quenches ALL the missiles of Satan (Ephesians 6:10-17)

---Jesus conquered and stripped ALL principalities and powers (Col. 2:15)

---behold the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)

---be of good cheer, Jesus has overcome ALL the things of the world, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (Jn 16:33; 1 John 2:16).

---Jesus Christ is God's total disallowance of evil.

BOTTOM LINE: GOD'S INVOLVEMENT WITH EVIL= ZERO, ZIP, NADA!

BUT, what about Satan? Is he HE involved only in some evil, most evil or is HE involved in ALL evil?

If we stick to the New Testament teachings, the answer would have to be YES. Satan is involved on SOME level in every evil act, every sin we commit, every external disaster, every debilitating disease we suffer, and every cruel circumstance we encounter.

Let's look at some New Testament passages:

Satan is called the "RULER of the power of the air" in Ephesians 2:2.

Jesus thrice calls Satan "the RULER of this world." Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

"The WHOLE WORLD lies in the power of the evil one." 1 John 5:19.

Paul calls Satan "the god of THIS world." 2 Corinthians 4:4.

John says that "whosoever sins is OF, OF, OF, OF the devil." 1 John 3:8.

Jesus said as we sin, we "commit the lusts OF our father the devil." Jn 8:44.

Reading all these passage together, it is clear that Satan's reach is PERVASIVE in this fallen earth realm. Does this mean Satan is omnipresent across the entire cosmos? No, of course not. But, it does mean he has planet earth well-canvassed. Also remember that he has an army of fallen angels at his disposal who were cast down to earth with him. Revelation 12:7-9.

Nor, does Satan's pervasive influence here mean that Jesus hasn't already totally defeated and defanged the devil and his evil empire per Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 4:8-10. Satan's kingdom runs today entirely on the fumes of the Church's corporate neglect in endorsing and enforcing the victory of the cross.

As the book of Hebrews says, it is ONLY our "neglect" (individual and/or corporate) which prevents us from experiencing the full benefits of our "so great a salvation" here on earth. Hebrews 2:3. Until the Church rises up and puts Satan under its foot here on earth as he's ALREADY been put under Jesus' foot in heaven, Satan's kingdom of darkness will hover here as the default setting of this earthly realm.

The Book of Job confirms that Satan operates "to and fro upon the earth and up and down upon it." Job 1:7. Further, Satan operates physical destructions in the earth by using three deadly weapons ---- MEN (1:13-15, 17), NATURE (1:16, 18-19), and SICKNESS (2:7).

Satan first inspired violent men, the Sabeans and Chaldeans, to murder Job's servants and flocks by the sword. Satan then manipulated nature, "great wind" and "fire from heaven" (lightning), to kill Job's children as well as the remaining servants and sheep. Satan then finally infected Job with "boils" from head to toe. The New Testament confirms that Satan is able as "the Prince of the power of the air" to influence nature to try to kill (Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 8:26).

So, is it really outlandish to see Satan as having his finger involved in SOME capacity in every evil act of nature or man? Jesus called Satan "the tempter" in Matthew 4:3,8-9, who offered ALL the fallen worldly kingdoms to Jesus in one moment of time in return for Jesus worshiping him. Satan was there when Adam first sinned. And he is with us still when we sin. John 8:44; 1 John 3:8.

Moreover, Satan is NOT just a fallen angel, but is a worldwide spirit which works in the sons of disobedience. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this

world , according to the prince of the power of the air , the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Ephesians 2:2. Jesus frequently healed the sick by casting out legions of "spirits of infirmity" and "unclean spirits."

Paul also confirms that we need to don the full armor of God to stand against ALL of Satan's wiles. Ephesians 6:10-17. Even James 1:13-17 says that "every man is tempted , when he is drawn away of his OWN lust , and enticed [by another, who could only be Satan]. Then when lust hath conceived [with Satan] , it bringeth forth sin : and sin , when it is finished , bringeth forth death."

It s certain that the early Church fathers believed that Satan and the demonic were involved in every evil event, whether inside of man or outside of man. Consider these quotes:

Athenagoras (133-190 AD) summarized the early Church's cosmology as follows: "The Maker and Framers of the world distributed and appointed....a multitude of angels and ministers...to occupy themselves about the elements, and the heavens, and the world, and the things in it, and the godly ordering of them all.... Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice....so is it among the angels. Some, free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which He had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them." A PLEA FOR THE CHRISTIANS, 10.

Athenagorus further believed that Satan, as "the (spirit) prince of (earthly) matter exercises a control and management contrary to the good that is in God" (A Plea, 25). Thrice Jesus called Satan the archon (ruler or prince) of this material creation (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul likewise called Satan the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the archon (ruler or prince) of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). As theologian Greg Boyd has sagely noted, "Athenagorus concluded that everything in nature that obviously looks contrary to God's character appears that way because it is contrary to God. It didn't arise from the omni-benevolent hand of the Creator (as the atheists of his day and ours object) but was rather due to the activity of an evil 'ruling prince' and 'the demons his followers'" (A Plea, 25).

Tertullian (160-225 AD) wrote that "[d]iseases and other grievous calamities" were demons on the attack, whose "great business is the ruin of mankind." Whenever "poison in the breeze blights the apples and the grain while in the flower, or kills them in the bud, or destroys them when they have reached maturity..." the fingerprints of evil spirits becomes clear (Apology 22).

Origen (184-254 AD) wrote that that every fiber of nature was under the direct care of "invisible husbandmen and guardians" (Against Celsus, 8.31). "Natural" evil came from certain spirits rebelling against their creator. Origen taught that the destructive horsemen of disaster, death, pestilence, war and famine were not "natural" in God's creation, but were rather the result of fallen angels on the attack

(Against Celsus, 8.31). These rebel forces were “the cause of plagues...barrenness... tempests... [and] similar calamities” (Against Celsus,1.31).

Gregory of Nysa (335-395 AD) states it more simply: “In this visible world...nothing can be achieved except through invisible forces” (Dialogues, IV.5).

SO, ARE YOU THE TRUE AUTHOR OF YOUR SIN?

Nope! You may be an avid reader of Satan's "Book of Sin," BUT you are NOT the original author. The Devil is the author, creator and perpetual facilitator of all your sin. Just as Jesus is "the author and finisher" of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), Satan is the author and finisher of our sin. All we do is choose which spiritual book we will read and follow with our hearts--- Satan's book of temptation, sin and death VERSUS Jesus' book of faith, grace and life.

"He that committeth sin is OF the devil" 1 John 3:8.

"Ye are OF your father the devil , and the lusts OF your father ye will do . He was a murderer from the beginning , and abode not in the truth , because there is no truth in him . When he speaketh a lie , he speaketh of his own : for he is a liar , and the father of it." John 8:44.

Do you see? When we sin, we are "of" the Devil. It is HIS "lusts" we do, not OUR lusts but HIS. We certainly ratify that lust as our own, but we did NOT create it. Lucifer is the composer of sin, NOT us. We are complicit in the sin. We are certainly misled, lukewarm, neglectful, even rebellious. And for our complicity in it, we certainly need to repent. And Jesus' blood totally covers our part in each and every sin-event written in Satan's book.

But the sin itself is NOT our creation. It is Satan's. Jesus, from the Cross, exhorted His Heavenly Father to forgive us, FOR we know NOT what we do. Luke 23:34. This is hardly the thing Jesus would say IF we knowingly and intentionally authored and created all the sin that men do. No, Jesus was revealing, in the Scriptures above, that we were the victims of sin, not the creators of it.

The idea to transgress in the Garden came from Satan in the form of the Serpent. It did not come from Adam or Eve. Adam and Eve were both neglectful, distracted, disobedient and horribly misled. BUT they did not create the sin.

Like a cobra who first mesmerizes its careless victim, then injects poison through its deadly fangs into the victim; so too does Satan first mesmerize the neglectful with temptation, then afterward sinks his sinful fangs into the victim's heart. Death soon results-- death to relationships, death to well-being, death to an undefiled conscience, death to joy, and death to dynamic intimacy with God.

Jesus routinely attributed sin and sickness to Satan rather than the individual. He rebuked Peter's sin by telling Satan to get behind Him. Jesus knew Peter was "snake-bit" with Satanic influence, but that Peter was not it's true author but Satan. Matthew 16:23.

In His wilderness temptations, Jesus attributed ALL of them to Satanic suggestion. Jesus also attributed the eighteen year affliction of a daughter of Abraham to Satan when He healed her on the Sabbath. Luke 13:16. Get the picture? Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil, and ALL the works of the Devil. And He did.

Jesus now waits for His bride, His body, and His church to rise up, endorse, enforce, and OPENLY manifest His victory upon the earth as its already been won in all the heavenly places. "Thou [the Father] hast put all things in subjection under His [Jesus] feet . For in that He [the Father] put all in subjection under Him [Jesus] , He [the Father] left nothing that is not put under Him [Jesus]. But now we [believers] see not YET all things put under Him [Jesus]. But we [believers] see Jesus...." Hebrews 2:8.

Jesus now sits, waiting in "expectation" for US to VISIBLY put all sin, death, and evil underfoot. "But Jesus, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat DOWN on the right hand of God; From henceforth EXPECTING till HIS enemies be made HIS footstool." Hebrews 10:12-13.

The Father first gave ALL authority to Jesus, "And hath put all things under his feet." Jesus has now ascended to the right hand of the Father, but not before leaving ALL of His authority to "be the head over all things TO,TO,TO the CHURCH, Which is HIS body , the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Ephesians 1:22-23. Hallelujah!

Do you see? WE, WE, WE are the ones with the authority to wield Jesus' power to defeat evil, and ALL of it. Jesus has already given us everything we need to trample Satan underfoot. We just need to wake up to it! This is our magnificent calling! Let's embrace it!

QUESTION 25: WHAT ABOUT ALL THE WRATH IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

The purpose of this discussion is not to explain ALL the mysteries of Revelation. Rather, I want to highlight the key dynamics of how to read, interpret and understand the book in light of what we now know about God's goodness.

Revelation is the "final exam" for understanding the goodness of God. If we don't already know the nature of God, we will never understand the book of Revelation. As Revelation 5 clearly shows, ONLY the divine nature and wisdom of Jesus is WORTHY and ABLE to unseal and open the mysteries of the book.

People usually advertise Revelation as revealing a God who is incredibly violent, wrathful and destructive. Yet, is this true? Is this violent image the true Lamb of God portrayed in Revelation? NO!

Actually, Revelation is chocked full of various themes of God's non-violent goodness:

1) Death and Hell will be destroyed by God's goodness (20:13-21:4).

2) Satan is overcome by our non-violent and sacrificial worship of God (12:11).

3) God's goodness makes all things new--- we receive a new name (2:17; 3:12), God creates a new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:12), we worship God with new songs (5:9; 14:3), there is a new Heaven and a new Earth, and ALL things are made brand new (21:5).

4) The words "worship" and "worshipped" appear more in the book of Revelation than in any other book of the Bible (4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:11; 11:15-17; 14:7; 15:1-4; 19:10; 22:9). Some commentators actually believe Revelation is just one big worship service.

5) The Lamb shall be our ABSOLUTE and ONLY source of provision--- no more hunger (7:16), no more thirst (7:16), no more tears (7:17; 21:4), and even no more sun or moon, for the Lamb will be the light (21:23).

6) The theme of universal salvation is broached in Revelation 5:8-14, where "every creature in Heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that are in them, sing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'" Certainly sounds like all creatures, great and small, are reconciled back to worshipping God here--- bar none. Hallelujah!

7) The Marriage Supper of the Lamb is described, a celebration which joyfully heralds the defeat of evil and the full orgasmic union of Christ and His bride (19:4-10, 11-21).

BOTTOM LINE: Revelation is chocked full of goodness themes. It is not a book primarily about wrath and destruction, but rather life and restoration.

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS GOING ON IN REVELATION?

Have you ever been listening to your car radio, and because of poor reception you begin to hear two different radio signals at once? I remember driving late one night on a long road trip. I couldn't find a clear channel to listen to, but I did turn the dial to a setting where I could hear BOTH a Gospel music station AND a talk radio show where alien abductions were being discussed. Sometimes the stations alternated so that I could hear each station clearly for a few moments as the signals fought back and forth for dominance, while at other times they both played over each other simultaneously so that all I could hear was a garbled mess of mixed signals.

Well, this is exactly what is going on in Revelation. We are hearing more than one signal, and both are battling for dominance in our hearts. And often, those signals

produce oxymoronic messages. The definition of "oxymoron" means, "A rhetorical figure in which incongruous or contradictory terms are combined, as, for example, in the following terms--- 'a deafening silence' and a 'mournful optimist.'"

The book of Revelation is full of oxymorons. "The wrath of the Lamb" is an oxymoron (6:16). Lambs don't have wrath. These images conceptually clash. "The wine of the wrath of God" is an oxymoron (14:10). Wine is a symbol of celebration, not wrath. The "Lake of Fire" (Revelation 19:20). How can water and fire occupy the same space? Again, these images simply do not blend.

Let's consider some other oxymoronic imagery which pervades Revelation. Jesus is initially called the Lion of Judah in Revelation 5, but for the rest of the book is always referred to as "the Lamb"--- hardly the picture of a wrathful killer. Jesus is pictured with "a sword coming out of His mouth" in 19:15, an "image-clash" between "speaking words of truth" and "hacking enemies to death." In this same passage, Jesus is "treading" grapes in a winepress to make "the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." But again, wine is a symbol of celebration and joy, not of anger and wrath. These images clearly contradict each other, and so should give us pause when we seek to interpret them.

Violent images continually converge with non-violent images. "The wrath of the Lamb," (6:16) and "the wine of the wrath of God" (14:10) and "the winepress of the wrath of God" (9:15) and "the marriage supper of the Lamb... where ye eat the flesh of kings, captains and mighty men" (19:9) are all so contradictory. A lamb as an image of wrath? Wine, normally a symbol of joy and celebration, used as a symbol of wrath? A celebratory marriage feast where we eat the flesh of sinners? Jesus is portrayed as wearing a robe dipped in blood (19:13), but the blood is not His enemies but His own. How can a lake (Revelation 19:20), defined as a body of water, consist solely of fire? Oxymoronic images abound all through the book of Revelation.

What is going on here? Often, when oxymorons are profusely used as they are here, it is often because the author's intent is for us to totally deconstruct our presuppositions. By crashing these contradictory images into each other, the better truth then survives and arises victorious.

It is a battle of imagery where instruments of peace overcome brutal instruments of war. Swords are conceptually hammered into plough-shares. Instruments of wrath become attached to symbols of joy and celebration instead. God overcomes evil one way and one way only, with goodness. This is not theology but poetry. We need to see it as such and keep focused on the end of the matter: tears done away with, death done away with, pain done away with, Hell emptied, a new heaven and a new earth.

The book of Revelation is written in a style known as Jewish apocalyptic literature. It is heavily metaphorical, feverishly symbolic and incredibly non-linear in its exposition. Theologians warn us NOT to read it literally for theological doctrine, but rather to read it poetically for mystically moving imagery.

In the first place, Revelation was mediated by angels according to 1:1. However, all the other New Testament books were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit without the need of any mediator. This by itself should give us pause, because ANY writing mediated by a third party is once removed from direct communication. The five books of the Law, which no man could fully understand or keep, are the only other Biblical books which are said to have been mediated by angels. And it is clear that all the Old Testament saints distorted and deformed the true spiritual meaning and application of the Law (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19).

The longer the chain of custody is between any two communicators, the more likely it is that some part of the message can become distorted. And, here in Revelation, it is impossible to know exactly how many angelic mediators are involved because it is written in the first person, but clearly more than one narrator is speaking to us. Sometimes it's John's voice speaking, and at other times John is quoting other celestial figures he encounters.

"When one works through Revelation 6-16, one needs to be prepared for shifts in points of view. Sometimes the perspective is that of those on earth; sometimes it is the heavenly viewpoint through the so-called hymnic interludes." Ben Witherington III, THE NEW CAMBRIDGE BIBLE COMMENTARY: REVELATION.

Remember, there is "a war in Heaven" going on in this book (12:7). Enemy angels are all over the place (12:7-10). There is chaotic, pinball-like activity swirling all around, which mandates that we can't automatically assume that every angel we encounter in Revelation is necessarily serving God.

FEAR VERSUS AWE, BEAST VERSUS LAMB, CHRIST VERSUS ANTI-CHRIST

Simply put, there are two spiritual stations transmitting here in the book of Revelation. One dial is set on "awe" and the other is set on "fear." Which station you set your heart on will determine how you read and understand Revelation.

The ancient Jewish rabbis taught that there are two types of fear, LOWER FEAR and HIGHER FEAR. The definition of LOWER FEAR is simply TERROR and FRIGHT. Conversely, HIGHER FEAR is defined as AWE and WONDER. We are called to have HIGHER FEAR "toward" God, but NEVER the LOWER FEAR "of" God.

The book of Revelation is the Biblical battlefield where our inner "fear" battles our inner "awe" for supremacy in our view of God, a boxing ring where "violence" and "peace" clash for dominion in our hearts, a wrestling mat where "wrath" and "love" grapple each other for kingship of our soul.

In fact, our whole faith walk carries this same continual conflict. We are constantly challenged to either see God as love, or to see Him as wrath. If we are fearful, we will see God as hard and harsh. But, if we see God as Jesus saw Him, our hearts will be pure and we will rightly see the Father of lights as He truly is--- loving and heroic. To the

pure God appears pure, but to the twisted God appears twisted (Titus 1:15; 2 Samuel 22:27).

The final battlefield is in the heart of every man. What motivating force will finally win the day--- the fear of wrath or the awe of love? In this type of Armageddon, "Perfect love" casts out all fear, wrath and violence (1 John 4:8). The "peace" of God rules our hearts and crushes Satan under our feet (Romans 16:20). The awe and wonder of God is the beginning of wisdom, and we are to abide in it all the day long (Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 23:17).

But, more than "just" fear versus awe, the competing spiritual radio signals also have the image of Christ as the Lamb of God combatting the image of the Anti-christ as the image of the Beast.

There are several similarities between these two competing images. The Christ-Lamb has a white horse (19:11), but the Anti-christ Beast also has a white horse (6:2). The Christ-Lamb has horns (5:6), but so does the Anti-christ Beast (13:1, 11-12; 17:12). The Christ-Lamb has a sword (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21), but so does the Anti-christ Beast (6:4, 8; 13:10).

But, there are very many distinguishing marks between the the two competing images. The Lamb loves (1:5-6; 5:9; 7:17), but the Beast coerces (6:4, 8; 12:12, 17; 13:4, 7). The Lamb liberates (1:5; 2:7, 11; 3:6; 7:9-17; 20:4-6; 22:1-3), but the Beast kills and drinks the blood of it's victims (14:8; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24). The Lamb celebrates with victory songs (5:9-10; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:6-8), while the Beast makes war on the saints (13:7; 19:19). The Lamb is faithful and true (3:14; 19:11), while the Beast seduces people with deceptive images and half-truths (13:13; 17:4-5; 20:8; 22:15). The Lamb and His people worship God alone (4:1-11; 5:9-14; 7:9-12; 15:2-4; 19:10; 20:4; 22:9), while the Beast usurps allegiance and worship to itself (13:1, 5-8, 15; 17:3; 19:20).

In short, the Lamb prioritizes worship, servanthood and sacrifice. The Beast prioritizes wrath, coercion and idolatry. The Lamb martyrs, while the Beast murders.

A THOUGHT ABOUT READING THE BOOK OF REVELATION "BY THE LETTER"

It is heartbreaking to see people entrenched in "by the letter" Scripture reading. The Bible warns us on its face NOT to do this, but "by the letter" Bible reading goes on and on and on and on. And God's character gets maligned and maligned and maligned and maligned----- and it is always from people who are reading the Bible "by the letter."

The following passage has got to be the most ignored Scripture in the Bible:

"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us ABLE MINISTERS of the new covenant, NOT 'of' the LETTER but 'of' the Spirit; for THE LETTER KILLS, but THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE." 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

We are able, able, able, able ministers to read the Scripture by the life-giving Spirit and NOT by the KILLING LETTER. People in who wrath lies hidden again and again get snagged by literalism, always by literalism. And God becomes cast as the devil. God becomes the killer of men, not Satan. God becomes the afflicter of men, not Satan. God becomes the wrathful destroyer, not Satan. Yet the Scripture says "the letter kills." How does it kill? One way is by making God out to be a killer.

Hebrews 2:14 clearly says Satan, not God, has the power of death. God simply does not kill--- it is NOT in His nature. If Revelation appears to say BY THE LETTER, literally in other words, that God DOES kill, then we must back off the literal in favor of the spiritual meaning.

This exact same dynamic occurred in an Old Testament event recorded BOTH in 2 Samuel 24:1 and I Chronicles 21:1, where 70,000 Israelites die because of David's sin in numbering Israel. In the Samuel version of events, "the wrath of the Lord" caused David to sin. But, the Chronicles version claims that "Satan provoked David" to sin. We know that the Chronicles lines up with what Jesus taught us about Satan as the author and finisher of our sin (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). Thus, here we redivide the literal BY THE LETTER reading of Samuel in favor of the higher spiritual reading. The point is that if Scripture ever mistakenly calls "Satan's destructions" the "wrath of God," then we are compelled to correct and clarify the passage under the authority of 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

You want to know the best, and really only, reason we should never say God kills or ordains evil? Because the Holy Ghost within us does NOT bear witness that He does.

If you honestly believe the Holy Ghost has revealed to you Jesus to be a wrathful and vengeful killer, afflicter and smiter of unbelieving men, then go for it. Fire and brimstoners unite. But, if, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit speaks a different tone about God, a tone of light, love and perfect mercy, then go with it where it leads. Just don't let "by the letter" Bible reading be your guide, for it surely kills the truth. Make sure the Spirit is your central source of conviction.

Finally, consider the words of John Wesley when responding to by the letter scriptural arguments that God is the source of evil:

"You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it can never prove this; whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, What is its true meaning then? If I say, I know not, you have gained nothing; for there are many Scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense at all, than to say it had such a sense as this. It cannot mean, whatever it means besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the judge of all the world is unjust. No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that His mercy is not over all His works." Wesley's Journals, Vol. VII, p. 383.

Armed with this mindset, we then can better translate the tough passages of Revelation. For instance, we know that when Jesus is talking about killing Jezebel's children in 2:20-23, He is not referring to "literal children," but rather to "sinful impulses" birthed by the Jezebel spirit. Jesus does "kill" sinful thoughts, emotions and ideas, but He kills them with the anointed truth of His love.

Concerning other difficult passages, we know that when Revelation describes the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in 6:1-8, these represent demonic forces of plague, war, famine, and death (see the NIV Study Bible note on this passage). Just because Jesus warned us of these attacking forces does not mean He sent them. We know better. God frequently warns His children of approaching danger. It is men who mistakenly take the warning as an indication that God actually sent the destruction. This is like blaming the fireman who heroically rescues us FROM the fire for CAUSING the fire itself.

Another tough passage speaks of the demanded blood revenge cried out by martyrs who have been killed (6:9-10). Yet, we know martyrs don't talk or feel this wrathful way. We know this from Jesus' dying remark from the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." We also know it from Stephen's last words as he was being stoned to death, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Both of them forsook revenge, not demanded it. We know that revenge is simply not in the divine nature (Matthew 5:38-48). And any verse in Revelation, or anywhere else for that matter, which paints God as a torturer, a wrath monger, a mass murderer, all just simply can't be literally true.

The point of Revelation is to allow WRATH and LOVE, FEAR and AWE, BEAST and LAMB, CHRIST and ANTI-CHRIST, to fight to the death for the core motive of our hearts. God's goodness WILL win this Armageddon. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13).

Revelation may be the last book in the Bible, but it is not the last word. Jesus is the first, middle and last word. Only Jesus is worthy and able to unseal and open the mysteries of Revelation. Listen to Him! Like a brave fireman warning us of danger and instructing us how to avoid it, Jesus in Revelation is our heroic rescuer. Never think of Him as otherwise.

The overcoming spirit of love and patience we are to take from reading Revelation is wonderfully exemplified in the following quotes, with which I want to close this discussion.

"In Revelation 17:14 we hear of war against the Lamb. It raises important questions of how Christians could help to stop the cycle of violence or violence's glorification. There is a story from the fourth century A.D. about a monk named Telemachus who once paid a visit to Rome and attended a gladiatorial fight held in the Roman Colosseum. Disgusted and horrified by what he observed, he hurled himself into the arena and stood between the gladiators seeking to prevent either of them from being killed. But, in the process he himself was killed. This repulsed various of the observers, who one after

another got up and left the Colosseum. It is said that this action precipitated the end of the gladiatorial games in that venue." Ben Witherington III, THE NEW CAMBRIDGE BIBLE COMMENTARY: REVELATION.

"Revelation is more a book about terror defeated than terror inflicted... which is why worship and liturgy are such a central feature of the book." Barbara Rossing, THE RAPTURE EXPOSED: THE MESSAGE OF HOPE IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

"We must say to our white brothers all over the South who try to keep us down: we will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with spirit power. Do to us what you will, and we will not hate you. And yet we cannot in all good conscience obey your evil laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.... Say that we're too low, that we're too degraded, yet we still love you. Bomb our homes and go by our churches early in the morning and bomb them if you please, and we will still love you. We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory." Martin Luther King.

QUESTION 26: HOW DO WE TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PAUL'S "PHILOSOPHY" AND PAUL'S "EPIPHANIES" ?

The Apostle Paul was a great man. He had many "third heaven" revelations. He also had many "first heaven" educated opinions. We need to know the difference. "Third heaven" revelation from the "throne room" of God fills Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. "First heaven" opinions based on Paul's practical philosophy frequently appear in Timothy, Titus, Romans and Corinthians, even though these books also contain many "third heaven" insights as well.

Let me clarify. Jesus never talked philosophically about politics, slavery, women's rights, etc. However, Paul did. And without question, Paul's opinions on these issues certainly matter. They are a good place to start.

But, are Paul's opinions on philosophical issues the final word for all time? Are we forever chained to Paul's opinions? Are we unable to better develop them, respectfully disagree with them, or rigorously debate them? Do we stand on Paul's shoulders or does he stand on ours? If Paul stands on OUR shoulders, then we, as the low man on the totem pole, will never see the answers directly for ourselves, but will have to totally trust Paul's philosophic vision as the ONLY legitimate seer on these matters. But, if WE stand on Paul's shoulders, then we should be able to see higher and better and fresher and clearer than Paul did on these issues.

I can easily imagine Paul exhorting us in the cloud of heavenly witnesses to carry the baton of his opinions faster and farther than he did. He would WANT us to refine, improve and expand his personal philosophy to better honor the Lord. Paul's opinions in these areas might be part of the foundational "floor" we stand on for initial balance, but they are not the ultimate conceptual "ceiling" we grow to reach toward and beyond.

Let me give an example. Jesus NEVER talked about political systems, except perhaps when He said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). This one statement is hardly a political manifesto with which to guide our Christian walk.

Jesus NEVER said ALL governments were ordained by God to execute the sword over evil doers or that government officials were ministers of God. And yet Paul said all these things in Romans 13:1-7. But, one could argue that this differed from Jesus' view because in the wilderness temptations it is revealed that all the kingdoms of the worlds are in the power of Satan to give to whom he pleased (Luke 4:5-6). 1 John 5:19 confirms that the whole fallen world lies in the power of the evil one -- Satan. Thus, one could make the Scriptural argument that earthly governments are unspiritual at best and demonically influenced at worst.

Yet, Paul had a higher view of government as a godly authority, or at least he did when he wrote the book of Romans. But let's think about that for a moment. Paul was a Roman citizen, a status which gave him a lot of protection. Time and time again, Paul was protected from death at the hands of the Judaizers BECAUSE he was a Roman citizen. To Paul, the government he was exposed to offered him and his ministry a level of protection.

But, would Paul have felt that Rome was "God's minister" when they sacked Jerusalem and killed thousands of Jewish men, women and children. Or, if Paul was given a prophetic foresight into the despotic governments of Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, Mao Zedong's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Saddam Heusein's Iraq, Pavelic's Croatia, who, in total, harshly oppressed and brutally killed hundreds of millions during their rule, would Paul have written Romans 13:1-7? If Paul could have seen their future evil, would Paul call ALL government authorities "ministers of God" as he did in Romans 13? Surely not!

The point is that what Paul said about government was HIS philosophy, HIS best Christian opinion, and HIS best advice to a young church in need of practical counsel. BUT, what Paul said about government was NOT his "third heaven" revelation. Paul's "third heaven" revelations consisted of his transcendent epiphanies of the Lord's "SUPERNATURAL GRACE" and the matchless "IN CHRIST" realities available to all believers.

Paul acknowledged in Romans 14 that our respective maturity levels of faith might result in us having differing opinions on various practical matters such as diet, drink, calendars and festivals. The brother with weaker faith may have a different view than

the brother with more mature faith, yet the freer brother should not be a stumbling block to the weaker brother by purposely doing anything which would be a stumbling block to the faith of the younger believer. Paul's point was that each believer could be on different sides of an issue, yet both still be right IF they both were acting from their respective levels of faith.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, Paul also acknowledged that he had particular revelation which he was certain was from the Lord with regard to marriage, BUT that there were OTHER marriage-related issues in which he could only hazard his best opinion. Paul simply didn't have "throne room revelation" on every practical or philosophical question that came before him. And he was man enough to admit it.

Let's take other examples. Paul said women should NOT speak in church, should NOT teach men, and in fact should NOT exercise any authority over any men (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Are we to be tightly and permanently bound to Paul's philosophical view of women espoused in the above verses? Certainly not. The body of Christ has, for the most part, left this primitive philosophy behind. Today, there are tons of anointed female teachers, prophets, pastors and ministers who, praise God, DON'T keep silent in church.

Paul likewise instructed slaves to be obedient to their masters (Ephesians 6:5; Titus 2:9). The church has violated this principle repeatedly by supporting anti-slavery activities of all kinds, including underground railroads during the Civil War which both encouraged and enabled slaves to disobey their masters by running away.

Do mature Christians planet-wide agree with Paul's philosophy which would have run away slaves always return to their masters to once again subject themselves to a yoke of bondage, JUST to comply with Paul's opinion? Paul did this very thing to the runaway slave Onesimus in Philemon 9-24. Here, Paul sent Onesimus back to his master Philemon, along with a written plea to free him.

Don't get me wrong. Paul's solution in Onesimus' case was beautiful and full of grace. His plea to Philemon brings tears to read it. However, does this mean that Paul's philosophy of slaves obeying their masters is a universal rule meant to apply for all times in all situations? Or, can we develop, modify and evolve Paul's thinking to discover a different "faith solution" for ourselves? Millions of runaway slaves over the last thousand years have done just that. Do I have the confidence to say that the Holy Spirit has NEVER led ANY oppressed slave to escape his oppression by running away? No!!!

And, bringing government back into it, Christians also have a long history of protest and refusal when it comes to "obeying" the authorities God has set "over us." From abortion to military service to unjust wars to capital punishment, Christians have long "resisted the ordinances and powers of government" when quickened to do so by their consciences. But Paul said that "whoever resists the power or ordinance (of

government) resists the ordinance of God and shall receive to themselves damnation." Romans 13:2.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who is universally admired for his righteous lifestyle and ministry, is widely considered a martyr for conspiring to physically remove Hitler from power. He failed and was executed by Hitler's regime. Bonhoeffer would definitely disagree with Paul that ALL government "powers that be are ordained by God" (Romans 13:1). There is just no way God ordained Hitler to rule Germany under divine unction.

Paul's gross oversimplification of complete political obedience was, as Albert Einstein famously said, "Simpler than possible." Nobody would seriously label Bonhoeffer's acts of "resisting the power and ordinance" of Nazi Germany as an offense which would bring him "damnation." If every great Christian who resisted government authority and power was "damned" for doing so, then heaven will be sparse indeed.

By the way, the Holy Ghost has definitely managed a few "technically illegal" jail breaks in his day, such as in Acts 5:19; 12:10; 16:26. If Paul's Romans 13:2 propositions were universally true, then the apostles, who frequently escaped numerous lawful prisons, along with the Holy Ghost Himself, would ALL be guilty of "resisting the power and ordinance of God." I wouldn't like to be the officer who tries to serve THAT arrest warrant on the Holy Ghost.

Aside from the issues listed above, it may also be that Paul's linked views on election, predetermination and the potter-clay analogy used in Romans 9-11 may all be influenced more by Paul's philosophies than by Paul's epiphanies.

Paul's pharisaical background so steeped in hyper-sovereignty and hyper-predetermination, combined with his ongoing vexation at his Jewish brothers' continuing rejection of the Messiah, may well have combined to push Paul a little too far over into his "vexed" opinion and away from his spiritual revelation. I say this because issues of predetermination and election never seemed to concern Jesus in His teachings or preachings.

Yet, Paul describes God as a sovereign potter who either predetermines humans to fail as instruments of wrath and dishonor OR succeed as instruments of glory and honor. This preformation of men occurs in the same way clay is manipulated by the hands of the potter. This image portrays God as an omnipotent potter PRE-forming and PRE-determining all our futures by EITHER giving us inborn "flaws to fail" or inborn "faith to succeed."

This analogy by Paul is not well thought out and is not fully consonant with the loving Father revealed by Jesus, a Father Who in NO way has any connection to putting evil flaws into us and Who gives only good gifts to His children (James 1:13-17; Matthew 7:11). Again, this questionable analogy may be more due to Paul's philosophical bent towards hyper-predeterminism than it is to perfect "third heaven" revelation.

The point is that we must not treat Paul's personal philosophy the same way we treat his supernatural "third heaven" revelations which come straight from "the throne room of God." Jesus NEVER preached or taught on these specific topics listed above for a reason. He wanted US to be fluid, thoughtful and faithful in OUR generation by going BEYOND Paul's advice into greater and greater solutions for OUR day and OUR circumstance.

Paul's wisdom is certainly to be esteemed and understood from every angle, but it is not the only acceptable philosophy on these matters. Christians of different faith levels and giftings can disagree on these non-essential, tangential issues listed above and still be operating in faith that pleases God.

QUESTION 27: RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

1) James and John wanting Jesus to call down killing fire on the Samaritans for rejecting them in Luke 9:54 (just like Elijah did to the rebellious Samaritans in 2 Kings 1:10, 12);

2) The Pharisees wanting to execute Jesus' disciples to death for Sabbath-breaking in Matthew 12:1-7 (just like Moses commanded all Sabbath breakers stoned to death, no exceptions, in Exodus 31:14-15 and 35:2, and who in fact stoned a man to death in similar circumstances for just picking up sticks on the Sabbath in Numbers 15:32-36);

3) The mob seeking to stone the woman to death who had been caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 (just like Moses commanded all adulterers to death in Leviticus 20:10, no exceptions);

WHAT did these would be killers all have on their side?

ANSWER: The Bible.

All these bloodthirsty people were relying on well known Scriptures, established Scriptures, clear Scriptures, compelling Scriptures. I cite all the passages above.

These mobs thought they all had the spiritual high ground. But you know what? They didn't.

Jesus told James and John they "knew not what spirit they were of, because He came to save life, not to destroy it." Luke 9:55. He told the Pharisees seeking to execute His disciples for Sabbath-breaking that He Himself was "Lord of the Sabbath" and that His disciples were "blameless" and "guiltless" because He "wanted mercy and not sacrifice." Matthew 12:5-8. After scattering the mob seeking to stone her, Jesus told the adulterous

that He Himself did NOT condemn her. John 8:11. He cleaned all their plows of wrath with His Spirit of rescuing love.

The point here is that we all need more than JUST the Bible on our side. These people all may have had the literal Bible on their side, but they did not have Jesus on their side. They did not have the Holy Spirit on their side. And they did not have the Heavenly Father on their side.

Time and time again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the Scripture may literally SAY this, but I spiritually SAY..... This is all I am advocating here, to let Jesus' nature, Jesus' presence, and Jesus' wisdom have the FIRST and BEST say when it comes to us reading Scripture.

These three mobs had ALL had read the Scriptures literally, all had thought they clearly understood them, and were all confident they were serving God. What a chilling prospect!

Do we commit the same error today when we believe we can understand Scripture without first putting primary reliance on Holy Ghost interaction? Do we think that our "natural understanding" of Scripture is always automatically right, especially when the book of James warns us that the wisdom from "below" is "earthly, natural and demonic." James 3:15.

SATAN HIDES IN OUR NATURAL UNDERSTANDING!

Did you now there are worldwide demonic powers whose sole function is to lure you into reading the Bible "by the letter," WITHOUT the aid and illumination of the Holy Spirit in other words?

"So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the ELEMENTAL SPIRITS of the universe." Galatians 4:3.

"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly ELEMENTAL SPIRITS, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain." Galatians 4:8-11.

"Christ DISARMED the PRINCIPALITIES and POWERS and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.... If with Christ you died to the ELEMENTAL SPIRITS of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh." Colossians 2:15, 20-23.

"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, NOT of the LETTER but of the SPIRIT; for THE LETTER KILLS, but the SPIRIT GIVES LIFE." 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Scripture calls these "by the letter" devils "elemental spirits," demonic powers which continually keep us in bondage to legalistic "by the letter" reading and "by the letter" thinking. Don't let yourself be manipulated by them!

Satan is always in the over, under or mis translation. Galatians 4 and Colossians 2, in the RSV, speak of elemental spirits which seek to mislead us into literalism and legalistic interpretations which cause us to under, over or mis translate the divine impulses. They are always the real enemy. The letter always kills, and wants to make both God and us into killers as well.

THIS is why we must let the Holy Spirit mediate all Scriptural meaning to us.

THIS is why reading the Bible "by the letter kills."

THIS is why the New Covenant isn't written on tablets but on the human heart.

When Jesus illuminates our reading through the Holy Ghost, THEN Scripture glows bright in each and every verse. Mercy manifests, ideas coalesce, hearts burn, minds renew, mysteries unveil and faith explodes.

QUESTION 28: WHAT WAS THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

What if the REAL PURPOSE of the TEN COMMANDMENTS was NOT to tell us how bad WE can be, but instead how good and perfect Jesus IS?

In other words, consider the Ten Commandments as a revelation of Jesus' flawless divine nature. In John 5:46, Jesus said Moses wrote of Him. Jesus later confirmed that that ALL the Scriptures speak of Him. Let's now reread the Ten Commandments with this in mind:

- 1) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to be LESS than the Lord our GOD.
- 2) It is IMPOSSIBLE for there to be OTHER Gods more powerful and real than Jesus.
- 3) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to ever act in vain and without complete victory.

- 4) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to leave the Sabbath rest of His past completed work, for He has already done ALL to save us.
- 5) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to dishonor His heavenly Father at any time.
- 6) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to commit murder, violence or coercion.
- 7) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to commit spiritual adultery on His bride the Church.
- 8) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to steal, rob or destroy.
- 9) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to lie, manipulate or deceive.
- 10) It is IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to be jealous, covetous or envious.

Moses had an epiphany of Jesus on the mountain top of who Jesus WAS. But, by the time he got back down the mountain, and the glory had started to fade from his countenance, all he could hold on to were a few basic rules of conduct to describe what Jesus was NOT. What was originally conveyed as the revelation the Jesus' goodness deflated into the threat of the Law.

QUESTION 29: WHY DIDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT PATRIARCHS EVER MENTION SATAN?

Abraham never mentioned the name of Satan.
Isaac never mentioned the name of Satan.
Jacob never mentioned the name of Satan.
Moses never mentioned the name of Satan.
David never mentioned the name of Satan.

These Old Testament saints never rebuked the demonic, never cast out devils and never engaged in spiritual warfare against dark powers and principalities. When they prayed to God, their approach was to ask God to do or not to do something. "God, please don't destroy us" or "God, please destroy our earthly enemy" or "God, please be merciful and stop afflicting us." It was all in God's hands, in other words. They frequently prayed for the Lord to relent and change His mind about things. They actually asked the Lord to "repent" of His destructions toward them.

The bottom line is that Satan is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament, and is never identified either as the source of evil or as an enemy of God. When Satan is mentioned, he is seen as a servant of God, merely obeying the directives of God. In fact, according to modern day Jewish encyclopedias, Satan is still considered by the Jews to be the

angel of death described in the Old Testament who simply carries out the judgments and punishments of God.

Jesus, by contrast, continually exposed and rebuked both Satan and his devils. He made clear that Satan was a cosmic rebel opposed to God's kingdom on every level. Satan was not working for God but against Him.

Moreover, with regard to prayer, Jesus never prayed to change God's will but rather to release it. Jesus didn't change God's mind, He revealed it. Jesus prayed that God's will be done on earth, NOT that God repent of His planned evil in order to line up with our prayer petitions. Exodus 32:12. We are the ones who need to repent and relent of evil, not God. His mercy and grace is light years ahead of us of every level.

QUESTION 30: DID GOD VIOLENTLY BREAK JACOB'S HIP DURING AN ALL-NIGHT WRESTLING MATCH?

Did God (or His angel) violently break or dislocate Jacob's thigh/hip? The being that Jacob wrestled with is variously described as an angel, a man, or God. Some believe it was even Jesus making a pre-incarnate appearance. Genesis 32:24-32; 35:1-7 and Hosea 12:3-5.

But, regardless, did God violently break or dislocate Jacob's hip and thigh? After wrestling with Jacob all night, and seeing that Jacob could not be defeated, did God then resort to breaking Jacob's bones? And, in the wake of this incident, did God then bless Jacob as one who has wrestled Him and prevailed? Could any man wrestle an all-powerful God all night long and defeat Him, or at least wrestle Him to a draw? Reading this story literally opens up a can of worms as to how God operates.

Must this story be read literally, or is it possible that it has a deeper symbolic meaning? If we do read it only literally, which 2 Corinthians 3:6 warns us NOT to do, then we open the door to a "by the letter" reading which sees God as a bringer of affliction, sickness and violence. He literally "breaks our bones" to reward us and teach us humility. We defeat Him fair and square in a wrestling match, and our reward is that He afflicts us with broken bones? That makes no literal sense.

No, Jacob's wrestling match is clearly an allegorical story which can be read different ways. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus told the two disciples "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He (Christ) INTERPRETED to them in ALL THE SCRIPTURES the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?" Luke 24:26-27, 31-32.

Now, we know that Jesus is LITERALLY nowhere explicitly to be found by name in the Old Testament. But, ALLEGORICALLY, He is everywhere to be found. Do you see? Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to these two highly blessed disciples. And their hearts burned within them as they finally understood the true importance of the Old Testament.

So, how do we read this passage allegorically, so that our hearts too can burn with Jesus' wise fire?

First, it highlights the need for us to pray with "importunity" (wholehearted boldness and shamelessness) toward God, which is exemplified in the NT by Luke 11:5-13. The man in this Lukan passage has Jacob's same shameless chutzpah-infused attitude which says, "I will not go away until You bless me!" God loves this quality, although in the Luke passage the man's chutzpah is to bless his friends in need and not himself.

Second, the "thigh/hip" is the strongest muscle area in the body. As an allegorical symbol, it represents a man's natural strength, his natural power-- the power of the will included.

Jacob's wrestling with God is no different than our wrestling with God in heart-wrenching times of prayer during trial. "Not my will (natural willpower) but your will be done," Jesus said, after sweating blood in His agonized wrestling match in Gethsemane.

We all wrestle with obedience with God, with the hope that He will help us to "dislocate" our own natural willpower in favor of Jesus' divine Holy Ghost willpower, which works in is to "will and to do." Philippians 2:13.

So, Jacob's wrestling match with God on this level is just an allegory about us picking up our own crosses and following Jesus (Matthew 10:38). By yielding our own will to be crucified and broken/dislocated, we then are blessed to "put on" and allow the mind of Christ to empower us to righteously will and to effectively do.

The "rod" that Jacob had to always lean on after his dislocation, as has been long been taught by Bible expositors, is clearly a type of Christ. We allow Jesus' divine nature to be our "rod" of support by allowing our natural willpower to be broken by humbling and dying to self. The Syrophenician woman, who had to endure being compared to a dog, could be seen as another NT example of one who willingly allowed her "hip socket" of pride and self-will to be dislocated so that Jesus could fill the vacuum with the healing will of God (Matthew 15:22-28).

Reading allegorically makes this passage infinitely more helpful to us as New Covenant believers. Reading it literally does nothing but make it look like God broke His hip to make Jacob let Him go (remember there is a real dispute from Scripture whether God was wrestling an angel of God Himself, as different OT passages describe it differently). Under either scenario though, a strictly literal "by the letter" reading would make God look like a violent bone-breaking God, when in fact New Testament Jesus contradicts that view. Moreover, do we really think for one second that Jacob could defeat either an

angel or God in hand to hand combat? No, this passage is an allegory crying out to be understood.

Alternatively, if any angel did LITERALLY break Jacob's hip after a wrestling match, then it was a dark angel. Perhaps, if it did literally happen, Jacob was wrestling THROUGH and PAST Satan to embrace God wholly as His Lord. After all, the only angels the New Testament says we literally wrestle against are the dark angels of Satan. Ephesians 6:10-17. The battle scar of that fight might have been Jacob's broken hip, which again would serve as symbol of the breaking of his natural will in favor of the divine will--- Jacob's version of, "Not my will but thine be done."

I am fine with either or both interpretations, because both could be simultaneously correct. Reading allegorically doesn't always mean that some version of the event didn't literally happen. Reading allegorically often means that there is MORE than JUST the literal reading. Allegory can mean OTHER or MORE than the literal meaning.

My heart now burns with Jesus' love as I read this passage. I hope yours does too.

QUESTION 31: IF SATAN HAS "ALREADY" BEEN DEFEATED BY JESUS, WHY IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE STILL GOING ON?

Jesus has defeated Satan, sin, Hell and death in the unseen realm. And the unseen makes up about 99.99999% of the fabric of all reality.

"Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORAL; BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

"By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that WHAT IS SEEN hath NOT been made out of things which APPEAR." Hebrews 11:3.

Do you see, this visible and earthly reality is but a "sliver of a sliver on the hangnail of Heaven." So, when dealing with Jesus' victory over all things Satanic, we must start from the "wide invisible" and then proceed to the "narrow visible." Jesus has indeed defeated Satan in every unseen corner and cubby in the unseen realm. Jesus now sits in expectation, awaiting for us to translate and enforce that victory FULLY into this seen realm.

So, Jesus has paved the "currently unseen" highway of eternity with absolute heart-pounding victory over all the powers and principalities of evil. Colossians 2:15. But, WE are the trumpeteers of that victory INTO the seen realm of manifestation. Until we, as

the earthly, corporate and bridal body of Christ, fully blow our trumpets of faith, the unseen victory will not manifest into the seen realm.

This is why, even after the Cross, all visible creation is STILL inwardly groaning to see the MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD. Romans 8:19. All creation is waiting for the trumpet call of the sons of God to announce, endorse and enforce Christ's victory on the earth, as its ALREADY been announced, endorsed and enforced in Heaven.

Let's explore this theme a little more. In his classic Christian book, Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan portrays Satan as twin lions chained on both sides of heaven's highway. As long as we pilgrims stay centered in the Lord's highway, neither lion can reach us because the chains snap taut. But, if we stray from the center of the road, the lions can maul us. Satan is bound, but still dangerous if we neglect our so great a salvation and stray too near to his clutches.

Jesus has taken the dominion of death and destruction away from Satan. However, that victory has not yet been fully manifested in the earthly realm as it has been in the heavenly realm. Hebrews 10:13 tells us Jesus is seated at the right hand of God waiting and "expecting til his enemies be made his footstool." 1 Corinthians 15:26 tells us, "the last enemy that SHALL be destroyed is death."

Thus, even though Jesus has ALREADY disarmed all principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) in the heavenly realm, He is waiting for his church to enforce that victory upon the earth (Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:10). The fact that we still see death and defeat is not due to any deficiency in the Lord, but rather to a deficiency in the church in "neglecting" her so great a salvation (Hebrews 2:3).

I think warfare for us NOW is a matter of "faith-endorsing" and "faith-enforcing" Jesus' heavenly victory here on earth as it has ALREADY been fully won in the Heavens. This is why Paul called it a "fight of faith." It IS a fight. But, the good news is that God doesn't promise He WILL win the battle for us. No, He promises He already HAS won it. All we do is add our faith's "amen" to His grace's "yes."

In a way, it is like a scripted professional wrestling match. No matter how brutally real the violence appears, the Lord's written a spiritual script which guarantees US manifest victory IF we but fight the good fight of faith. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God did BEFORE PREPARE that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10.

Unhappy warriors fight with a grim spirit because they don't know the outcome. But, happy warriors, as William Wordsworth called them, fight with grins of joy unspeakable because they know the outcome is already established IF they will BUT BELIEVE IT and fervently follow the script.

Jesus tells us that whatever we bind on Earth has "already" been bound in Heaven. The original Greek of Matthew 18:18 and 16:19 both clearly say that we have the authority to

bind on Earth that which is ALREADY bound in Heaven(per Colossians 2:15). Interlinear translations agree that these verses convey the idea that, “whatever you might bind on the Earth will be, having been bound in the Heavens ALREADY.”

It gets even better. Not only has the demonic been demolished, but we have also already been completely healed of all our sins, sorrows and sicknesses. Jesus again completed this healing long ago through His Cross and Resurrection: “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye WERE healed.” 1 Pet 2:24.

But, if demons are defeated and all our sins and sicknesses healed, then why don't we see this “always already” victory right now? The following verse holds the alarming answer.

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; . . . Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we SEE NOT YET all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” Heb 2:3, 8-9.

This passage is clear that all things have ALREADY been put under Jesus, but we don't yet SEE them put under Jesus. The reason? Because of our individual and corporate “neglect” of “so great a salvation.” Both Satan and Evil have no gasoline left in their tank because Jesus drained it all away at the Cross. They are functioning today solely off of the fumes of our neglect of Jesus' great salvation. What makes this salvation so great is its “always already” aspect.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convince us of the accomplished benefits of this great salvation. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” 1 Cor 2:12. But, our fight is always one of faith, effectual and fervent faith which steadfastly cleaves to the Lord's reports of pre-victory.

In other words, BLOW the trumpet of faith in Zion you angels, BLOW the trumpet of faith on earth you sons of men, BLOW the trumpet NOW you sons of God, and watch all Satanic walls fall in!

QUESTION 32: DID GOD "REALLY" TELL MOSES TO STONE A POOR MAN JUST FOR PICKING UP STICKS ON THE SABBATH?

Jesus is the ONLY full, final, and authoritative revelation of the nature and character of God the Father. So, if we CANNOT spiritually see Jesus as a killer or destroyer, then we can't see God the Father as a killer or destroyer either, even if the Old Testament "letter" says otherwise.

Let me give you an example in the following Numbers 15 passage:

"32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35 And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses."

This above passage quotes God as directly commanding Moses to "surely put this man to death" for merely picking up sticks on the Sabbath. The Holy Spirit within me and many others doesn't bear witness that Jesus (who is the same God yesterday, today and forever) would EVER give such a command.

In fact, in John 8, Jesus PREVENTED the stoning of the woman caught in adultery. This despite the fact the same law literally demanded her death as it did the Sabbath breaker (Leviticus 20:10). Jesus revealed Himself to us as our rescuer from Satanic stonings, not their cause. Rest assured Satan supports each and every stoning of each and every sinner. Jesus does not.

Now, did the stoning in this passage literally happen? I have no problem saying it did. BUT, are we legalistically bound to it's "by the letter" literal description of the event? Moses certainly "thought" he was hearing "God" say to "surely kill" the man who merely picked up sticks. But, did he hear the Lord accurately, or was Satan dispiriting Moses' understanding of the divine will?

You see, if Moses erroneously thought Satan was God's "angry voice," the left hand of God in other words, merely carrying out the Father's directives, something WE now know to be wrong, then how might that affect our interpretation of this passage?

Here is the key. When Moses quoted God, Moses wrongly included in his functional definition of God BOTH Yahweh AND Satan. So, if Satan was speaking this to Moses' heart, Moses would have attributed it as coming from God. And Moses would have been wrong.

So what do we do? Simple, we have to let the Holy Spirit redivide the Old Testament passage to comport with the character of Jesus. If Jesus were physically standing by Moses that day, would He have just stood there and said "Go ahead Moses, surely kill him." Or, would Jesus have done the same thing He did for the woman caught in adultery, the same thing He does for us today--- saved him, not condemned him, then exhorted him to go forth and sin no more. I think the answer is pretty clear.

The Holy Spirit is the key. Always remember, 2 Corinthians 3:6 says we are "ABLE ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life."

QUESTION 33: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW THE BIBLE TO BE SOOO MISUNDERSTOOD BY SOOOO MANY?

Unblessed Question ALERT Unblessed Question ALERT***

This may shock you, but God DOESN'T allow Scripture to be distorted.

We do.

The real problem with this unblessed question is that it wrongly PRESUMES that God DOES stand idly by and allow Scripture to be twisted and distorted by so many. Thus, the question is based on a false premise.

Do you see? This type of question never yields any spiritual truth. It just ultimately blame-shifts "evil" FROM man and Satan TO God.

If I am wrong, and the original question IS legitimate, why not then take it to its logical extreme and "up the ante" even more? Ask moreover, "Why would God EVER allow ANYBODY to EVER distort ANYTHING about God, be they preachers, teachers, evangelists, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, satanists, pagans, or atheists?" And yet, all of these people DO routinely distort the image of God. And so do WE, all too often. The original question is simply unblessed.

Think about it for a moment. The question "Why does God allow ANY evil thought or event?" wrongly blames God by presuming that He has somehow put His stamp of approval on the evil. Why not go all the way with it and ask instead, "Why did God allow: Satan to twist the truth to Eve, Cain to slay Abel, Pharaoh to slay Israel's firstborn, Tamar to be raped, the Holocaust to happen, or millions of children to die worldwide every year?" Do you see? This is just another way of blaming God for evil happenings to begin with.

We don't say it this way, but this is what we are really thinking: "Why wouldn't God just omnipotently coerce us all to think right, do good and believe true things about Him?"

Ahhhh, and now we get to the heart of the matter. Here is the direct answer as to why God is NEVER responsible for us twisting Scripture. Simply put, God is not coercive. Force isn't in His character, nature or personality. God is all-powerful, but only within the context of His flawless character. There are certain qualities that are NOT in the divine nature, a nature which God won't EVER violate. Men certainly violate these qualities, but not God, not Jesus.

For instance, Scripture says that it is impossible for God to lie. Titus 1:2. But, some would say, "Sure God can lie, He is all-powerful after all." But, no, it is impossible for Him to act outside of His flawless nature of love, light, Spirit, truth and grace. He won't lie because it is AGAINST His nature.

This is easy to see in the context of lying, but what about other qualities which are NOT to be found in the divine nature of God? What if violence, coercion, brutality, manipulation, and pettiness are NOT in His character? Well, there can be only one conclusion: God's omnipotence must always be defined within the context of His character. He is all-powerfully good, all-powerfully forgiving, all-powerfully healing, all-powerfully truthful, all-powerfully patient, all-powerfully restorative, etc. But, He is NOT all-powerfully cruel, all-powerfully condemning, all-powerfully vindictive, all-powerfully violent, all-powerfully coercive, etc.

Thus, God won't lie to us, kill us, coerce us, manipulate us, brutalize us, abuse us, threaten us or terrorize us. God will protect us, bless us, correct us, teach us, convince us, strengthen us, encourage us and deliver us. Consider the following passage from Saint Anselm:

"How can you be omnipotent, O God, if you cannot do all things? How can you do all things if you cannot sin - - if you cannot lie, if you cannot make false what is true? If you are unable to sin, you cannot claim to be able to do all things. Or is it that sin stems not from power, but from powerlessness? For those who commit sin have so little power over their own natures that they actually harm themselves. They are at the mercy of forces which they cannot oppose . . . The more people have power to commit sin, the more they are powerless. So, Lord God, you are in fact more truly omnipotent because you cannot act through powerlessness." Proslogion, Chapter 7.

Thus, God won't ever coerce us to NOT distort Scriptures. He will exhort us not to, woo us not to, help us not to, but He gives us the final say as to what spirit we ultimately yield our thoughts to, the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God.

So, this leaves it up to us to yield fully to the promptings and illuminations of the Holy Spirit. If we ALL truly did this, we WOULD be of one mind, one heart, and one soul. We would ALL read Scripture in dynamic and complementary ways. The fact that we all

don't read Scriptures simpatico can mean only one thing: the distortion lies in us, not God.

On some subconscious level we may be only barely aware of, some part of us WANTS to distort the divine impulses of God imbedded in Scripture, and thereby be divided amongst ourselves. In short, there is a hidden saboteur lurking somewhere within us concealed in our natural and carnal understanding. This saboteur is the true culprit behind our every twisting of Scripture.

What we must learn never to do is to blame God for this sneaky saboteur, this man of iniquity, this accomplice of Satan, which lurks within. God is the only party who is completely blameless. Anabaptist leader Hans Denk spoke to our lamentable tendency to blame-shift evil unto God during the time of the Reformation.

“O My God, how does it happen that Thou art so great and yet nobody finds Thee, that Thou callest so loudly and nobody hears Thee, that thou art so near and nobody feels Thee, that thou givest Thyself to everybody and nobody knows Thy name? Men flee from Thee and say they cannot find thee; they turn their backs and say they cannot see Thee; they stop their ears and say they cannot hear Thee.”

The real question then is why do WE stand idly by and let Scriptures be distorted? IF we have the mind of Christ, IF we have the indwelling Holy Spirit who leads us into ALL truth, and IF we have a heart of faith in the same God, then why don't we all agree on what Scripture means? Why don't we all read Scripture, if not in total agreement, then at least in the same general area code of understanding?

The answer may not be pretty in the short run, but in the long run it will yield the peaceable fruits of wisdom and righteousness. WE are the ones who allow, by refusing to yield wholly to "the influx of the Holy Spirit" (Luther), distortions of Scripture to misrepresent the nature of God and thereby cripple our corporate unity of the faith.

But the good news is that there is a cure in hand and at hand! Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, put on the mind of Christ, put on the wisdom of Christ! Jesus must be our sole hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture. All Scriptural unity of truth flows from accurately knowing His nature. This reboots our thinking into perfect alignment whenever we read the Bible. "And all shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well!" Julian of Norwich.

QUESTION 34: DID GOD SEEK TO KILL MOSES FOR FAILING TO CIRCUMCISE HIS SON?

Did God seek to kill Moses in the following passage?

"Now on the way, at a place where they stopped for the night, the LORD met Moses and sought to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off the foreskin of her son and touched it to Moses' feet, and said, 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.' So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said, 'A bridegroom of blood,' referring to the circumcision.)" Exodus 4:24-26.

God sought to kill Moses, simply because Moses failed to timely circumcise his son? Does this make any sense? Could we ever picture Jesus ever doing anything remotely like this?

Of course not! Let's take a closer look.

First, this passage says God sought to kill Moses, apparently for failing to circumcise his son on the 8th day after his birth. The Jewish mindset often would say "the Lord" did "this deadly thing" or "the Lord" did "that deadly thing," but then later assign the actual destructive action to an angel. They interpreted all "angelic activity" as "the Lord". They considered Satan "the angel of death" of the Exodus plagues who just followed the Lord's killing orders. This Exodus 4 passage is no different.

Judaism and Calvinism both make the same basic theological mistake -- they both believe Satan ONLY does what God expressly commands him to do. Calvinism says Satan is a rabid dog on the Lord's taut chain, BUT that he ONLY does what the Lord specifically "yanks his chain" to do when He "sics" Satan on those He wrathfully wishes to destroy. Judaism differs only slightly in saying that while Satan is not be a rabid dog, he is certainly an obedient servant angel who ONLY does what the Lord expressly orders him to do. Either way, Satan is seen as the executor of God's destructive judgments.

Again, the Jews attributed ANY and ALL angelic activity to God. When Jacob wrestled God, the Bible describes it in one place as God wrestling Jacob, while in another place Scripture says it was an angel who Jacob wrestled. When God appears to say He Himself will strike the firstborn of Egypt, it is actually the death angel who thereafter does the dirty work, a death angel Judaism has always recognized as Satan.

As THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says, "Satan...is...identified with the angel of death. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9

In fact, in this Exodus 4:24 passage, the Jews believed it was an ANGEL in the form of a SERPENT to be doing the harm to Moses. As Christians, we know who the "serpent-

angel" is-- Satan. Below is one of the most famous Jewish commentaries concerning this passage. It is called Rashi's Commentary. Rashi was the outstanding Jewish Biblical commentator of the Middle Ages.

"Exodus 4:24. Now he was on the way, in an inn, that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. כִּדּוּ יְהוָה בְּדַרְךְ בְּמִלּוֹן וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְהוָה וַיִּבְקֶשׂ הָמָיִתוֹ:
Now he was: [i.e.,] Moses.

ויהי: משה בדרך במלון

on the way, in an inn and sought to put him to death: [i.e., He sought] Moses, because he had neglected to circumcise his son Eliezer. Because he neglected it, he was [to be] punished with death. It was taught in a Braitha: Rabbi Jose said: God forbid! Moses did not neglect it, but he reasoned: Shall I circumcise [him] and go forth on the road? It will be dangerous for the child for three days. Shall I circumcise [him] and wait three days? The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded me, "Go, return to Egypt." [Moses hurried to Egypt intending to circumcise Eliezer upon his return.] Why [then] was he to be punished with death? Because first he busied himself with [the details of] his lodging. [This appears] in tractate Nedarim (31b). *****The angel turned into a sort of serpent and swallowed him [Moses] from his head to his thighs, and then [spit him out and] swallowed him from his feet to his private parts. Zipporah therefore understood that it was because of [the failure to perform] the circumcision [that this occurred]. — [from Ned. 32a, Exodus Rabbah 5:5]."

The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) likewise attributes the attack on Moses to an angel of the Lord rather than to Yahweh directly. Note how the Old Testament saints confused Satan and the Lord in the following passages: 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 2 Samuel 24:1. These passages both describe the exact same Biblical event of David's sin in numbering Satan, but in the first passage "Satan" caused David's sin and the resultant killing of 70,000 Israelites, whereas in the second passage "the anger of the Lord" caused David to sin. So, if the Old Testament "wrath of God" is in reality "the ministry of Satan," then "Houston we have a problem" in rightly understanding the difference between God's nature and Satan's nature in the Old Testament.

The point is that Old Testament saints believed Satan was the left hand of God, His angry voice, His official minister of wrath. SO THAT when THEY described "the angel of the Lord" as committing destructive acts, they were referring to Satan.

If we don't allow for their misunderstanding on that point, we will believe in all sorts of horrible things about God. Jesus revealed a God who only gives and protects life and a Devil who only takes and destroys life. John 10:10; Hebrews 2:14. Jesus perfectly knew the difference between God's works and Satan's works. The Old Testament saints often didn't.

If we can't see Jesus killing Moses over his son not being circumcised, then we can't see God the Father doing it either. Now, if Moses had an obedience issue with God, a faith-flaw in this important area of sanctifying his family, then this could grant Satan legal

access to afflict and try to destroy him. This is why the New Testament warns us to "not give space to the devil" (Ephesians 4:24). That is what I believe is going on here. But, that Satanic access was cured here by Zipporah's repentant actions.

Paul says in Galatians physical circumcision is "nothing," but that heart circumcision is everything. To imagine Jesus ever killing anybody over the absence of a physical ceremony which the New Testament says is "nothing" is just inconceivable. We have to start in the New Testament and work backward.

QUESTION 35: WHAT IS THE IDOLATRY OF LANGUAGE?

"Our sufficiency is of God, Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." 2 Corinthians 3:5-6

Does God communicate with language or does He communicate despite our language? Does human language carry the actual communication of God, or does it, at its best, merely point us to seek a deeper realm where God speaks to us without using language? Could it be that human language, the very thing we use to describe our interactions with God, ends up being the very thing that hinders us from better communicating with Him?

Saint Augustine said that even the person who says the most about God is still but "dumb." His point was that human language is woefully inadequate to impart the knowledge of God. And yet we often hold language as the highest expression of God, when in fact it is one of the lowest.

The more I hear God, the less I hear language. God speaks primarily by "tone." That tone is love, not language. Language can describe it. Language can polish it. Language can explain aspects of it. Language can even enhance it on occasion. BUT language by itself cannot contain or deliver the essence of God's love. In a word, language can't ARTICULATE the Kingdom of God. Isn't this the very reason Jesus never ARTICULATED what God's Kingdom WAS, only what it was LIKE? He knew human language could not convey God's Kingdom, so He used parables of comparison rather than language of definition.

If the Tower of Babel proved anything, it was that human languages divide men and diminish man's knowledge of God. Many years ago I wondered why didn't Jesus just take pen to paper and write the New Testament in His own hand so that nobody could question whether there were any mistakes or misstatements. The Lord then showed me that IF Jesus had handwritten the New Testament, then we would worship the language He used rather than the Spirit He manifested.

In fact, this is what people do today with the Ten Commandments. They worship the letter of the Law rather than the Spirit of the Word. They wrongly define God by language commands rather than by indescribable inner ignitions of God's love. Law lovers can argue points of theology ALL DAY LONG without EVER experiencing the presence of God's unspeakable love. God is above, beyond, deeper, wider, farther, better and stronger than ANY language. The Lord is "slumming" when he uses language.

When we REALLY get hold of this, we will loosen our grip on words and start using them the blessed way. Tennis pros often instruct students to "loosen their grip" on their rackets so they can better swing with fluidity and power. It is counter-intuitive to think a looser grip can increase power, but it is a proven fact that clutching the racket too tightly can inhibit the proper arc and rotation of the swing. Similarly, clutching language too tightly keeps our Spiritual movement stiff and stilted.

When I first started studying the Bible, I put a DEATH GRIP on it. I endlessly quoted verses verbatim. Every sentence I uttered or wrote, I had to back it up with a specific scripture. I couldn't tell someone I loved them without citing a verse reference. I was in such bondage. I eventually saw that for every literal concept I tightly gripped from Scripture, I would be challenged by another "DEATH GRIPPER" with his own literal verse in hand which seemed to contradict the verse I was gripping.

I began to realize that a "strictly literal" DEATH GRIP reading of the Bible triggers a Tower of Babel dynamic which scatters all DEATH GRIPPERS into separate Spiritual NATIONS. These combative and competitive NATIONS all have conflicting doctrines about God. They become denomi-NATIONS, in other words. The end result is worldwide disunity and dissension among professing Christians. We cannot hear each other BECAUSE we speak ONLY the denomi-NATIONAL language we choose to learn.

Only when we each have an "inner" Pentecost can the BABEL EFFECT be reversed and true Spiritual unity occur. Wasn't that one of the major points of the gift of tongues at Pentecost, to break our addiction to our idolatry of language? Wasn't God telling us to loosen up on the literal by leaving the dead "letter" behind in the Old Covenant bin where it belongs? This is what happened to me.

The Lord started "coaching" me to loosen my grip on human language. He showed me I had developed a "language addiction" which was retarding my spiritual growth. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit did an intervention to help cure me. They showed me to focus more on the "tones" of God rather than the languages of men.

"Tone" in physical science is defined as "the quality, character and strength of a particular sound." In language, "tone" refers to "the use of pitch to convey meaning to distinguish, convey, contrast, or otherwise express the proper use of the words being spoken. All languages use pitch to express emotional and other nonverbal information." In fact, "tonal languages," like Chinese, express meaning more by HOW something is said than in WHAT is said. Or, more precisely, the tone of the speaker determines the

meaning of the words. Meanings of words change based on the tones used by the speaker. English is not tonal, so this is a difficult concept for us to grasp.

I know we all recognize that our parents had certain tones toward us as youngsters, tones that we needed to be sensitive to regardless of what they were literally telling us. My dad's tones told me far more than his words. As a lawyer, I have learned that most Judges have "tones" which tell me far more than their literal words. Lawyers unable to recognize judges' tones often trip courtroom land mines.

My point in all this is that the concept of "tone" is crucial to understanding Scripture. By "tone" here, I mean "the quality, character and strength" of the Holy Spirit's inner voice within us conveying the true meaning of Scripture. Literal meaning is "toneless" and often misleads us into wrathful interpretations. BUT as we listen to God's tone, we become convinced of better things. Do you see? The Holy Spirit's perfect tone sings within us to lead us into all truth.

We are no longer slaves to language. The Spirit sings all meaning to us through the quality, character and strength of God's goodness. I can read something literally when the Spirit sings to me that it expresses God's true character. I will not read literally when the Spirit "sounds" a different meaning to me. GOD'S TONE ALONE DEFINES ALL SCRIPTURE.

Beloved, let's loosen our grip on human language. Wasn't that the purpose of the gift of tongues at Pentecost--- to show that heavenly language unites and blesses? God was telling all men to loosen their grip on their own natural understanding, to stop idolizing language, to stop worshipping the letter, and to stop loving the literal. Instead, there is a non-verbal land of milk and honey waiting for us. This land flows with unspoken unctions, transcendent tingles, virtuous vibes, inner illuminations, incomprehensible utterances, and groanings beyond words. When I now think of God, words no longer initially come to mind. Rather, a "tone," a "vibe," a "sensation," a "knowing" fills my heart with divine recognition.

When Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice," perhaps He meant, "My sheep hear my tone." His tone never kills, destroys or steals. "The tone of a stranger we will not follow." Jesus' tone only blesses, loves and gives life (John 10:10). Remember, the letter kills but the Spirit gives life. Language can be Satan's greatest weapon when we allow human language to mediate our knowledge of God RATHER than allowing God's presence to mediate our knowledge of language.

I can honestly say since I have loosened my grip on language, I have become much better at using it. I feel free to use language as a complementary tool to help polish, clarify and amplify the "tone" of the Lord as sounded by the Holy Ghost within me. But no longer am I addicted to serving the literal language of man. Start sensitizing yourself to the Lord's tone and soon, very soon, language will never torment you again. Then, YOUR tone will explode with goodness as you start harmonizing with the Holy Ghost!

QUESTION 36: DOES GOD GIVE PERMISSION SLIPS FOR EVIL?

Many say that while God doesn't commit evil, He certainly PERMITS it.

So let me get this straight. If my daughter gets raped, while your daughter does not, then the reason is that God specifically permitted my daughter's destruction but not yours. My daughter's rapist obtained a precise permission slip from God whereas your daughter's would-be rapist didn't.

WHAT? How is that ANY different from just saying God caused it to begin with. If God's USDA "stamp of approval" is needed for every evil to happen, then evil HAS to come from Him. Under this line of reasoning, I couldn't even think of evil to begin with unless God explicitly permitted/ordained/decreed that I think of that particular evil.

This is so unworthy of God, of Jesus, of the Father, of the Holy Spirit. God has done EVERYTHING to DISALLOW all evil. It's called the Cross of Christ, the disarming of all evil described in Colossians 2:15.

God is now expecting us on earth to finally realize and believe this. (Hebrews 10:13). In the believing of it, we will then see every form of evil has ALWAYS ALREADY been extinguished by the power of Christ displayed at the Cross.

The reason we still see evil today? Because we wrongly believe He APPROVES/ PERMITS/ALLOWS it. We can't effectively resist evil if we believe it came FROM Him in any regard. But, if we remove this deadly mental stronghold, I believe the tide will turn and victory WILL manifest.

Bottom Line: don't EVER say God causes OR allows OR permits OR ordains evil. Bite your mental tongue when you start thinking this way. An enemy had done this evil, not God, not Jesus. Jesus came to destroy evil, and in fact already has. (1 John 3:8). All we have to do is recognize His victorious grace by our faith's fervent perception of it throughout the day, every day.

QUESTION 37: WILL EVIL ALWAYS BE POSSIBLE, EVEN IN ETERNITY?

I have been asked several times how evil will ever be totally vanquished. Even in the New Jerusalem, what will keep evil from re-emerging again. Won't we still have free will to potentially choose evil for all eternity?

No, evil is not eternal. God is eternal, love is eternal, and virtue is eternal, but NOT evil.

Here is the perfect illustration to help us better understand the non-eternal nature of evil.

Evil is a potential "growing pain" that is temporarily possible only during this finite earth age. I remember reading once that children often suffer "growing pains" in their joints and bones. I know I suffered them horribly in both my shins when I was nine years old. The pain was almost crippling.

The suspected cause of "growing pains" is MISUSE from a child's over-exertion of their body. Similarly, spiritual evil comes from our MISUSE of our free will. But, just like literal "growing pains" subside when maturity comes, so too does the "growing pain" of evil EVENTUALLY subside as we spiritually mature in this life and/or the next.

Wherever there is freedom, there is also the possibility of misuse, at least in the developmental stages of growth. The oldest Methuselah in this earth age is still but a child in the spiritual sense, which is why I believe evil can only exist briefly during the childhood of free beings. Once outside the incubator, virtuous maturity comes and temporal evil fades.

For some, maturing PAST the "growing pains" of evil can occur in THIS lifetime because they are consistently allowing their minds and hearts to be renewed daily to the good, perfect and acceptable will of the Lord. For others though, maturity will have to come in the AFTERLIFE, where the Lord uses His chastening flames of correction to purge away a lifetime of rampant misuse of free will. The resultant "growing pains" experienced in the Lord's wise fire will be devastating but ultimately restorative.

The below passage describes this postmortem process to a tee:

"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire."

But the best news of all is that growing pains stop when we reach a certain level of maturity. This is true both in the physical and spiritual applications. And growing pains of evil DON'T have to occur. Jesus never misused His freedom, and so never experienced evil within Himself. But Adam did. Jesus certainly experienced evil circumstances and evil temptations, yet He remained without sin. And, on the Cross, Jesus certainly bore ALL of our cumulative growing pains of evil on the cross. But, at the end of the spiritual day, at the end of the ages to come, there will be no more growing pains, no more evil, and no more tears.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Revelation 21:4.

QUESTION 38: WHAT IS THE ABSOLUTE BEST BIBLE TRANSLATION EVER?

Which is the guaranteed best Bible translation? Is it the KJV (King James Version), the NASB (New American Standard Bible), the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), the NIV (New International Version), or any one of a dozen other "versions?" Which one does God want you to read the most? Which version does God like best?

Would it surprise you if the answer was: NONE OF THEM. Certainly, each respective version has various things which commend it and various things which diminish its readability or accuracy. But none of them are the Lord's favorite.

The Lord's favorite Bible version is one I want to call the HET, which stands for the HEART ENGRAVED TRANSLATION. This translation is flawless, brilliant and perfect. There are no textual ambiguities, no scribe's errors, no mis-numbering or misquoting. It is totally accurate and reliable.

Want a copy? Ok, put your hand over heart. Now, focus on God. There you go. The HET version is right there in plain view ---- written all over your heart, your thoughts and your passions. Written by the finger of God on you, in you and for you. The Word is "tattooed" all over your being right now, regardless of how much or how little you have read the "printed" Bible. The Bible I speak of is the INNER BIBLE, the HET INNER BIBLE, the HEART ENGRAVED TRANSLATION INNER BIBLE.

"YOU are our epistle... MANIFESTLY declared to be the epistle of Christ... written NOT with ink, BUT with the SPIRIT of the LIVING GOD; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart, and such TRUST we have THROUGH CHRIST TOWARD GOD.... Who also hath made us ABLE ministers of the New Testament; NOT of the LETTER, but of the Spirit: for the letter KILLS, but the SPIRIT giveth LIFE. But if the ministration of death, WRITTEN and ENGRAVED in tablets, was glorious,... how much MORE GLORIOUS shall be the ministration of the Spirit?" 2 Corinthians 3:2-4, 6-8.

The above passage tells us the purest form of the New Covenant is written not on "tablets," but on the human "heart." This is the WHOLE difference BETWEEN the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant was written JUST on tablets. The New Covenant is written JUST in men's inner parts.

"But this shall be the COVENANT that I WILL make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and WRITE IT IN THEIR

HEARTS; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord!', for they shall ALL know me, from the least unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:33-34.

So beloved, IF we really believe these passages above, why do we still largely "serve" the OUTER BIBLE rather than the INNER BIBLE? The OUTER BIBLE is a great external resource divinely inspired and beneficial in a thousand different ways, BUT why do we PRIORITIZE and serve it BEFORE our INNER BIBLE, the BETTER BIBLE of our BETTER COVENANT with BETTER PROMISES. It is BETTER in every way because God's laws of love are ALREADY written inside us. If we could but grasp the enormity of this truth, we could unleash the power of God from within as manifest sons of God.

Let me be clear. We should definitely study and revere written Scripture, BUT not above, before and at the expense of the Word of God written on our inner parts. It is like the difference between a treasure map and the treasure itself. The treasure map is to be cleaved to tightly UNTIL we actually find the treasure, but when we do, the map is now secondary in importance. Of course, if we put the treasure back in the ground, then we need to clutch tight to the map again in order to relocate the treasure should we stray and forget the burial spot. But when we have the treasure before us, we are to revel in IT and not the map any longer.

So what is the Word written on our hearts? It is the "prompting presence" of God in the form of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine nature of Christ indwelling us. It is Christ IN us, the hope of glory. We are temples of the Holy Ghost housing the Spirit of the living God. Our born again birth right is to hear the voice of the Shepherd and to follow it. The Sons of God are those led by the Spirit of God, not the external Bible of God. Do you see the importance here? Anybody can twist numerous Old and New Testament verses alike to say most anything ---- justifying violence, hatred, unforgiveness, cruelty and wrath. For every verse of love and forgiveness cited by one, another can cite a verse of destruction or revenge.

BUT, the HET can never be twisted. The Heart Engraved Translation is always upright and clean. The inner voice of grace, mercy and forgiveness always walks tall in our Spirit-quickenened conscience. We judge not. We turn the other cheek, not because the Bible says to, but because the Holy Spirit urges this divine idea from within. God doesn't love us because the Bible tells me so. God loves us because the Holy Spirit PERFORMS the ACTUAL love of God for us in our hearts. He performs in us 24/7 through His Spirit-showings in our inner man.

The OUTER BIBLE is there to always point to the INNER BIBLE, but NOT to replace it. The INNER BIBLE illuminates, renovates and properly translates the OUTER BIBLE, and not vice versa. We are to let the character of God interpret written Scripture, but NOT let the written Scripture interpret the character of God. The deep truths of God flow from the INNER MAN outward, NOT from the OUTER MAN inward. So, if the OUTER

BIBLE "APPEARS" to say God commits evil by stealing, killing or destroying the lives of men, or even that He sits idly by while allowing such destructions to occur, then your INNER BIBLE TRUMPS that claim when your conscience rises up and declares "No! God is good. Only good. Always good!"

The OUTER BIBLE not only serves as a MAP, as discussed above, but it also serves as a MIRROR. It reflects from without what the voice of God is ALREADY telling us within. This is why true spiritual knowledge feels more like we are remembering the truth than newly discovering it. The treasure we carry, the indwelling mystery of Christ, is carried in these earthen vessels we call bodies. We can too easily forget we are Second Adams born of the Spirit rather than First Adams born of the dust. The MIRROR aspect of the OUTER BIBLE helps us shake the dust of neglect off our self-image. The written Bible serves as a point of reflection to remind us we are made in God's image and that we are NEVER to NEGLECT or FORGET the treasure buried within us, the very life and Spirit of God. But if we do, the written Bible is there to point the way back by REMINDING us who WE are IN CHRIST and who HE is IN US.

So as a MAP, the EXTERNAL BIBLE leads us to FIND the treasure already hidden in our hearts. As a MIRROR, the EXTERNAL BIBLE is also there to REMIND us who we are in God. Lastly, as a form of MILK, it is there to help us grow initially in our spiritual infancy. But, as we grow, it becomes necessary to WEAN ourselves OFF the milk of the literal and mature into the meat of the Spiritual. The meat of the Spiritual can only be found by prioritizing the INNER BIBLE over the OUTER BIBLE. We will still heartily use the OUTER BIBLE for devotion and study, BUT the proper translation of it will not come from OUTER BIBLE RULES OF INTERPRETATION, but rather from INNER BIBLE UNCTIONS OF UNDERSTANDING. In other words, SPIRITUAL LEADING, not LITERAL READING, is our source for all Biblical understanding.

The INNER BIBLE is really just another word for the "ANOINTING" used in the following passage: "But you have an UNCTION (literally 'anointing') from the Holy One, and you know ALL things.... But the ANOINTING which you have RECEIVED of Him abides IN you and you need not that ANY man teach you: but as the SAME ANOINTING teaches you of ALL things, and IS truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall ABIDE in Him." 1 John 2:20, 27.

Do you see the similarity between this verse and the Jeremiah 31:33-34 passage quoted above? Men's LIMITED external teaching is replaced with the Spirit's LIMITLESS internal anointing. This ANOINTING imparts all knowledge to all men and ultimately removes the need for all teachers BECAUSE all are hearkening to their INNER BIBLES. It has been said that the best teacher ultimately teaches you that you don't need a teacher. We are here to "wean" ourselves "away" from the OUTER BIBLE'S PARTIAL AND LITERAL REVELATION and instead feed ourselves continually on the INNER BIBLE'S COMPLETED AND SPIRITUAL REVELATION. Hallelujah!

NEVER leave home without your HET INNER BIBLE. The Heart Engraved Translation is the guaranteed best Bible translation ever. It is flawless. The HET Bible has already

been disbursed to every man on earth, but most don't know it, while many others who may know it have yet to open it. Still others, who both know they have the INNER BIBLE and actually read it from time to time, nonetheless fail to read it enough to actually abide in it. Some are too lazy to read it. Others simply don't believe in their ability to hear the voice of God clearly enough to trust it continually. But a few, a happy few, are well rehearsed, totally immersed and perfectly versed in the power of the HET INNER BIBLE. Let's join them!

QUESTION 39: WHY DOES PRAYER FOR HEALING SOMETIMES FAIL?

These are sensitive topics for sure, especially getting into "why" certain prayers for healing and restoration seem to fail. I believe it is unwise to ever get into why in any PARTICULAR SITUATION a healing prayer fails.

While it is good to know in a GENERAL way why prayer/faith fails, it is best stay away from SPECIFIC situations because to REALLY know all the reasons for a particular failure, we would have to know EVERYTHING about ALL the participants. And only God TRULY knows the hearts of all men, all the variables of firsthand or secondhand sin, of various Satanic accesses, of familiar spirits, strongholds of unbelief, regional variables, etc.

Just as secondhand smoke kills millions of people who have never in fact smoked, sin's harmful effects have released Satanically toxic events to destroy innocents who were never involved in the sowing of the initial sin. So, to know why any ONE prayer fails to effectually heal another is beyond our ability to know.

But, again, it is good to know in a GENERAL way what debilitates our prayers so that we can AVOID their harmful effects and MAXIMIZE our faith. To be aware of the general dynamics of faith is a wonderful wisdom to have. Just remember to never apply these dynamics to any individual situation, lest we fall into the snare of Job's foolish friends and become ACCUSERS rather than HEALERS.

So, here are a few reasons for failed headings I see in Scripture.

First, we, as the body of Christ, have NOT yet matured to the point of perfection where we are routinely healing the sick and raising the dead. Paul said in Romans 8:19 that the whole creation is WAITING and groaning for "the manifestation of the sons of God," which meant that they were NOT YET manifesting the same and greater works Jesus commanded in John 14:12.

Jesus is also WAITING for us to make "His enemies be made His footstool" Hebrews 10:13. He is particularly WAITING for "the last enemy" to be fully defeated by us, which is death (1 Corinthians 15:25-28). The whole book of Ephesians is about the body of

Christ maturing and growing up into perfection (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-16). Lack of perfection (maturity) is the MAJOR reason we are not yet harvesting dead bodies back to life on a wide-scale basis. We believe Lord, but help our unbelief to grow and mature past dismal results and rare successes.

Moreover, and here it gets a little touchy, Scripture clearly reveals individual or corporate unbelief as one, but certainly not the only, reason for failed healings and failed dead-raising. When Jesus, in Mark 6:1-6, could do no mighty works at Nazareth, it was because of their corporate "unbelief," an unbelief which disappointed Jesus so much that He "marveled" at it. Jesus was able to heal a few by His own faith, but was clearly hampered and handcuffed by their unbelief which kept Him from doing "the mighty works of God."

God's provision for healing is always available but not always received due to:
Unbelief (ours or those around us) (Mk. 6:1-6; Matthew 17:16-17);
Unconfessed sin (Jas. 5:13-16);
Un-persevering faith (Luke 11:8; 18:1-8);
Unconfessed faith (Mk. 11:22-24; James 4:2; Proverbs 18:21);
Undeveloped faith (John 8:31-31; 2 Peter 1:3-8; Hosea 4:6);
Un-fervent faith (James 5:16);
Unforgiveness (Mark 11:24-26);
Unfulfilled conditions (Proverbs 26:2) such as: NO laying on of hands (Mark 16:17-18);
NO elders or anointing oil (James 5:14-15); NO communion (1 Corinthians 11:23-30).

Sometimes it is one, or some combination of, the above disabling conditions which hamper the Lord's manifest will to heal ALL oppressed of the devil. In fact, John Wesley famously believed that because of freewill, God could only effect His healings through the faith and prayers of men. God is waiting for US to mature into the faith warriors who will put ALL His enemies underfoot, once and for all, especially death. We will not mature into this until we honestly admit we are still children in our understanding.

Concerning people who have prayed for sick children (or anybody for that matter) with no results, I would say this. I have to believe, because of what Scripture promises, that wholehearted faith will always heal those oppressed by the devil, and who are in fact willing to be healed. The problem is that WE can't really know for sure who is being wholehearted with their faith and who isn't. They may look wholehearted, confident and intense to us by the natural eye, but that it is only an appearance. ONLY God knows what the true source of their prayer is, whether it be of faith, or self-will, or bold desperation, or any other blended motive.

In the New Testament--- Jesus, Paul, Peter, James and John just made too many declarative promises of guaranteed healing, authority OVER all Satanic attacks, and protection FROM evil for me not to stand on them. Even the Old Testament reveals a God who always keeps His healing covenant with Israel.

So, whatever the source of failure is, it has just got to be on OUR side of the equation and NOT God's. I have stood on these promises for my own 7 children, confessed these promises in prayer over them even when they were completely healthy. None have ever broken a bone or been devastatingly sick, praise be to God. Yet, some of my healing prayers toward them in other developmental areas have not yet fully manifested. Nonetheless, I will never believe it is God's will that my children NOT be made whole--spirit, soul and body. Whatever the holdup, it is not God.

Below is an outline of healing nuggets I made some time back:

1) Jesus bore all our sins and sicknesses on the cross. Ps. 103:1-5; Is. 53:1-6 (In verse 4, the literal Hebrew for "griefs" = diseases and "sorrows" = pain); Matt. 8:16-17 (Note that Jesus healed physical sickness here in fulfillment of Isaiah, not just spiritual sickness); 1 Pet. 2:24 (Note the past tense "by his stripes ye were healed", pointing to the past and completed work of the cross).

2) We should never pray for God to heal us because Jesus already provided healing on the cross. Rather, we should pray in faith to receive the Lord's healing already accomplished two thousand years ago. Consider Ephraim (Israel) in Hos. 11:3 whom God had already healed, but they knew it not. In the same way, all the saints have been healed today, through God's provision at the cross, but many know it not and never receive it by faith. A million dollar check in our pocket will never do us any good until we make a demand to cash it. Similarly, the healing promises of God must be presented by our faith, endorsed by our confession and cashed by our actions. The Holy Spirit's role is continually convincing us that we truly possess the million dollar check of healing and deliverance. (1 Cor. 2:12; Jn. 16:7-15).

3) Jesus healed all who were oppressed by the devil except those who refused or were unable to receive through unbelief. (Acts 10:38; Mk. 6:1-6).

4) Jesus commissioned believers to walk in the same healing anointing He had. (Jn. 14:10-14; Mk. 16:17-18; Lk. 10:1,9,17-19; Matt. 10:1, 7-8; Jas.5:15).

5) Faith which is released and received will always heal the sick. (James 5:14-15; Mk. 11:22-24; Matt. 21:22; Mk. 9:23; Acts 14:8-10).

6) It is God's nature to heal. Exodus 15:26, Jehovah Ropheka, "The Lord that healeth thee," Ex. 23:25; Mal. 4:2; Pr. 9:11; Acts 10:38), and that same nature is in us. (Col. 1:27).

7) Sickness is a curse which comes from Satan, and healing is a blessing which comes from God. (Jn. 10:10; Ps. 107:20; Acts 10:38; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 5:5; Lu. 13:16; Prov. 10:22). "Woe to those who call evil (sickness) good (from God) and good (healing) evil (from Satan)" (Is. 5:20). Calling sickness "evil" allows us to resist it with the same intensity as we resist sin. Calling sickness "good" keeps us from fighting it.

8) Consider Jesus' ministry. Jesus never put sickness on anybody to test or teach them. Jesus destroyed sin and sickness. (1 Jn. 3:8); Acts 10:38). This shows His will is to heal all who come to Him in faith. Jesus said that He and the Father are one and when you see Jesus you see the Father. Thus, we know the Father's heart for healing is the same as Jesus' heart. (Jn. 10:30; 14:7);13:16), whose seed we are if we are "of faith" (Gal. 3:6-7,13-14, 29).

9) All scholars agree that God had a healing covenant with Israel (Dt. 7:12-15), and our covenant through Jesus is a "better covenant" (Heb. 8:6) which in the Greek literally means a stronger covenant. Our covenant of healing is even stronger than was Israel's.

10) If God puts or allows sickness on men, then Jesus couldn't have healed as He did. He said that Satan can't cast out Satan because a house divided cannot stand. Jesus couldn't cast out sickness if God put it on men or He would be a divided house. It would be God casting out God (Mk. 3:22-29).

11) Finally, consider the Heavenly Father: He is not a child abuser who puts diseases on His children or neglects them to death. (1 Jn. 1:5; 3:1; 4:8). If earthly fathers know how NOT to expose their children to dangerous conditions (warm clothing for cold weather, avoidance of disease ridden areas, healthy food for hunger), how much more does the heavenly Father know how to protect his children from Satan if they will receive in faith His provision of protection. (Lu. 11:10-13; Jas. 1:6).

Blessings!

QUESTION 40: WHAT ABOUT THESE TWO TOUGH PASSAGES ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Below are two good questions recently submitted to me along with my response.

1) What do you make of Jesus' statement re Judas "better that he was never born?" This sounds like he is lost forever! To never be born means he will never enter New Jerusalem

2) What about the sin against the Spirit NOT being forgiven in this age or age to come? Sounds like person remains in this state even in the next age which means never enter the New Jerusalem?

1) "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him : but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." Matthew 26:24.

I think this could be said of many people, Adolph Hitler, mass murderers, terrorists, among many others. To say it was "good for him if he had not been born" merely means to me that the person had a life of failure and rejection as it pertains to their walk with the Lord. This statement would be true at some level of ANY lifelong unrepentant sinner.

I believe in the eternality of souls, or put another way their immortality. Many babies have been aborted or still-born, yet their souls are with the Lord, even though they never actually lived on the earth. But, what if one of those aborted babies WOULD have grown up into another lifelong unrepentant Hitler? If the Lord in His foreknowledge knew this, it would definitely be accurate and true to say it was "better" that the baby was never born than to grow up to become a mass murder. In other words, it is true to say it would be better for Hitler to have never lived on THIS earth (but instead his immortal soul remain in Heaven under the Lord's care) than for Hitler to suffer a failed, destructive and unrepentant life along with the dire post-mortem consequences.

2) "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Matthew 12:32.

This verse is talking about the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost. I think it is referring to someone who habitually attributes the works of the Spirit to Satan, which was the context of this passage (the Pharisees were attributing Jesus' Spirit ministry to Satan). And Matthew's statement that there is not forgiveness for him in THIS age or the age to COME is definitely serious.

But remember, there is MORE than ONE age to come.

"That in the AGES (plural) to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus ." Ephesians 2:7.

Reading these two together, I believe that blasphemers of the Holy Ghost will have a "chastening-age" of purification, correction and rehabilitation in God's "wise fire" known as Hell. And I believe this Hell-age for many could well be lengthy, painful and anguishing beyond our ability to measure it. Fortunately, that is not where the story ends because in the AGES (plural) to come PAST and BEYOND this age of Hellish-chastening, there will be apocatastasis, which the NSRV translates as "universal restoration" in Acts 3:21. Revelation 5:13, Phillipians 2:10 and 1 Corinthians 15: 22-28 also describe this Christus Victor future age where ALL things are reconciled to God.

In conclusion, it is hard to limit Jesus' statement from the cross to "forgive them for they know not what they do" to all men EXCEPT Spirit blasphemers. I totally agree that those

who commit this sin are in for a rude post-mortem ride of incredible pain and anguish, BUT I don't believe they are beyond the Lord's redemptive reach in the subsequent AGES to come.

QUESTION 41: WHY SHOULD WE READ THE OLD TESTAMENT?

The central purpose of Old Testament Scripture is for us to have an Emmaus Road "burning heart" encounter with Jesus where He "interprets" to us where "He IS" in "ALL" the Scriptures.

Jesus clearly said He WAS, in fact, in ALL the Scriptures, not only here, but also in John 5:39 where He said the Old Testament "Scriptures are they which SPEAK of Me." This is why Jesus said the Old Testament Scripture "cannot be broken" (John 10:35), because it continually "speaks" of Him.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus told the two disciples "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He (Christ) INTERPRETED to them in ALL THE SCRIPTURES the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our HEART BURNING WITHIN us, while he spake to us in the way, while he OPENED to us the SCRIPTURES ?" Luke 24:26-27, 31-32.

This Emmaus passage is from where I derive the term The Jesus Hermeneutic. This hermeneutic says that the Old Testament Scriptures may ONLY rightfully be "opened" by Jesus as the interpretive source. And when He does open them to us, our hearts burn within, and burn, and burn. Without Jesus (through His indwelling Spirit) translating and allegorizing the Scriptures "for" and "to" us, the Old Testament becomes a frequent death trap for God's goodness.

All Old Testament Scripture must be read looking first and foremost for something "Jesus-related" or "Kingdom-of-God-related." Since Jesus IS the kingdom of God, Kingdom dynamics are really just Jesus dynamics. Since Jesus is not to be found in the LITERAL reading of the great bulk of the Old Testament, then the great bulk of Scripture must be read non-literally, or ALLEGORICALLY.

The definition of allegory I have adopted is as follows: "Allegory is language that means MORE than what is being literally said or OTHER than what is being literally said." When the Old Testament DOES clearly speak of a coming Emmanuel-Messiah who will bring salvation to all nations, etc., then we can read those passages literally because they are referring to Jesus. The spiritual and reading readings here coincide (even though we still always need Holy Spirit "quickening" for these passages to impart true life to our heart).

But, these passages are very few. There are also numerous statements, especially in the Psalms, about God's goodness, His tender-mercies, His loving-kindness, His heroic nature and boundless love. These are certainly literally true, but they only become kinetically true for us WHEN we see their NOW fulfillment in Christ.

For example, for the OT saint, God's "tender-mercies" might mean the Lord instigating the de-capitation their enemies. However, for the NT saint, the word "tender-mercies" would not allow for a construction that would grant us such wrath toward our enemies. So even then, we need to have Jesus allegorically FULFILL every good thing the Old Testament literally says about Yahweh--- fill it full of Jesus' goodness.

The great bulk of the Old Testament passages have Jesus (and His Kingdom dynamics) IMBEDDED in them in non-literal form. The only way to extrude them is through the use of allegory. Jesus, Paul and the early church fathers continually allegorized the Old Testament away from the literal to the symbolic.

One could argue that Jesus displayed this same dynamic with His parables. Did the parables actually happen? Were they literally true? Jesus' use of the word "certain" when introducing His Kingdom Parables (a "certain" king, a "certain" man, a "certain" householder) indicates that they were perhaps literal-historical, but was that the vital point? No, the vital point was not whether they were literal-historical, but rather what Kingdom dynamic about Jesus was imbedded WITHIN the Parable for those who had ears to hear.

It is undeniable that Jesus largely spoke in parables. Matthew 13:13. Some had ears to hear. Most didn't. These stories all had to be understood allegorically and NOT literally. Even though they literally said some useful things, their true value came when Jesus explained them to His disciples ALLEGORICALLY (just like He did on the road to Emmaus).

"But your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see [the truths of the parables revealed by Jesus] but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. So listen to the parable...." Matthew 13:16-18.

I would suggest that parabolic reading is a form of allegorical reading. And this appears to be the reading method Jesus prefers.

"Allegory is language that means MORE than what is being literally said or OTHER than what is being literally said."

1) "MORE THAN" ALLEGORIES: In the instance of a particular passage meaning MORE than what is being literally said, the text CAN be read literally as true, but also allegorically as meaning MORE than JUST the literal meaning. Here, the allegorical meaning which points to future New Testament realities would be the PRIMARY goal of our reading, while the historical-literal meaning would be secondary.

Knowing that Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and Elijah were all historical figures who walked the earth as "hall of faith" men carrying the baton of the covenant for their generation blesses us on a literal and moral level. And that is good and useful. But, each of their lives also contain types and shadows which reflect the reality of Jesus and His coming Kingdom. These allegorical meanings are the core truths Jesus wants us to see.

Here are a handful of examples of literal-historical events which the New Testament means much MORE than originally meets the interpretive eye.

Galatians 4:21-31 (The "allegorical" reading of the Old Testament here is both modeled and approved by Paul, as he completely reinterprets the meaning of the story of Abraham, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael to refer rather to the current relationship between Old and New Covenants).

1 Corinthians 10:1-11(Paul "allegorizes" the whole Exodus journey of Israel as a type of the Christian walk, reading it non-literally in other words).

2 Corinthians 3:6-18 (Paul here says we are to be "ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter, for the LETTER KILLS, but of the Spirit, for the Spirit gives life," and that Moses, as a symbol of Old Testament understanding, "veiled" the true meaning of OT Scripture by reading it with blind literalism).

Hebrews 8:1-5 (The voluminous OT passages about the "tabernacle" and "priesthood" and "sacrifices" are all "shadows of heavenly things" rather than literal realities on earth).

Hebrews 10:1 (Here, we see the law itself is to be read allegorically: "the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and NOT the very image of the things").

Colossians 2:17 (The OT festivals, holy days and dietary laws are all called "shadows" of "the body of Christ" to come, again not the literal thing itself but a prophetic shadow of the Kingdom of God).

To read Old Testament Scripture allegorically is NOT to deny it lacks any historical value at all. Rather, it is to say that the primary meaning of Old Testament Scripture is symbolic and non-literal. It is more like a heroic "movie trailer" of Christ and His "coming soon" kingdom. The trailer is not in narrative form, but is a series of quickly cut and wondrously weaved symbolic snippets which give us exciting flashes of insight into Jesus. But this trailer can only be previewed on a Holy Ghost projector.

Now, we know that Jesus is LITERALLY nowhere explicitly to be found by name in the Old Testament. But, ALLEGORICALLY, He is everywhere to be found. Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to those two highly blessed Emmaus disciples so that we

would learn the right way to relate to the OT. And their hearts burned within them, as they will within us, as they finally understood the true import of the Old Testament.

2) "OTHER THAN" ALLEGORIES: In the instances where the passage means OTHER than what is being literally said, then we are commissioned as able ministers of the New Covenant to redivide Old Testament Scripture in conformity with New Testament light (2 Corinthians 3:6).

I agree with Augustine's statements below.

"Wherefore, in the Old Testament there is a veiling of the New, and in the New Testament a revealing of the Old. According to that veiling, carnal men, understanding things in a carnal fashion, have been under the dominion, both then and now, of a penal fear. On the other hand, spiritual men... have a spiritual understanding and have been made free through love which they have been gifted." Saint Augustine (On Catechizing the Uninstructed 4:8; NPNF 1/3:287).

Augustine also wrote that, "if a passage seems to endorse wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid selflessness or kindness, it is figurative" and not to be read literally. He believed that all Scripture must be interpreted through the love of God and neighbor, on which all the law and prophets hang (Matt. 22:37-40).

I think we would agree that only Jesus could perfectly discern, process, and translate divine impulses of the Father. It was for this reason that John 1:18 and 5:37 tell us that nobody prior to Jesus had fully and accurately perceived God's nature. These are stunning statements to be sure. For this reason, Jesus had to retranslate certain Old Testament passages to better comply with His Father's true nature.

Jesus demonstrated this during the Sermon in the Mount in Matthew 5 when He repeatedly said the Old Testament may have "said...." this thing or that thing, "but I SAY..." something better, deeper, higher and clearer.

Especially look at verses 38-48. Jesus here redivided Moses' law to better reflect His Father's heart. In John 8, Moses' law demanded the woman caught in adultery be stoned on the spot. But, Jesus didn't let it happen. Did he "chuck" the Old Testament out here. Well, the wrath He chucked out maybe, but I think the better way to look at it is that He "fulfilled" the Old Testament here by "filling it full of His love and mercy." He did NOT condemn the woman, but rescued her from danger and let her know He cared, THEN He exhorted her to stop sinning. Moses would have had her stoned on the spot, whose very words the crowd were obeying to begin with.

Jesus routinely edited the "literal" meaning of the Old Testament whenever it didn't accurately convey His Father's true nature. Consider the following passage in which Jesus first declares the purpose of His Earthly ministry.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” Lk. 4:18-19.

This above passage was quoting an Old Testament passage in Isaiah 61:1-2.

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD; to comfort all that mourn . . .” Is. 61:1-2.

Compare the two passages and notice what Jesus carefully “left out” of His use of this Scripture. He left out, “To proclaim . . . the day of vengeance of our God.” Isaiah’s version was tinged with wrath. Jesus removed the tinge. Praise God He removes all our “tinges” if we let Him.

The Gospels are crucial to this discussion because they show us how Jesus read, understood and applied Scriptures. Jesus basically displayed three dynamics in His reading of Scriptures:

A) Sometimes, Jesus literally applied Old Testament Scripture word for word.

“And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.” Lu. 4:4 (quoting Dt. 8:3).

B) Other times, Jesus adjusted and improved the literal meaning of Old Testament Scripture.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”
Matt. 5:21-22 (quoting Ex. 20:13).

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Matt. 5:27-28 (quoting Ex. 20:14).

C) Still other times, Jesus outright contradicted and changed Old Testament Scripture.

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” Matt. 5:33-37 (quoting Nu. 30:2 and Dt. 23:23).

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” Matt. 5:38-42 (quoting Ex. 21:24).

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt. 5:43-45 (quoting Dt. 7:1-5, 16-26).

Jesus frequently adjusted Scriptures to conform to the true nature of His Father. Sometimes, the “literal” meaning lined up with the “Spiritual” meaning. Sometimes it didn't. Jesus never let the “letter” of Scripture define God's character. Rather, Jesus always allowed the character of His Father to define Scripture. Sometimes, Old Testament saints mis-applied their inspiration in writing Scriptures. In these cases, Jesus re-applied the Holy Spirit's wisdom to better and more accurately match “meaning” to “inspiration.” Whenever needed, Jesus translated Old Testament literal darkness into New Testament Spiritual light.

The point is that we have to let Jesus show us how to rightly read the Old Testament with New Testament eyes, "NOT by the letter, for the letter kills, but by the Spirit, for the Spirit brings life." 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Bottom line: when the OT attributes wrath, cruelty, vengeance and destruction to God, we need to redivide the meaning to OTHER than what is being literally said. Satan is the source of these horrors, not God.

This misattribution of evil usually comes from the OT authors' confusion between Satan and God. The OT Jews believed Satan was an obedient angel, God's left hand, His angry voice, His official minister of wrath, His death angel. Jesus came and emphatically corrected that erroneous idea. Jesus revealed Satan a cosmic rebel, liar,

and murderer from the beginning, the prince of this fallen world whose works and ways Jesus came to destroy (John 8:44; 16:11; 1 John 3:8).

If we don't redivide Old Testament Scripture by rerouting all the death and destruction described there to Satan, then we are misreading Scriptures and NOT positioning ourselves for an Emmaus road experience with our indwelling Christ.

QUESTION 42: WHY WAS THE MAN BORN BLIND IN JOHN 9? IS THIS A BLESSED QUESTION?

This passage is so twisted by wrath-mongers. They love to cite it for the proposition that God struck this poor man at his birth with blindness SO THAT Jesus would get the glory thirty years later when healed him. This is insane! God gets the glory for healing a man He struck blind to begin with? Thirty years of this man's stumbling in the darkness brings God glory?

We must avoid the trap of becoming too caught up in the exact cause of a current evil situation. Millions of tangential factors could be working in complex combination to sow the harvest of the particular destruction we are considering.

Let me use the metaphor of a large lake. Every thought or action we take is like a rock thrown into this lake of causation. It causes ripples which affect ourselves and others. Now multiply these ripples by the trillion other rocks of thoughts and actions hurled into the lake 24\7 by billions of other people past, present and future.

Also consider how those ripples may work together to cause a single tidal wave of calamity, or the waves may violently crash into each other causing multiple minor chaotic events and buffetings. Only God can know and safely navigate through and around all the interference patterns of sin, sickness and unbelief.

Why any one wave of affliction crashes at any time on any one person is beyond our ability to know. But we can trust that God knows and always hastens to the highest available good.

Jesus only occasionally cited the source of a sickness or demon-possession, and then only in the most general of terms. Once He cited the sin of the afflicted as a causative factor. Jn. 5:1-14. Another time He stated Satan as the cause. Lu. 13:11-16. Peter was clear that Satan was always involved in every sickness and affliction at some ultimate level: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Acts 10:38.

Yet, on still another occasion (Jn. 9:1-7), Jesus stated that the cause of a man born blind's affliction was irrelevant and NOT due to either the sin of the afflicted or his parents.

When asked by onlookers "whether" it was the man's "own sin" in the womb which caused his blindness, or, alternatively, "was it his parents' previous sin" which caused the man to be born blind, Jesus, in the original Greek, answered:

"NEITHER, nonetheless let the glory of God be revealed" (literal translation of Jn. 9:3; "Grammatically 'hina phaneroo' could be construed as an imperative: 'Let the works of God be displayed in him!' For such a construction cf. Mk. 5:23; Eph. 5:33; 2 Cor. 2:7; possible Johannine instances are 14:31; 15:25; see C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of NT Greek* [Cambridge: Cup 1953] 144-145, with literature there cited, and N. Turner in Moulton's *Grammar of NT Greek* 3:95*" World Bible Commentary, Vol. 36, George R. Beasley-Murray, Word Books (1987), p. 151.*)

Also consider the Contemporary English Version's alternate translation of these verses:

"As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who had been blind since birth. Jesus' disciples asked, 'Teacher, why was this man born blind? Was it because he or his parents sinned?' 'No, it wasn't!' Jesus answered. 'But because of his blindness, you will see God work a miracle for him.'" Jn. 9:1-3.

Another well-respected translation by renowned scholar George Lamsa based on the Peshitta, the ancient Aramaic version which serves as the authorized Bible of the Church of the East, reads as follows: "Jesus said to them, 'Neither did this man sin nor his parents. But that the works of God might be seen in him, I must do the works of Him who sent me....'" John 9:3.

The point is that there are many alternative renderings of this passage which are much more in line with God's character as revealed in Jesus Christ. The other translations which suggest that God cruelly struck the man blind at birth so that His OWN glory would somehow be revealed thirty years later, are simply untenable and dishonoring of the divine nature. If scholars disagree on translation issues, we should always go with the translation which best honors God and more closely resembles the heroic view of God Jesus revealed.

Getting too caught up in the specific cause of the current affliction can cause blame, condemnation and shame to pollute the atmosphere resulting in faith not being released. This is not to say prior sin of the afflicted is never to be broached, but only if the Spirit wills it. The vast majority of healings Jesus ministered never involved specific sin being exposed, but rather focused on the release of God's glory.

Let us likewise be glory-focused. Rather than looking back on what seeds caused the evil harvest, we must hear God about what seed of faith is needed NOW to sow salvation into the situation. Sometimes that seed will be repentance over some sin by

the afflicted, and sometimes it will not. Jas. 5:14-16 seems to put this burden on the afflicted as to whether a particular sin should be confessed as a cause of the current illness.

Our primary focus should always be on the "how" (to release healing) rather than the "why" (is the person afflicted). The healing is always in the "how," not the "why." It does not appear Jesus required repentance over sickness-causing sins before He would heal the afflicted. Of course all men need to repent for all sins, whether it be sooner or later. Yet, Jesus never made it a precondition for His healing glory to be released. However, repentance is crucial to keep the same or worse affliction from returning. (Jn. 5:14). Repentance removes Satanic access.

QUESTION 43: HOW DOES THE LORD "SCOURGE" US AS HIS SONS?

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and SCOURGETH every son whom he receiveth." Hebrews 12:6.

God doesn't "spank" our outer man with affliction. But He does "scourge" our inner-man with crashing waves of stimulating conviction. Conviction just means "a heart pricked to firm and full resolve on a particular matter."

George Whitefield prayed for this power of conviction and resolve in 1737, "God, give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and a single eye, and then let men or devils do their worst." Smith Wigglesworth did as well. "Lord, give us, Thy servants, great searchings of heart, great decisions of will, and great assurances through the blood of Jesus. Amen."

These "stripes" of conviction we receive from the Lord are more like spiritual "steroid injections" of faith and truth. In the physical, steroid shots are often given to combat debilitating arthritis. They are shot locally into inflamed joints or tendons to deliver medication directly to the problem areas. They are painful as they prick the skin in these sensitive areas, but their effect gives the body new resolve to battle and recover from weakness and inflammation.

Now, in the spiritual, our hearts and minds can become feeble, hard and "arthritic." These are the times we need the steroidal scourging injections of the Lord to combat the inflammation of deception and error. In areas of our soul where we have become infirm, weak, hardhearted, lukewarm, or hopeless, the Lord brings His steroidal rod of correction to our inner-man.

Physical steroids are useful in suppressing inflammation in the short term, and in the long term, dissolving scar tissue, stabilizing the body's defenses, speeding the healing process, and is very effective in causing certain cysts to disappear.

So too, in the spiritual, the Lord's scourging correction injects the passionate power of quick healing into our minds and hearts, while also working to dissolve the spiritual scar tissue there. We come out of it strengthened with new resolve, new truth and new energy. The correction may have hurt going into us, but now we are soaring again in the vibrant truth and galvanizing grace of the Lord.

The Lord's scourging is goooooood!

He does it in the same way a loving coach "scourges" a lackluster effort from those players whom he knows have untapped fire waiting to be ignited.

He does it in the same way a director "scourges" uninspired performances from actors he knows have greater moments of inspiration within them.

The Lord pricks our consciences with His rod of correction because He knows we are not being wholehearted. So, He injects us with His steroidal passion. He waves His pungent smelling-salts under our drowsy areas of thought and perception. He exhorts us to wake up, gird up, look up, and fire up. He gives us a loving kick in the tail to get our heads and hearts back into the game. His correction is simply a way of arousing our consciences and consciousness to rally.

Now use the dynamics I just shared above to help us better understand the tone of the passage below.

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and SCOURGETH every son whom he receiveth.

If ye ENDURE CHASTENING, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Now no chastening for the PRESENT seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

----HEBREWS 12:5-11.

God's corrective "scourging" then, is administered NOT to curse us but to bless and heal us. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest" Ps. 94:12.

"The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly. . . The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly." Prov 20:27,30. These verses tell us, along with the Hebrews 12 passage cited above earlier, that God puts stripes of conviction on our consciences through correction as the FATHER OF OUR SPIRITS, as opposed earthly fathers can put literal "spanking" stripes on our flesh as the fathers of our flesh.

The belly always represents the area of our bodies where the Hebrews believed the spirit of a man was located. Jesus said out of our "belly will flow rivers of living water." Thus, the Lord's stripes on "the INWARD parts of the belly" represents the convicting pangs of a repenting conscience, and NOT the literal stripes of a physical spanking.

The point is the Lord corrects the inner man with "the rod of truth," not the outer man with "the rod of brutality." "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12.

For us to welcome the Lord's scourging is to merely jump up on the doctor's examination table and tell our Great Physician that our soul is weak, inflamed, and arthritic. He will then inject His steroidal correction into the area of inflammation and you will be healed. It will hurt as its injected in, but it will soon produce "the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Hebrews 12: 11.

QUESTION 44: WHY WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST THE GREATEST "OLD COVENANT" BELIEVER?

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Matthew 11:11

Jesus gives John quite a complement here---sort of. Two mysteries are presented in this incredible verse. First, why was John the Baptist the greatest of all the Old Testament believers? Remember, John died before Jesus went to the cross to initiate the New Covenant. Thus, John was still a prophet under the Old Covenant.

For Jesus to say there was none greater than John is significant and we have to prayerfully consider why. The second mystery here is why John, as great as he was, was still less than the least in the kingdom of heaven? In other words, why is the least New Testament believer greater than John the Baptist?

Why was John the greatest Old Covenant believer? Well, I believe it is because he had the least distorted view of God's goodness. His teachings are often overlooked, but he focused on giving clothes to the poor and food to the hungry. He taught tax collectors to take only what was due. He taught soldiers not to intimidate people and to be content with their wages. In short, he taught us not to hurt one another (Luke 3:11-18). These issues, along with water baptism, repentance, and heart preparation for Messiah formed his message, a message utterly lacking in promoting violence and wrath among men.

John had Moses' Godly humility without Moses' anger. He had David's Godly zeal without David's violent streak. He had Elijah's prophetic power without Elijah's willingness to call down killing fire on his enemies. John wasn't perfect because he still lived by his own righteousness rather than the righteousness which is of God. This is the reason he was less than the least of all New Covenant believers, because we live by the righteousness of God rather than by our own righteousness under the law. But, John the Baptist's "orbit" around the heart of God was tighter and closer than all other Old Testament saints.

I think the "orbit" concept wonderfully explains the Old Testament saints' various positions in the universe of biblical revelation. It also helps us visualize the Bible in a healthy way. In any solar system, planets orbit the sun at particular angles and distances. Distant orbits result in frozen and more death-friendly planets, like icy Pluto. Closer and more intimate orbits allow for warmer and more life-friendly planets, like lush Earth.

I think about Old Testament believers in the same way. How close is their orbit to the heart of the Son of God? Instead of physically measuring how close a planet orbits the Sun, we spiritually measure how close an Old Testament saint orbits around the Son. Jesus lets us know in the above verse John the Baptist orbits closer to Him than any other Old Testament figure, yet John also orbits farther away than any other New Covenant believer.

It is as if Spirit-filled New Testament believers, that is those in "the kingdom of heaven," have a closer Earth-like orbit which produces the warm and lush life of God for us who believe. Our better orbit, however, is not due to our efforts but to the better way revealed in and by the life of Jesus Christ. This better orbit, what Hebrews calls our "better covenant with better promises," gives us access to more intimately accurate insights, vantage points and conclusions about God.

But, Old Testament saints have more distant orbits with more distant perceptions, understandings, and apprehensions about God. This can result in "colder" and "harsher" theologies and views of God. This is why David can love God but still feel justified in killing not only his enemies, but the children of his enemies. This is why Moses can love God, but still kill his own people by the sword in God's name and feel justified. This is why so many Old Testament saints "kill" as part of their faith walk. This is also why those today who still choose to live in Old Testament orbits think it perfectly permissible to hate and hurt their enemies in God's name.

I am not talking about sin here. Both Old and New Covenant believers fall into that snare when they neglect their salvation. Rather, I am talking about what Old Testament saints considered to be a legitimate part of God's nature and a legitimate part of their own nature-----anger, hate, wrath, revenge and murder. These things are not in the intimate orbit of Jesus' nature and wherever they exist I assure you Old Testament orbits are being used.

Jesus' orbit teaches us to love and bless our enemies at all times and to overcome all evil with good, forgiving all seven times seventy and never taking vengeance ourselves. Yet, Old Testament orbits routinely believed in the violent treatment of enemies and the eye-for-an-eye revenge dynamic which permeates the Old Testament scriptures.

As a lawyer, I always evaluate the reliability of a statement by an eye witness as follows. How close were they to what they claimed to have seen, how well do they know the people they claim to have seen, and how detailed is their description? If they were far away, then accuracy becomes a real question. If they didn't know the people involved by sight, this further muddles their reliability.

Lastly, if they couldn't see clearly enough to get a precise description of clothing and physical details like size, facial features, hair color, etc., then their statement has to be relied on very loosely. It can still be very useful in building an overall case, but the witness statement has to be assessed and weaved into the provable facts, allowing for some level of human distortion while still giving it credibility.

Likewise, Old Testament views of God were partial, distant and lacking in character detail. The best passage on this is Exodus 33:18-23. Here, Moses asked God to show him His glorious goodness. God hid Moses in a cleft of a rock and informed him he could only see God's "goodness" from behind and at a distance. Moses then saw the Lord's goodness from behind after He had passed by. What a wonderfully strange passage to show that the best Old Covenant man of his day could not achieve the orbit necessary to behold God's goodness from the front.

The bottom line is that New Covenant believers simply have a better view, a better orbit, a more reliable angle into the FULL FRONTAL VIEW OF GOD'S GOODNESS. This is why John the Baptist's orbit was more distant than any one in the New Testament kingdom of heaven. He had not yet received the frontal view available only after Jesus rose from the dead and poured out His Spirit at Pentecost to live in all believers.

John, Moses and all other Old Covenant believers NOW most assuredly have that full frontal view of Jesus, but they didn't at the time their biblical experiences were recorded. For this reason, their witness statements have to be adjusted by us through the Holy Spirit's leading based on their partial, distant and limited vantage point. God doesn't want us to go backwards to see things from their colder, harsher and more remote orbit. He wants our orbit blazing hot with God's New Covenant goodness and love!

God wants us embracing our better orbit and then using it to renovate Old Testament coldness into New Testament warmth. David's orbit might have been a bit closer than Moses'. John the Baptist's orbit might have been a bit closer than David's. But the intimacy of Jesus' orbit surpasses them all by light years. After we account for these orbit distortions, we will see the great truth that every Old Testament saint played a crucial part in our spiritual heritage. Like stepping stones, we all jump from orbit to orbit through all the Old Testament saints, getting closer and closer to Jesus' coming arrival in the New Testament.

John the Baptist is the last stepping stone. John didn't have a perfect picture of the coming Messiah, and in some ways he saw dimly and was perhaps tinged with some excessive future wrath expectations. But he also knew all men need repentance and forgiveness, and that God was providing "a lamb Who would take away the sins of the world." John 1:29. Not of the Jews only but OF THE WORLD! That went way beyond any previous Old Testament orbit. And, to his everlasting credit, he knew Messiah when he saw Him. JOHN RECOGNIZED JESUS AS THE CHRIST! John knew ahead of time what to look for in Messiah. He knew Jesus would have the seal of the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Him (John 1:32-33).

The Holy Spirit's seal of approval is almost completely forgotten today. Yet, John knew that only the absolute heralding of the Holy Ghost could usher in the Christ. He also knew that Jesus was coming to baptize US with the Holy Ghost and fire (Luke 3:16). Nobody else saw THAT coming. John was all about the Holy Ghost, both as Jesus' seal and as ours. JOHN RECOGNIZED THE HOLY GHOST!

John was so humble, he even encouraged his own disciples to leave him in order to follow Jesus. He claimed no honor or title for himself, referring to himself only as "a voice crying in the wilderness." In a day when men lunge for titles of honor like pigeons on bread crumbs, it is refreshing to see a man let his gift speak for itself. He rejected the honor of man, instead seeking the honor of God alone. And he got it.

What was John the Baptist's vital last stepping stone message? Only this----make your paths straight TO and FOR the now coming Lord. This message still resonates today. John said he must decrease while Jesus must increase. Or put another way, all men need to abandon their current orbits and jump over to Jesus' orbit.

I know John, Moses and David would all speak to us now and exhort us to come closer to God than they did. They would tell us to USE the better things we have been given so that we may fully know God's frontal goodness. They were faithful to the limited view they had, but now they know in full just as they are known. They themselves have long since jumped Old Testament orbit to behold the Lord face to face now as they never did during their lives. The good news is we don't have to wait until we die to see God's frontal goodness. We have full access NOW!

QUESTION 45: WHAT IS THE SEVERITY OF THE LORD?

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Rom. 11:22.

What a wonderful verse! Yet, many stern Calvinists tell us we must behold the "severity" of the Lord in our lives as we suffer affliction and oppression. But, this verse says just the opposite. God's severity is only toward those who reject faith in God. But toward us who believe we behold nothing but goodness as we "continue in His goodness." God's severity is never toward believers. Hallelujah!

Moreover, the Greek word translated in Romans 11:22 as "severity" here, according to Strong's Greek Lexicon, figuratively means "decisiveness," while the Greek word for "cut off" figuratively means "frustrated." Reading this passage with these dominant ideas, the verse is essentially saying that if we DON'T continue in God's goodness, THEN we will experience all kinds of "frustration" because God "decisively" refuses to coerce or control our freewill decisions to MAKE us continue in His goodness. He may woo us, exhort us, and even rebuke us to stay on the righteous path, but He will NEVER coerce or force us to.

And how do we get cut off? Satan cuts us off from God's goodness DUE to the access we have provided him by neglecting our so great a salvation.

QUESTION 46: DOES THE VIOLENCE IN THE PARABLES SUGGEST THAT GOD IS ALSO VIOLENT?

Jesus often taught with parables.

A parable is an earthly story containing Heavenly truth. Sometimes, the parables reveal the positive dynamics of walking in the Kingdom of God. But at other times, the parables are used to expose the negative dynamics which HINDER us from walking with God.

Jesus usually affixed the term "certain" to these stories, which indicates that these events were probably factual rather than fictional. Jesus then adapted the heart of these true stories to make a broader spiritual point about Heavenly dynamics. The modern equivalent of this technique would be us taking newspaper headlines, stories which most all were familiar with, and then using them to make spiritual analogies of Heavenly dynamics.

The teaching concept here is simple. By using comparison to that which is familiar, a conceptual bridge is built which allows us to cross over into the unfamiliar. And while

these stories might useful in a general way as a teaching tool, nobody would claim that EVERY facet of the story would have to have a precise Heavenly corollary.

The parables are often "rough-edged" and full of flawed humanity such as "wicked kings" (Luke 18) and "vengeful vineyard owners" (Luke 20) and "evil fathers" (Luke 11). To think that Jesus was trying to attribute these flaws to the Heavenly Father is unthinkable and unwarranted.

Because of their "rough-edges," scholars have long warned us to only glean broad points from the parables. In other words, we shouldn't get "hyper-literal" in thinking EVERY detail of the story lines up perfectly with Heaven. Parables are there, rather, to just get us thinking about Heavenly dynamics in new ways. They don't fill in ALL the revelatory gaps on a one-to-one ratio. We have to let the Holy Ghost do that.

We must let the Spirit translate the parable for us, helping us know which perfect facts to focus on and which flawed facts to leave behind. Like we crack the shell off of a nut before eating it, or remove the skin off an orange before consuming it, so too do we need to remove the "human husks" off the parables before we use them to define the character of God.

The fact that many parables contain violent, petty, unjust and wrathful rulers does NOT mean that God is likewise violent, petty, violent and wrathful. Jesus used flawed humanity, warts and all, to make heavenly points. Like with many Old Testament passages, we must let Jesus alone excavate, elevate and illuminate the character of God.

Jesus acknowledged that parables do NOT speak clearly to the human mind (Mark 4:10-12). So, why would we PRIORITIZE less-clear parabolic statements by Jesus over the more numerous and perfectly clear statements He makes concerning His Father's nature. The most compelling statement by Jesus regarding His Father's nature occurs in Matthew 5:38-48. In verse 48, Jesus exhorts us to, "THEREFORE be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect." And to what does the "THEREFORE" refer?

Clearly, to the previous ten verses which explain the Father's perfection. This passage paints the Father as a God who always: "turns the other other cheek" when attacked, "walks the extra mile" when "asked," gives the "extra coat" to help the needy, endlessly "lends" to those who "ask," generously "blesses" all those who "curse Him," fervently "loves" all His enemies, does "good" to His "haters," and passionately "prays" for those who "despitefully use and persecute" Him.

The Father generously sends His healing "sunlight" on "both the good and the evil," and He sends His replenishing "rain" on "the just and the unjust." Do you see? This Sermon on the Mount passage is the Father's perfection CLEARLY stated by Jesus. Don't ever use a less-clear parabolic passage to trump a more-clear expository passage, particularly when it comes to defining the character of God.

Moreover, cross referencing the same parables in different Gospels often show surprisingly different recollections of what Jesus said. For instance, in the parable of the dinner feast in Matthew 22:1-14, wrathful violence by the king is mentioned, whereas in the same parable in Luke 14:16-24 all violence has been excised out of the story.

If Luke was able, by the Holy Ghost, to convey the same parable without using violent images that distorted the character of God with human flaws, then shouldn't we too follow his lead?

Moreover, in other passages, such as Matthew 21:33-41 and 25:24, the violence of the king/ruler is PRESUMED by the audience but NEVER approved or endorsed by Jesus as accurate. So too today, many likewise wrongly presume a violent and vengeful image of God without actually EVER hearing from the Holy Spirit about it.

Lastly, to whatever extent Jesus did recite violence in these parables, He was using it solely for dramatic effect. Regardless of whether they were fictional or factual, the violence is just used as a dramatic device to make the story more riveting to the listener. In any dramatic narrative, violence is used by the author as a plot device to further the reader's emotional investment while still furthering the overall theme of the story.

Christian authors C.S. Lewis and J.R. Tolkien certainly used dramatic violence this way in their stories, despite the fact that their overall themes were emphatically non-violent. To read their classic Christian-themed stories as painting a violent view of God just because violence is occasionally used is both unfair and incorrect.

So too with the parables. Don't stretch the parables where they weren't meant to go. Take all the human and fleshly "shells" off these stories as far as they pertain to dishonoring the nature of God. De-husk all the flawed human violence, wrath, cruelty, pettiness and revenge BOTH out and away from your image of the Heavenly Father.

Take away the dross from the parables and you will be left with the gold, silver and precious goodness of God. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5.

QUESTION 47: JUST WHO IS "THE GOD OF THIS FALLEN WORLD?"

Well, if ANY Old Testament saint was asked this question, their response would essentially be the same: "Yahweh is the God of this world! He alone rules and determines EACH and EVERY circumstance, event or happening on planet earth 24/7. Yahweh alone is God of this world. He BOTH afflicts and heals, He BOTH kills and resurrects, He BOTH destroys and creates, He BOTH oppresses and delivers, He is the author of BOTH good and evil."

But, hold onnnnn there a minute Babalooie!!

The New Testament says that THE GOD OF THIS WORLD is NOT Yahweh, NOT Jesus, NOT the Holy Spirit, and NOT the Heavenly Father. No, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD is(drum-roll)..... SATAN!

The Apostle Paul confirmed this: "In whom THE GOD OF THIS WORLD hath blinded the minds of them which believe not , lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ , who is the image of God , should shine unto them ." 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Jesus confirmed this: "Now is the judgment of this world : now shall THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD be cast out." John 12:31. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you : for THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD cometh , and hath nothing in me ." John 14:30. "Of judgment , because THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD is judged ." John 16:11.

And finally, the Apostle John confirmed this: "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and THE WHOLE WORLD IS IN THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE?" 1 John 5:18-19.

Now, the above verses should both alarm and comfort us. Comfort us because Jesus has both defeated and judged Satan, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD. But, it should also alarm us to possible Old Testament MISATTRIBUTION. What do I mean by misattribution? Well, if Old Testament saints wrongly thought that THE GOD OF THIS WORLD was Yahweh, then much of what happened in the Old Testament which is attributed to Yahweh is, in truth, the work of Satan.

All the violence, plagues, killings, oppressions, curses, afflictions, destructions and damning which the Old Testament says comes from GOD must NOW be re-evaluated with New Testament light. We must look at the particular Old Testament passage which is attributing "evil" to GOD and ask if it is referring to THE GOD OF THIS WORLD or is it referring to THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

In other words, the Old Testament had an "undifferentiated" view of God. They lumped Satan into their image of Yahweh. They simply did not differentiate God from the Devil in any meaningful way. The result? A bipolar God who is up and down, good and evil, hateful and loving, cruel and gentle, vengeful and forgiving, murderous and peaceful.

The Old Testament certainly has many accurate and priceless versions of the wondrous acts of the true Yahweh, THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Old Testament frequently reflects the riches of Jesus' love, virtue, blessing, mercy, miracles and generosity. But, not always. Too often, because they are largely clueless about Satan's identity, the Old Testament mars and deforms the image of God by attributing the works of Satan to God.

Jesus came to heal and reveal. He came to heal our image of a wrathful and hateful God by revealing His Father-God to be ALL love and ALL light. Jesus came to teach us how to differentiate the works of the true God from the works of Satan. Jesus IS that

differentiation. Satan, as the FALLEN GOD of this FALLEN WORLD, operates in all forms of stealing, killing and destroying. God, on the other hand, as fully revealed by the RISEN CHRIST of the RISEN FATHER, operates only in forms of life --- the giving of it, the protection of it, the blessing of it! John 10:10.

What a difference between THE GOD OF THIS WORLD and THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST! It is the ultimate difference. Its time to KNOW the difference. It's time to live the difference. "This then is the message which we have heard of him , and declare unto you , that God is light , and in him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5.

VIVE LE DIFFERENCE!

QUESTION 48: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S BLINDNESS? WHAT ABOUT ELYMAS' BLINDNESS? WHAT ABOUT ZACHARIAH'S MUTENESS?

I was blessed to grow up in athletics and be coached by a wonderful man who really cared for me. He befriended me, nurtured me, and exhorted me. He welcomed me into his home, gave me his trust, and treated me like a son. But there was something else he frequently did---- he CHASTISED me when I was being neglectful, REBUKED me when I was being lukewarm and PUNISHED me when I was being stupid by briefly "benching" me from the field of play.

My coach did not hesitate to "get up in my grill" by grabbing my football facemask, pulling me close to him and verbally letting me "have it" by sternly rebuking me for foolishness or half-heartedness. Two minutes later the matter was forgotten and he would be exhorting and encouraging me again.

But, a few other times, when I would make a more serious mistake, he would on rare occasion "jerk my cord back to the bench" so that I could fully focus on the gravity of my error. The benching was always brief because he knew I hated nothing more than leaving the field of play. After he let me stew for a couple of plays, he would look at me, smile and wink, then then tell me to get back in the game. Lesson learnt and all was well again.

BUT, he NEVER hurt me, NEVER hit me and NEVER hated me. What he did was for my good. I knew this because I knew he loved me. His correction was unpleasant for season, but never harmful, cruel or vindictive. Above all else, he was my friend. And I never got mad at him during the times of discipline--- NEVER. I trusted that he was right in whatever he was chastising me about.

The issue of chastisement has been handled in another question, so here I will focus on "spiritual benchings," a dynamic describing situations where the Lord temporarily detains us from crossing the line and damaging a situation which is under His

protection. He does this so that we can have a chance to cool down and rethink our actions before we hurt ourselves or others.

BENCHINGS occur when the Lord yanks us aside off the field of play in order to keep us from making bigger and circumstantially crippling mistakes. I can think of three such occurrences in Scripture: Paul's being struck temporarily blind (Acts 9:1-18), Elymas being struck temporarily blind (Acts 13:6-13) and Zachariah being struck temporarily mute (Luke 1:5-65). All three men here were not harmed, but WERE abruptly taken off the the field of play in order to rethink their actions.

Now, let's be very careful here. None of these three men were harmed, hurt or brutalized. They were merely sent to the "spiritual bench" for a short season to keep them from making serious blunders and to give them a chance to find true repentance.

In Zacharias' case, he was spouting out serious and toxic unbelief and ingratitude in the presence of the angel Gabriel concerning the "glad tidings" God was sending their way. These glad tidings were expressed in Gabriel's announcement to Zachariah of his wife Elisabeth's miracle pregnancy and the soon coming birth of John the Baptist.

God was not about to let words of unbelief continue to be spoken around Elisabeth's womb, so Zachariah was muted for a short season to meditate on "the bench." He was verbally benched. His volume was put on mute. The verbal benching did him good, for when his voice returned, Zachariah first words were "naming" John and "praising" God, and the awe of the Lord was all around. Zachariah learned his lesson and got back in the game!

Paul was on the way to Damascus seeing to execute any Christians he could find. God knew Paul's heart would ultimately be His, so what did He do? God jerked Paul's cord by knocking him off his high horse, so to speak, and then visually benching Paul. The bright light on the road to Damascus stopped Paul in his tracks and kept him from going on his planned killing spree of Christians.

Paul was "visually benched" in darkness for three days, during which time and got his head right, changed spiritual teams, and became a new man in Christ. Out of that blindness came divine sight which let Paul get back in the game, this time playing on the right side. Paul learned his lesson!

Lastly, Elymas' cord was jerked and he too was "visually benched" with short term blindness as was Paul. They both were playing for the wrong team at the time they were blinded. Paul used his benching constructively and changed teams. We don't know what became of Elymas in the wake of his visual benching. We only know that he interfered with Paul's conversion of Sergius Paulus, the prudent deputy of the isle of Paphos.

When Elymas interfered with Paul's ministry and denounced Christianity to Sergius Paulus in their presence---- well, Elymas' cord was sidelined for a season of visual benching. Sergius Paulus was then converted. We can certainly hope that Elymas too

found a place of repentance during his "visual benching" and switched teams like Paul, but at this point only Heaven knows what became of him.

The point is that there are occasions when God does TEMPORARILY BENCH men who are about to make brutally bad mistakes in pivotal situations where the Lord's protection is in full effect over a particular situation.

Paul had a heart destiny as an Apostle, but was wrongly killing Christians, so things needed to change.

John the Baptist needed to be nurtured in a fertile environment without negative statements of unbelief clouding the miracle airwaves, so things needed to change.

Sergius Paulus had a conversion date under the Lord's protection which the scoffing Elymas was obstructing, so things needed to change.

Each of these three men had to go in the penalty box for a brief time to consider the gravity of their respective situations, and hopefully repent. Two did. We don't know about the third.

When the Lord chastises this latter way, we usually find four distinguishing marks: 1) God does it for the person's own good; 2) the benching effects are always temporary and never permanent; 3) nobody is hurt or injured. Satan; and 4) God, like an emergency responder, briefly puts His restraining hand over a manic mouth or crazed eyes in order to calm a person caught in hysterical unbelief. Satan, by contrast, seeks always to fully kill, fully steal, and fully destroy us whenever and wherever he can. Beware, Satan's destructions are NOT the chastisements of God, so never confuse them. God NEVER harms us. Satan ALWAYS does.

QUESTION 49: DID GOD ACTUALLY TELL ABRAHAM TO SLIT ISAAC'S THROAT AND BURN HIS CORPSE IN THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE?

"And He saith, `Take, I pray thee, thy son, thine only one, whom thou hast loved, even Isaac, and go for thyself unto the land of Moriah, and cause him to ascend there for a burnt-offering on one of the mountains of which I speak unto thee.'" Genesis 22:2 (Young's Literal Translation)

At the outset, I want to point out there are two levels to consider here when discussing the meaning of this passage.

The first level is what this passage personally meant to Abraham at the time this happened. In other words, what was God trying to tell Abraham in his day?

The second level is what the Lord intended this passage to mean for us in a symbolic sense about the death of Christ to come. In other words, what does God want this story to tell us about Jesus' future sacrifice as the Lamb of God who bore away the sins of the world? Both levels will be discussed herein.

I want to start by answering the question proposed in the title, namely, "Did God actually tell Abraham to slit Isaac's throat and burn his dead corpse?" I want to answer that question by first asking you a question. After reading the short Matthew passage below, please answer the following two questions:

1) IS JESUS SAYING BELOW THAT HE CAME TO BRING US A LITERAL- PHYSICAL SWORD TO GUT AND KILL ALL OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO WE MAY BE IN DANGER OF LOVING MORE THAN WE DO GOD?

2) OR, IS JESUS SPEAKING BELOW OF A SPIRITUAL SWORD WHICH WILL SEVER ALL IDOLATROUS TIES TO RELATIONSHIPS WHICH WE HAVE WRONGLY PRIORITIZED BEFORE OUR LOVE FOR GOD?

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Matthew 10:34-38.

I hope this is a no-brainer. Option 2 above is the obvious answer. Otherwise, patricide, fratricide and homicide would be rampant. Murder would be the mark of true Christians as they went about slicing, dicing and slaughtering their loved ones, all in the name of God.

No! Never! Jesus is obviously speaking metaphorically here. He is using the sword as a symbol of the Lord's inner workings in our hearts. The Holy Spirit CIRCUMCISES our heart by cutting away all the carnal connections and fleshly relationships which keep us from loving the Lord with all out heart, mind, soul and strength.

Do you know people who love their children more than God, their spouses more than God, their friends more than God? Sure, we all know many such others. Moreover, we ourselves have all idolized certain people and relationships over our love for God.

Now, if it's this obvious in this passage that Jesus wasn't speaking of a literal sword, why isn't it JUST as obvious that the "burnt-offering" God spoke of in Genesis 22:2 is likewise symbolic?

In other words, God saw that Abraham was in danger of idolizing his love for his only son Isaac above and before his love for God. God was exhorting Abraham to

"symbolically," NOT "literally," offer his son Isaac on the ceremonial altar of God. But the deeper purpose was for Abraham to trust and release Isaac to God on the altar of his heart.

God was warning Abraham not to idolize Isaac, but rather to wholeheartedly offer Him INTO the Lord's hands. We do the same today when we symbolically "confirm" or "consecrate" or "commit" or "release" our children into the Lord's calling.

These external ceremonies reflect a greater inner dynamic--- we are fully trusting the Lord by committing our children to Him. We are prioritizing our faith, hope and love in the Lord as we yield to Him what we formerly loved most--- our children and family relationships.

In short, we are placing God on our heart-throne by trusting and thrusting our relationship with Him FIRST before all others and BEST above all others.

This was all God was trying to tell Abraham in Genesis 22:2, and all Jesus was trying to tell his listeners in Matthew 10:34-38. Same God, same message: LOVE GOD FIRST AND BEST OVER ALL YOUR EARTHLY RELATIONSHIPS.

Abraham, in his zeal, and without the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide him, interpreted God's exhortation hyper-literally. He went "too far" and was actually going to kill and burn Isaac, thinking that God would resurrect him (Hebrews 11:19). And God certainly could and would have done that.

But, God would never have a parent kill his own child--- never! That would violate His flawless character and loving nature. Instead, God had a "literal" angel stop Abraham's "literal" knife. If Abraham was hearing God's voice clearly and with perfect understanding, there would be no need for a "stand-by" emergency angel to stay his hand.

But Abraham was an Old Covenant believer and not yet in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. God certainly appreciated Abraham's zeal, but He was not about to let a horrible act of violence to be done in His name by one who was called "the friend of God." Divine friends don't let earthly friends drive the Bible drunk with literalism. This angel kept Abraham from crashing into a homicidal mistake.

If God truly wanted Abraham to kill Isaac, the Lord would have simply let the knife fall. God most assuredly did not allow it, so God most assuredly did not will or want it to happen. Had Abraham had the indwelling Spirit, He would have known the Lord was speaking symbolically and metaphorically, just like Jesus did in Matthew 10:34-38.

Satan's role in this event was surely to enable Abraham's zeal go "too far" in a "hyper-literal" interpretation of the Lord's word to him. Satan is always lurking near the surface of our thoughts, always trying to muddle the Lord's deeper and truer meanings by keeping us bound in literalistic interpretations of the divine impulses He sends us.

Remember, "the letter kills" (2 Corinthians 3:6). And here it almost killed Isaac. Satan used it in trying to urge Abraham to "literally" slit his own son's throat. In fact, even though Genesis makes no mention of Satan, it is significant to note that other early Jewish sources do. Jubilees 17:16 actually attributes the initiative to kill Isaac to "Prince Mastema," a well-known name for Satan in this document, where he is acting in the role of a prosecutor.

Satan's role IS important to see here. The reason? Because of the importance of this whole episode as a foreshadowing of Christ's atonement at the cross. You see, if we believe that the heavenly Father is the party who "slit" Jesus' throat by offering His only begotten son at the cross, then we will subscribe to the cruel Penal Atonement Theory which sees the wrath of an angry God as the killer of Jesus.

But, if we believe that Jesus' life was a RANSOM for our sin paid TO Satan BY God, then we will subscribe to the Christus Victor Atonement Theory, also known as the Ransom Theory of the Atonement. This theory, which was the predominant view of the early Church, sees Satan, along with the principalities and powers which rule this fallen world, as the actual killers of Jesus. These fallen demonic powers drove us to physically execute Jesus, while they themselves proceeded to torture, corrupt and destroy His soul in Hell.

Under this view, Jesus willingly laid His noble head on Satan's chopping block as a payment for all OUR sin. Satan had legal access to capture and control us because of the access our freewill had given him. WE freely gave and forfeited to Satan the dominion of this earth God originally gave us. This is why Paul called Satan the "god of this world" and Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world." Satan did indeed rule here because of the authority WE voluntarily handed over to him.

So, read this passage and choose your atonement theory carefully. It will ultimately determine what you REALLY think about the nature of God. You will either see Him as an angry and wrathful Father who killed Jesus because of His hatred for us, OR you will see God as a hero who gave Himself over to our captor in order to save us from ourselves and Satan.

The bottom line here is that Satan is the only killer in this Biblical event involving Abraham and Isaac. God, on the other hand, is the only hero. Isaac, as a type of Jesus to come, heroically entrusted himself to his Father's care and was willing to die for us in the process in order that we might be saved. God the Father likewise heroically intervened to save Jesus' soul from Hell. Peter preached of God's heroism in the important passage below:

"Ye men of Israel , hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth , a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs , which God did by him in the midst of you , as ye yourselves also know : Him , being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God , ye have taken , and by wicked hands have crucified and

slain : WHOM GOD HATH RAISED UP, having loosed the pains of death : because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

For David speaketh concerning him , I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand , that I should not be moved : Therefore did my heart rejoice , and my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope : BECAUSE THOU WILT NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN HELL, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption . Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance .

Men and brethren , let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David , that he is both dead and buried , and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet , and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him , that of the fruit of his loins , according to the flesh , he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ , that HIS SOUL WAS NOT LEFT IN HELL neither his flesh did see corruption . THIS JESUS GOD HATH RAISED UP, whereof we all are witnesses ." Acts 2:22-31

Don't ever confuse Satan's activity with God's activity. God must always be painted as a valiant hero and NEVER as a vengeful villain. Whenever faced with two possible interpretations of a particular passage, ALWAYS choose the more heroic version.

Make sense?

QUESTION 50: DID ABRAHAM, MOSES AND DAVID REALLY "TALK GOD OUT OF" KILLING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE?

If I were to tell you God was seeking to wrathfully destroy you, but that I, that is to say "me, myself and I," graciously interceded and talked God into being merciful, and that He thereby relented and repented of His evil wrath toward you, all because of me, what would you think? Maybe that I'm crazy? Or perhaps that I was egocentrically misinterpreting events by making myself seem like the hero of the story?

Well, at the very least, you would feel that I was misrepresenting the character of God. You would know this because of the loving nature of God Jesus reveals. You would know that it's impossible to imagine ANY man talking Jesus out of killing or destroying ANYBODY because He would never do that in the first place. You would quickly conclude that it was outrageous for me to EVER portray to ANYBODY, even for one moment, that "I" have MORE mercy than God, MORE patience than God, MORE kindness than God, and MORE wisdom than God.

This seems so obvious, doesn't it? My version of events where I am the one who convinced God of not destroying you is patently ridiculous. God is not some "rabid" deity

who is "foaming at the mouth" with fury. God is not a raging killer who WE have to talk INTO mercy. Sheesh!

And yet. And yet. And yet. The Old Testament, in its "by the letter" reading, tells us that Abraham (Genesis 18:16-33) and Moses (Exodus 32:9-14) and David (1 Chronicles 21:14-17) all did the very thing I claimed to do above. They each claimed THEY talked God out of His murderous intent to destroy millions of people.

Moses claims he talked God into "repenting over the killing evils He thought to do to His people." Similarly, Abraham claims he got God to agree to stop His proposed destruction of Sodom and Gomorra IF the lesser number of ten righteous men were found there, as opposed to God's original quota and sterner requirement of fifty. Lastly, David rebuked God that He was wrongly punishing and killing others en masse for a sin David alone had committed, and that therefore God needed to show mercy to His people.

Do you see? Something is lacking in the Old Testament view of God. Had they known what we now know BECAUSE of Jesus, they would never claim that they had to "talk" God into forgiveness. They would never claim that THEY were the compassionate ones who talked God into "repenting of His evil" or "staying His wrathful hand" or "showing mercy to His people by not killing them."

Baloney! Are we better than God, more merciful, more patient, more loving, more humane? Of course not!

We know better NOW, thanks to New Testament Holy Ghost illumination, that Satan, not God, is the Old Testament killer. Satan, not God, is the death angel, the destroyer, the minister of all destructive wrath, the father of all lies and lust, the ruler of this fallen world, the prince of the power of the air, the great dragon, in whose power the whole corrupted world lies.

Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan, not to inflict them. Jesus came to reveal that the Old Testament had a fundamental flaw, a blind-spot in their view of God. Whereas the Old Testament portrayed Satan as the obedient left hand of a wrathful God, Jesus came to reveal a vastly different picture of Satan. Jesus unveiled Satan as a rabid cosmic rebel operating without Divine sanction or approval, human sanction and approval yes, but NOT Divine.

Do you see? The Old Testament wrath and violence attributed to God was, in fact, the wrath and violence of Satan. Do we really think Satan was twiddling his demonic thumbs in the Old Testament while God Himself was operating Satan's ministry of wrath, accusation, temptation, oppression and condemnation? That the very things the New Testament NOW says Satan does, were nonetheless somehow in the Old Testament done directly by God? No way! Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He changeth not. The only thing that's changed is our BETTER understanding of God's BETTER nature under our BETTER Covenant.

The Old Testament saints had an UNDIFFERENTIATED view of God. They did not know that the love nature of God was totally divorced from the wrath nature of Satan. They simply viewed the works of Satan as the wrath of God. So, we now know that the three passages discussed above where Abraham, Moses, and David are all portrayed as being more merciful than God---- are simply Old Testament distortions in need of New Testament light. God is the one who ALWAYS talks us into being merciful, not vice-versa.

And let's be honest. Who REALLY gets the glory when WE claim to be the ones who talk God out of mass killing sprees. WE get the glory, not God. Anytime the Bible portrays men as being MORE merciful and compassionate than God, rest assured distortion is present. And God wants us, by the Holy Ghost, to see these occasional distortions and correct them with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. To God be ALL the glory!

QUESTION 51: TWO KEY QUESTIONS: 1) IS GOD AGAINST ALL VIOLENCE? 2) IF SO, WHY DID HE SEEM TO FAVOR VIOLENT MEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:38-48 ends with "therefore" and the imperative that we are to "be perfect" as our heavenly Father is perfect. The "therefore" links that perfection to the previous 10 verses, in which non-violence and non-retaliation are revealed as central to the Divine nature. Combine this with the fact that, according to Hebrews 2:14-15, Satan has the power of death, not God. Death, which is the destiny of all violence, is called the enemy of God in 1 Corinthians 15:26.

Death, cruelty, coercion and violence are dynamics that God NEVER operates in. No exceptions.

So, to answer the two questions:

1) Yes, I think God is against all physical and emotional violence which harms, coerces or traumatizes another. The Sermon on the Mount is dispositive here. God certainly deflects danger, binds devils, looses blessing, brings order by keeping the mouths of circumstantial lions from harming us, and delivers us supernaturally from any and all evil. But He does not commit evil to stop evil, use violence to stop violence, or use coercion to stop coercion.

2) Regarding God's favor on violent men of the Old Testament, Samson's and Joshua's and David's favor, my response is that their favor comes from God in spite of their violence, not because of it. Their respective favor comes from their faith and God's grace.

One of the few things I agree with John Calvin about is his statement that Old Testament saints had only a "sleight capacity" to understand the nature and purposes of God. With the New Covenant, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to lead us into truths they simply could not see in their own limited righteousness.

So, God never sanctioned their violence, but neither did he withdraw his love and blessing from those saints because of their violence due to their inability to fully grasp His goodness. I have often thought that Jesus' way of conquering the Promised Land would have been NOT by genocide, but rather by patiently converting them to Yahweh by acts of love and self-sacrifice. But, Israel was not able to reach a place of pure revelation on this. John 1:18 says nobody in the Old Testament saw the true essence of God, which is why Jesus came, to reveal the Father as non-violent and all-light.

Moses is the perfect example of someone who got a peaceful impulse from the Lord, to "speak" to a rock to miraculously cause water to spout, but then wrongly corrupted that impulse by striking the rock with his own anger and wrath. Moses misrepresented the nature of God to the Israelites by making God seem violent and wrathful, when He in fact was no such thing. I believe this same dynamic works through much of the Old Testament as those saints took the inspired impulses of the Lord and often distorted them with their own wrath.

But God didn't abandon Moses or reject him because of his mistake. God abided with him to the end of his life. As another example, we all may stumble quite often in verbal violence and cruelty, and God certainly does not sanction that either, but neither would He totally withdraw His favor from our lives. He abides with us, even in areas of distortion. A friend of mine, Brian Thomason, had a vision that death is like garbage, while God is like the wind. God didn't create or cause the garbage, but His wind can blow and influence circumstances all around our violent garbage according to His redemptive and non-coercive purposes.

Also, I think the issue of justified war and violence operate not on the level of divine sanction, but rather on the scale of lesser and greater evils. The only advantage to so called justified violence is that it prevents greater evils, or slows them down, or blunts their damage. And while it is true that less evil is preferable to greater evil, the problem is that we are committing evil to stop evil. It will catch up with us and does no eternal good. It might look good for the moment, but it defiled us. And we become the very evil we oppose. Hitler was the first to bomb civilian cities, but then Churchill retaliated by bombing civilians on a broader scale, and then we ultimately dropped an atomic bomb on a whole civilian population in two huge cities, irradiating tens of thousands helpless women and babies. You see? That so called lesser evil caused us to become the very thing we hate.

I think the missing element in this is a failure to rely on the supernatural protection of God. Jesus supernaturally escaped violent mobs, violent storms, violent demons and violent religion, all without ever engaging in harmful physical violence Himself. We are not sheep led to the slaughter, but are supernatural conquerers. As we renounce

violence, we simultaneously need to embrace and flow in the supernatural works of God.

I do believe in Spiritual combat, but not flesh and blood combat. Evil is only and always overcome by good, and only good.

QUESTION 52: WHO "REALLY" DESTROYED SODOM AND GOMORRA? WHERE WAS GOD? WHERE WAS SATAN?

In Genesis 18 three men, thought by most commentators to have been angels appearing as men, came to Abram (Abraham) in the plains of Mamre. After the angels received the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah, his wife, the LORD revealed to Abraham that he would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, because their cry was great, "and because their sin is very grievous."(Gen 18:20).

In response, Abraham inquired of the LORD if he would spare the city if 50 righteous people were found in it, to which the LORD agreed he would not destroy it for the sake of the righteous yet dwelling therein. Abraham then inquired of God for mercy at lower numbers (first 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, and finally at 10), with the LORD agreeing each time. (Gen 18:22-33).

Two of the angels proceeded to Sodom and were met by Abraham's nephew Lot, who convinced the angels to lodge with him, and they ate with Lot. Then (not having found even 10 righteous people in the city), they commanded Lot to gather his family and leave. As they made their escape, one angel commanded Lot to "look not behind thee. (Genesis 19:17). However, as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with brimstone and fire from the LORD, Lot's wife looked back at the city, and she became a pillar of salt. (Genesis 19:23-26).

What is going on here? Well, much like the flood, there was a continual increase in the wicked and a continual decrease in the righteous. The Lord here assured Abraham that a mere ten righteous men in the city would allow the Lord's protective presence to keep Satanic destruction from descending. But, there were NOT ten righteous men left. Satan had access to steal, kill and destroy because of the inflating lack of faith in the city. But Lot was righteous, even if only marginally so. For this reason, God sent angels to deliver him out of the coming destruction.

Do you see? God was, like a heroic fireman, rescuing Lot from a soon-to-be burning building. Satan, on the other hand, was calling in the airstrike of his wrath to destroy those he had increasingly corrupted and those who had increasingly quenched and grieved away God's protective presence. The Lord's protective presence had

constricted down to just Lot and his family. Satan filled in the vacuum of God's quenched presence with his massive missiles of destruction.

Remember, the Lord's protective presence waxes and wanes depending on the various levels of individual and corporate faith present in those involved. This doesn't happen overnight. Only repeated and rampant quenching of the Holy Spirit can so enable Satan to kill on such a wide scale as this. And how do we know it was Satan who killed here with fire from the sky? Hebrews 2:14 is always the key in this type of question.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might DESTROY him that had the POWER of DEATH, that is, the devil; And DELIVER them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14-15. Simply put, God does not kill. He quickens, heals, protects, purifies and purges, BUT He never kills---- NEVER! It is NOT in His nature, just like lying is not in His character, just like coercion is not in His character, just like cruelty is not in His character.

We know from earlier writings that the Old Testament Saints did not have a full or proper understanding of Satan. They thought the devil was an obedient angel of God lawfully executing God's wrath. They thought Satan was the death angel dutifully carrying out the Lord's instructions, RATHER than rightly seeing Satan as a cosmic villain, the father of sin and lies, a rebel murderer opposed to God on every level. Satan was indeed the death angel, but not in service to God, but rather in open rebellion to him. Jesus repeatedly revealed Satan as an enemy of God, NOT His servant.

The resultant problem was that the writer of Genesis wrongly attributed the works of Satan to God. This was BECAUSE the author had an UNDIFFERENTIATED view of God. He thought Satan was God's left hand. He was wrong. So, we are commissioned as "able ministers of the New Covenant, not of THE LETTER but OF the SPIRIT" (2 Corinthians 3:6), to go back in this Old Testament story and redivide it according to the New Testament truth of John 10:10, which states Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy, while Jesus comes only to give abundant life. We are called to DIFFERENTIATE the works of Satan from the works of God. The Old Testament couldn't do this without the indwelling Pentecost of the Holy Spirit. But we can! Hallelujah, we can!

QUESTION 53: WHAT MAKES US "VULNERABLE" TO SATANIC DISASTERS?

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were

sinner above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, EXCEPT YE REPENT, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke 13:1-5.

These difficult verses establish three truths:

All who live faithlessly are vulnerable to Satanic attacks of premature death and destruction. It is not that the Galilaeans or the eighteen in the above passage were greater sinners than other Israelites. Jesus is saying that ALL who are unrepentant are exposed and vulnerable to demonic attacks of disaster, destruction and death. But what does "unrepentant" mean in this context? "Repentance" (Greek - "metanoia") literally means "to change the way one thinks."

In other words, those who think wrong things about God leave themselves less than fully protected by their shields of faith. The maximum amount of protection our faith provides us comes from the "right thinking" we display as we continually cleave to and trust in the perfect goodness of God. All men must repent (change their way of thinking) toward God. This repentance certainly includes our personal sins. But, more than that, repentance requires that our minds be "renewed" in our thinking so that we "may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Godly repentance protects us from Satanic attacks of premature death and destruction. It allows us full access to the protective promises of Psalm 91 which are available only to those who abide in the secret place of the Most High God. Rest assured that Psalm 91 protection is only available for those who will receive it by faith. Wrong thinking on this point will dilute our shields of faith and open us up to demonic attacks.

The blessed question is not what specific sins, sinners and devils caused a particular evil harvest, but rather what seeds of faith can we sow now to stop this current evil harvest and any future evil harvest. If we need specific causes, God will give specific words of knowledge/wisdom about it. But we should not harp on specific causes in our own thinking. This can lead to condemnation and blame shifting.

Remember, Jesus did not relate these disasters to particular external sins. Rather, He related the disasters to a lack of internally "right thinking" about God, a lack which leaves much of mankind in a vulnerable state of exposure to devilish disaster.

Satan's temptations lure us into misusing our freedom to harden our hearts to either disbelieve "in" God or misbelieve "toward" God. Satan then fills the vacuum, poisons our perspective, and floods us with a thousand oppressions--- disaster, sickness, depression, insanity, tragedy, famine, war, destruction, rape, child molestation, murder, brutality, etc.

But, God, for His part, perseveres in perfection and protection. He navigates in, around and through our unbelief in order to remain always a mere heart-cry away. And remember this one thing, and never doubt it: GOD ALWAYS HASTENS TO THE

HIGHEST AVAILABLE GOOD, taking into account all the spiritual dynamics at play in any given situation.

These dynamics include: the freewill of men, the various accesses men provide Satan, the secondhand smoke-effect of others' individual and corporate sins, our own individual and corporate levels of neglect and unbelief, as well as the enabling prayers of the saints, and the various faith and repentance levels present in those involved.

Factoring all these dynamics into the reality which He alone can fully perceive, God hastens to manifest as much good as He can WITHOUT ever entering into coercion. Coercion is not a part of His nature of perfect love. Love never coerces, whether it be mental, physical or emotional coercion. God's nature is only and always non-coercive love. He will exhort us, heal us, rebuke us, and empower us, but He will NEVER coerce us. Love cannot coerce.

The day God becomes coercive is the day He becomes the devil. God is ALL-POWERFUL, but only within the context of His character.

Let me use the metaphor of a large lake. Every thought or action we take is like a rock thrown into this lake of causation. It causes ripples which affect ourselves and others. Now multiply these ripples by the trillion other rocks of thoughts and actions hurled into the lake 24/7 by billions of other people past, present and future.

Now, consider how those ripples may work together to cause a single tidal wave of calamity, or the waves may violently crash into each other causing multiple minor chaotic events and buffetings. Only God can know and safely navigate through and around all the interference patterns of sin, sickness and unbelief. Why any one wave of affliction crashes at any time on any one person is beyond our ability to know. But we can trust that God knows and always hastens to the highest available good.

The more we repent and renew our mind toward the good, perfect and acceptable will of the Father, the less vulnerable we become to Satanic destructions and disasters. The more we believe in and trust toward the goodness of God, the MORE God's protection will be released to manifest and the LESS Satan's destruction will be able to manifest.

QUESTION 54: DOES GOD REALLY HATE ESAU'S GUTS?

"And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that

calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HAVE HATED." Rom. 9:10-13.

I have had more than one person cite these verses to attempt to show that God loves certain men and hates others. In fact, these persons believe that God hates the guts of certain unborn babies whom he has predestined and predetermined to grow up evil. This is sooooo wrong.

FIRST, the word "hate" is used in this passage NOT in the sense of outright emotional hostility or venomous resentment. Rather, the word is used to mean "loving less." Charles Hodge, one of the the greatest American theologians of the nineteenth century, stated this view in his commentary on Romans concerning this passage, "It is evident that in this case the word hate means to love less, to regard and treat with less favor."

Hate is certainly used this way in other key passages. In Gen. 29:32- 33 "hatred" is used of Jacob's feelings for Leah, when in truth the clear meaning of the passage is that Jacob loves and favors Rachel more than Leah. The NIV translates this verse as Leah saying, "I am not loved." Lk. 14:26 likewise uses the term "hate" in the sense of "loving less":

"If any man come to me, and HATE not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Lk. 14:26. Jesus here is obviously not teaching us to hate our parents, siblings and children, for that would contradict thousands of other scriptures. Jesus is saying we must "love them less" than we do the Lord.

There is not any other verse in the Bible where God is said to hate any individual man, so using this verse to substantiate the view that God hates individual men is dangerously unwarranted. God hates evil deeds, not evil men (Rev. 2:6).

God loves all men. Christ died for all men. Christ offers salvation and forgiveness to all men. But, not all men choose to receive God's free gift of salvation. But God even loves those who reject Him. Jesus loved the rich young ruler who rejected His call (Mk. 10:21-22). Jesus healed the ear of a soldier who came to arrest Him (Lk. 22:51). Jesus asked forgiveness for all who killed Him (Lk. 23:34).

SECOND, Paul uses Jacob and Esau in the Romans 9 passage above to represent God's election of NATIONS, not the election of individual MEN. Paul was addressing the arrogant presumption of nationalistic Jews who believed Israel was the only chosen nation (people) of God, regardless of their corporate level of faith.

Paul's purpose in this chapter is to show that election is now NOT by nation but by INDIVIDUAL faith alone. Paul in these verses is tracing back the historical development of Israel as God's chosen nation (people). In Romans 9, Paul acknowledges the Israelite nation as the blessed recipient of "the adoption , and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose

are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came" (Rom. 9:4-5). He then traces back the call of God through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is in this process that Paul quotes with regard to Jacob and Esau: "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Rom. 9:11-13.

Paul quotes verse 12 from Micah 1:2-3. These verses in Micah are clearly referring to Jacob and Esau NOT as INDIVIDUALS but as the NATIONS of Israel and Edom. That Paul was referring to the call of a nation (Israel) rather than the call of an individual in these verses is highlighted in the following passage from F. F. Bruce's commentary on Romans 9:11-13.

"The elder will serve the younger.' From the birth oracle to Rebekah (Gn. 25:23). The prophecy relates not to the individuals Esau and Jacob (for Esau never rendered service to Jacob) but to their descendants; it relates to the long periods during which the Edomites were in servitude to Israel or Judah (cf. 2 Sa. 8:14; 1 Ki. 22:47; 2 Ki. 14:7; etc.).

'Jacob, I loved, but Esau I hated.' From Malachi 1:2-3, where again the context indicates it is the nations Israel and Edom, rather than their individual ancestors Jacob and Esau, that are in view. The way in which communities can be so freely spoken of in terms of their ancestors is an example of the common oscillation in biblical (and especially Old Testament) thought and speech between individual and corporate personality (cf. exposition of 5:12-21, p. 120, n. 1). Israel was the elect nation, and Edom incurred the wrath of God for its unbrotherly conduct towards Israel in the day of Israel's calamity (cf. Ps. 137:7; Is. 34:5 ff.; Je. 49:7 ff.; Ezk. 25:12 ff.; 35:1 ff.; Ob. 10 ff.)." F. F. Bruce, Tyndall New Testament Commentaries, Revised Edition, Romans, p. 182.

The nation Israel sprang from Jacob and the nation of Edom sprang from Esau. Interestingly, in Amos 8:11-12, Edom is used figuratively to represent the Gentiles. Romans 9 seems to echo the use of Esau as a symbol of the Gentile nations by starting off comparing and contrasting Jacob and Esau, and then concluding by comparing and contrasting Israel and the Gentiles.

This allows for the possibility that this whole passage is dealing with the calling of Israel versus the calling of all the Gentile nations, and how their respective favor\disfavor from God has now essentially flip-flopped with each other. (Rom. 9:25-26, 30-33). All the Gentile nations are NOW favored through faith in Christ, while national Israel has reaped DISFAVOR from God because of their corporate and continual unbelief. But even that will change when national Israel is grafted back into favor as they become jealous of the nation of faith which fills the earth. (Rom. 11:11-30). Then ALL will be one in Christ!

Paul's point in these verses is that Israel's election as a chosen nation was already determined in Rachel's womb. The Edomites were not God's chosen nation, even though they too were Isaac's seed. The key reason Edom could not be God's chosen nation was that Jesus was not in their seed. God loved Esau less not because Esau was an evil baby in Rachel's womb. God loved Jacob more because he carried the seed of Jesus in him. God did ordain that through the protected seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. all the nations of the world would be blessed through the birth of one seed - - Jesus the Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Science is settled on the point that fraternal twins, which Jacob and Esau were, come from entirely separate sperm and eggs. Thus, there was a world of genetic difference between Jacob and Esau, a difference large enough to ultimately spawn two entirely separate nations. Only one of these nations had the exact genetic input to produce the destined seed of Jesus - - Israel.

God had promised Abraham his seed would bless all nations, but God also promised that the chosen seed would come from the people which would come to occupy the specific boundaries of the promised land. (Gen. 13:14-18; 15; 17; Acts 17:26). Esau and Edom could never fit this bill, thus only through Jacob and Israel could the blessed and prophesied seed come - - the seed of Jesus.

Nonetheless, God still greatly loved Esau and the Edomites as individuals, even if they did not stand in corporate favor with God. That God loved Esau and the Edomites is established by Isaac's blessing of Esau (Gen. 27:39), the inclusion in scripture of Edomite genealogies (Gen. 36; 1 Chr. 1), God's apparent siding with Edom against the Moabites (Amos 2:1-2), and, most importantly, the clear injunction of Dt. 23:7, "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother."

These mercies toward Esau and Edom hardly support the view that God hates their guts. They were certainly less favored corporately than was Israel, but God continued to love them dearly, for that is His nature. God is love and God loves all men.

Israel was only chosen as a nation because it carried the seed of Jesus within it. Abraham received this seed by faith from the Lord when he believed God for the miraculous birth of Isaac. Thus, it was God's election of Abraham's seed made possible through Abraham's faith in receiving the MESSIANIC PROMISE for the nation of Israel. That hallowed promise is simply this: the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Once Jesus arrived and imparted His righteousness to mankind, then no longer was a national election needed. Faith had come to all nations. The Holy Spirit had come. His bride, body and church had arrived. No longer was there Jew or Gentile, but one new man (Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:12-15).

Similarly, we are not the elect because God loves us more than other men. We are of the elect because we have received the seed of Christ into our being through the exercise of our faith. "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ,

ACCORDING TO THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:1-2).

QUESTION 55: WHAT IS THE "FEAR" OF THE LORD?

Unfortunately, "the fear of the Lord" is a dynamic which has been largely hijacked by wrath-mongers who seek to rule God's flock by dread and intimidation. These angry men tell us we must cower in terror before God or else He will smite us with His terrible wrath. And yet, the New Testament tells us that "God is love" and that "perfect love casts out fear" (1John 4:8, 18).

Does God REALLY want us fearing Him in the same way that abused children tremble with dread when they see their abusive father's shadow coming toward their room? Surely not! In fact, the Bible says that in the "latter days" God's people "shall fear the Lord and His goodness" as they "seek their God" (Hosea 3:5). This is the key question then. What does it mean to fear God's goodness?

Some years ago I watched a PBS special on Elvis Presley. I will never forget what I saw during one of the clips of his concert. Thousands of fans were screaming with frenzied fervor at the presence of the King of Rock and Roll. Their faces were etched in awe, their eyes gushing with tears of adoration, their bodies overcome with impassioned hysteria.

They were not just spectators of Elvis' abilities. They were partakers of Elvis' presence. They actually participated in Elvis' performance by their enthusiastic and wholehearted responses to his voice, gaze and dance. Fans swooned over sweat-soaked towels Elvis cast into the crowd. Hugs and kisses from the King sent female fans into a higher dimension of ecstasy. The atmosphere was electric. Everybody was energized and activated into some sort of corporate awe which elevated the concert into an event of a lifetime. All other thoughts and concerns of life were eclipsed by the King's presence. This awestruck condition can only be described by one term - - the fear of Elvis.

The fear of the Lord of which the Bible so often speaks is our awestruck response to the presence of God. Our lives are a continuing concert before the King of Kings. As we recognize His love songs that are directed to us, we swoon, weep, dance and scream for joy. Our souls are activated into an ecstatic state called the fear of the Lord. The eye of the tiger starts with the fear of the Lord.

When I first read in the Bible about the fear of the Lord many years ago, I assumed it meant literal fright. I could never understand how being terrified of God could bring me closer to God. As I begin to study the nuances of the Hebrew language, I saw that the

"fear of the Lord" meant something different than being scared of God. "Fear of the Lord" is more accurately described as the "awe of the Lord."

The awe of God is a beautiful thing. It carries with it the ideas of jaw-dropping amazement, passionate reverence and anxious wonderment. There is an element of fear, but it is not based on the type of terror a battered child feels toward a brutal father who regularly abuses him.

The ancient rabbis distinguished between what they called "higher fear" (awe) and "lower fear" (terror). Godly fear is motivated by the matchless presence, power and goodness of God. "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever." Ps. 19:9. This produces spiritual butterflies in the belly of every lover of God. Just as new brides experience jitters of nervous desire on their wedding nights, so do God-lovers tremble with anxious passion as they seek to grow in intimacy with God. Our honeymoon thrill is never over with God as we seek to always relate to Him in the newlywed way of "first love." Revelation 2:4.

I will never forget I once got to be within arm's length of a previous President of the United States. He smiled at me and said hello. Butterflies in my stomach were churning emotions of awe, fear and respect all at the same time. Just as Elvis' fans responded in awe to his presence, I responded in awe to the President's presence.

This is the key. The fear of the Lord is our RESPONSE to knowing God's glorious presence. The Hebrew word for "knowing" is "daat" and means "relationally experiencing." Not mind knowledge, but heart knowledge. Wholehearted interaction with another. Intimate and mutual participation in each other's presence. Only through this kind of fervent engagement can we truly "know" God in the Hebrew way.

The importance of the fear of the Lord cannot be understated. It is the womb of our heart which nourishes, develops and births true faith. "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence " Prov. 14:26. It is the fertilizer of fervency which makes our heart soil rich so that we may reap God's hundredfold harvest in our lives. It is what stimulates and develops our sixth sense to discern the Lord's presence ever more clearly.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." Ps. 25:14. The fear of the Lord is our wholehearted accommodation to God's Spirit. This heart attitude is how we make ourselves available to God. The fear of the Lord renders our heart a "hospitality house" which continually welcomes and serves the Holy Spirit.

The cycle of lifestyle fear of the Lord works like this: God touches us with His presence; we respond in awe and stand at continual alert to receive more of the Lord; God then interacts with us more deeply according to our increased readiness; we again respond in awe and further sanctify our hearts to receive even more from God; God then penetrates us more intimately; we again respond with stronger consecrated awe; God again counters with an increased touch; God's righteous action; our righteous reaction;

God gives us all His presence we can handle; we rejoice in it and prepare our hearts for greater encounters.

The fear of the Lord is one part joyful response to the Lord's prior touches, one part ongoing response to the Lord's continuing current touch, and one part expectation which keeps our spirit, soul and body at constant spiritual alert for the Lord's future touches. This fluid process is like a wonderful dance where God passionately leads as we passionately follow. It always takes two to tango. "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged." Is. 60:5. We all must learn to join the dance!

The fear of the Lord is our righteous response to God's loving presence. It is a state of responsiveness where our entire being is set at awed readiness to continually relate to the ongoing presence of God. Just as our military is on constant alert and on a continuous state of readiness, so must the army of God stand fast in the fear of the Lord - - ever zealous, ever vigilant, ever responsive and ever amazed.

This eye-of-the-tiger attitude drives us to position ourselves to relate and respond to the Lord every glorious second of every glorious day: "be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Prov. 23:17. This is a life journey. Each day closer to God. Each day more sensitive to His Spirit. Each day more passionate for God.

The Jews have a name for God, "Ein Sof," which means "without end." This emphasizes God as our lifelong process of growing in His knowledge. The fear of the Lord is our wholehearted esteem for this continuing relationship with God. It is moving God from the back-burner of our hearts to the front-burner. It is truly putting God first in our lives.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Ezek. 36:26. It is impossible to fear the Lord without first knowing and experiencing Him on a heart level. Those who are awestruck WITH God must first be heart struck BY God. It is a personal revelation of God's love for you alone. He will come to you in your own emotional language and sing His ballad to the very depths of your soul. Your heart will burn within you as His love fills your memories, heals your hurts, and shows you He has always had His enthusiastic eye on your life. You will be astonished at how tender He is towards you, and yet at the same time so eager to give you your full inheritance in the kingdom of God.

The true Hebrew knowledge of God produces lifestyle fear of the Lord. To know the Lord in the Hebrew way allows you to respond in awe in the Hebrew way. To know God intimately is to be awestruck. To be awestruck is to overflow with esteem, admiration, wonder, amazement, veneration and worship. This is by no means a one time experience. Your life is one continuous concert before the Lord and love of your life.

If you crave this sensation of awe from God daily, then you are truly walking in the fear of the Lord. But, if this experience is rare or non-existent, then you must grow in the fear

of the Lord. "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore." Ps. 86:11-12. The awe of the Lord is the heart attitude that desperately wants, totally needs and fervently loves the presence of God.

If many church-goers were forthright, they would have to admit Elvis has left the building. In other words, the presence of God is not to be found in the man-made church which prioritizes the traditions of man over the presence of God:

"He [Jesus] answered and said unto them [the religious leaders], Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. . . . Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye." Mk. 7:6-7, 13.

As mind-based organization and man-based elevation increase, awe of God decreases, and decreases, and decreases. The result is a people who take God for granted. They don't wait for His presence in radical amazement and expectation. In short, they have lost what Abraham Heschel (1907-1972) called, "the legacy of wonder." Heschel rightly believed that, "Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin." Jesus spews this lukewarm mind-set out of His mouth because it does not fear the Lord. (Rev. 3:16). Heschel wrote that fear of the Lord is a "form of thinking" that never ceases "joyous appreciation" and "reverent wonder" of God.

God wants the fear of the Lord re-established in His people. This can only happen if man's religion is cast down and the Holy Spirit is lifted up. If His prioritized presence fills our meetings, relationships and homes, then we will discover the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. Then our heart palpitations for God will increase as God enters the building not made with human hands, but "which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." Heb. 11:10. The building God seeks to inhabit is you: "Ye are God's building." 1 Cor. 3:9. Just as Elvis' fans feasted on his presence, fans of God must also feast on Christ's pulsating presence.

No country has more groups of fans than the United States. In sports, masses of loyal devotees literally worship football, baseball, racing, basketball, hockey and soccer. Individual sports stars walk the earth as gods in the eyes of these fans. Add to the mix entertainment fans who revere rock stars, movie stars, theater stars, and even professional wrestling stars. All these showcase the true driving force of fame in this society - - the fan. The dictionary defines a "fan" as one who is ardently, fervently, intensely, passionately, glowingly and/or zealously devoted to a person or thing. A fan by definition must have a heart burning with focus on its object of devotion.

Those fans enraptured with Elvis had previously experienced him in their hearts through records, magazines, movies, letters, posters and continual devotion. There is a Hebrew term "meshugga la davar" which means "crazy about one thing." Just as these fans were single-eyed and whole-hearted in their dedication to Elvis, so must we be

"meshugga la davar" about God. Crazy for Him, hanging onto His every word and gesture, obsessed with Him and possessed by Him. God has always been meshugga la davar about you. He is your biggest fan. He knows everything about you - - your favorite color, song, movie, book, and dessert. He carries your picture with Him at all times. The reason we are able to be meshugga la davar about God is that He was first meshugga la davar about us. 1 Jn. 4:19.

QUESTION 56: DOES GOD HAVE SOME "PURPOSE" IN "PERMITTING" SATAN TO AFFLICT US?

Saying Satan has a "purpose...permitted" by God is like saying child molestation, rape or murder has a Godly "purpose" because God "permits" it.

This is just another way of laying evil at God's doorstep.

No, God has DE-permitted all Satanic evil through the power of the Cross. Luke 10:18-19; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; John 16:11; Matthew 16:19; Ephesians 1:22-23. God has ALREADY disallowed all Satanic evil, but we have YET to FULLY ENFORCE His judgment on all Satanic powers and principalities. Jesus IS God's complete disallowance of evil. Satan still hangs around here NOT because God allows him, but because WE do. He is a vanquished and defeated foe. God is waiting for us as His body to enthusiastically enforce HIS disallowance of evil--- today, here, and now!

To say God specifically "permits" each and every evil Satan does regresses back to the Old Testament Judaic and modern Calvinistic mindset that tragically clams both good and evil come from God's sovereign hand. Calvin famously teaches, as does Judaism, that "God's permissions are His purposes," which is why Calvin said Satan was God's "minister of wrath."

I respect Old Testament Hebraic thought, but I do not worship it. They line up with Calvinism on very many erroneous points, which end up deforming the character of God. Jesus came to IMPROVE our understanding of Satan as the horrific god of this world and the consequent need for spiritual warfare.

The Old Testament saint Job is NOT our model for dealing with Satan, Jesus is. Job was oblivious of Satan's role of malevolent destroyer. Job hardly modeled New Testament way of dealing with Satanic attack. He never mentioned Satan, never rebuked Satan, never resisted Satan, never engaged in any form of spiritual warfare at ALL while his children, health and possessions were all being destroyed.

Am I saying OT saints had no concept of the demonic? No, not at all, they had a dim and partial grasp of angelic conflict, but no able theologian from any Christian or Jewish

camp would support the claim that they had anything close to the New Testament view of Satan as "the god of this world."

In fact, any Jew would scoff at Paul's use of that title because their hyper-literal view of sovereignty would not allow for that term to apply to anybody but Yahweh. And so, they believed evil spirits came from the Lord, not Satan. They believed the death angel was Satan who merely killed whoever the Lord instructed him to kill. Satan was God's enforcer angel just doing his job. This is exactly what ancient Rabbinic Judaism believed what and Orthodox Judaism still believes.

The Old Testament is full of wonderful types, allegories and shadows waiting to be discovered. And I am in no way saying to discard it. I AM saying that the vast majority of both Christian and Jewish theologians agree that the Old Testament view of Satan is vastly different from the New Testament view of Satan. An unperceived Satan is an unresisted Satan. He was rarely if ever perceived or resisted in the Old Testament, but is almost continually recognized and rebuked in the New Testament.

Because of this, the Old Testament needs to be illuminated with the truths of our "better covenant with better promises," many of which pertain to our complete authority to rebuke and vanquish all Satanic evil. This is what the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is all about, the supernatural equipping to trample demonic foes. Jesus started telling the disciples about Satan's full rule and fuller defeat in John 16:11, but He said they could not yet "bear it" because they had not yet been Spirit-baptized. If they couldn't handle the full truth of Satan in their unspirit-baptized condition, despite being in Jesus' actual presence, how much less could the Old Testament saint grasp Satanic realities, having never directly beheld the face of Jesus. My point is the very last thing we need to do is regress back into Old Testament thinking about Satan.

QUESTION 57: IS THERE ANY REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "CAUSING EVIL" AND "ALLOWING EVIL?"

Did you know the Hebrew language makes NO distinction between actively causing something to happen and passively allowing it to happen? In other words, to "allow" something you have the power to stop IS "causing" it in the Hebrew mind.

Did you know that Calvinism's founder, John Calvin, likewise believed that there was NO difference between actively causing something to happen and passively allowing it to happen. In other words, to "allow" something you have the power to stop IS "causing" it in the Calvinist's mind.

Common sense also confirms there is NO difference between actively causing something to happen and passively allowing it to happen. All civilized societies would agree that if a powerful person stands idly by and allows another nearby person to be mugged, brutalized or robbed without that powerful person lifting a finger to help the

victim, then that person who refused to help is as guilty and despicable as the criminal who did the actual assault. Years ago, in the Oklahoma Federal Building bombing, the authorities prosecuted BOTH those who actively participated AND who passively participated to the full extent of the law. "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really co-operating with it." Martin Luther King, Jr.

Soooooo, where do we get off making the following ridiculous claim: "While God may not cause evil, He certainly allows it." WRONG! SO WRONG! Applying the reasoning in the first three paragraphs above, we know better than to say God somehow allows evil WITHOUT also causing it. If God CAN stop evil from happening, but He doesn't, then God IS causing evil. Judaism, Calvinism and Common Sense-ism all agree.

If the Hebrew mindset is intellectually honest enough, if John Calvin was intellectually honest enough, and if Martin Luther King, Jr. was intellectually honest enough, then shouldn't we be as well? Shouldn't we agree that there is no real difference between God allowing evil and God causing evil. They are one in the same. If I hand a match to a pyro-maniac who I know will set the city on fire, and then get out of his way while he does it, then I am just as responsible as the arsonist is for all the horrible damage done.

So, it just won't fly to somehow diminish God's responsibility for evil by saying that while He doesn't create evil, He still nonetheless does allow it. This is just a verbal shell game which still ultimately blames God for evil. For, if, if, if, you believe God either actively causes OR passively allows evil, you are still putting evil on God's doorstep, and THAT is unacceptable. See James 1:13-15.

There simply has got to be another dynamic here, a better dynamic, a higher dynamic, a deeper dynamic, a truer dynamic. A dynamic that says God is always an active DIS-allower and DIS-abler of evil, and NEVER an allower or enabler of evil.

So let's try to find this better dynamic. What if God doesn't cause OR allow evil? What if God's only posture toward evil is to DISALLOW it on every level. What if God has sent a definitive cure for all evil, a cure which would prevent every future evil, cure every past evil, and disarm every present evil? In fact, what if God has ALREADY sent this cure to us? In fact, what if the ONLY thing needed to activate this cure here and now is for us to "eat" and "drink" it in faith?

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.... He that eateth my flesh , and drinketh my blood , dwelleth in me , and I in him.... He shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John 6:53-56,51.

Beloved, do you see? Jesus on the Cross IS God's complete disallowance of ALL evil for ALL time. Do scriptures teach that God ONLY and ALWAYS disallows evil? Yes, but not only that. Scriptures teach Jesus has ALREADY disallowed all evil. We just refuse to "drink" and "eat" the cure He delivered us two thousand years ago at the Cross.

Consider these Scriptural gems below which assure us that God is in the-DISALLOWANCE-of-evil-business, and NOT the-evil-allowing-business.

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions , and over ALL the power of the enemy : and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Luke 10:19.

"Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall NO EVIL befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." Psalm 91:9-11.

"And you , being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh , hath he quickened together with him , having forgiven you all trespasses ; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us , which was contrary to us , and took it out of the way , nailing it to his cross ; And having SPOILED principalities and powers , he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it ." Colossians 2:13-15.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil , neither tempteth he any man : But every man is tempted , when he is drawn away of his own lust , and enticed . Then when lust hath conceived , it bringeth forth sin : and sin , when it is finished , bringeth forth death. Do not err , my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures ." James 1:13-18.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested , that he might DESTROY the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood , he also himself likewise took part of the same ; that through death he might DESTROY him that had the POWER of DEATH , that is , the devil ; And DELIVER them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage ." Hebrews 2:14-15.

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree , that we , being dead to sins , should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye WERE healed." 1 Peter 2:24. THE ABOVE VERSES SHOW US THAT EVIL IS ALREADY DEFEATED. THE CURE IS THE CROSS OF JESUS. WE NEED ONLY DRINK AND EAT OF HIM FOR THE DEFEAT OF EVIL TO FULLY MANIFEST. THEN, EVERY EVIL WE ENCOUNTER WILL BE DISARMED AND DEMOLISHED! THE PRESENCE OF EVIL EXISTS ONLY WHEN WE HAVE YET TO FULLY DRINK AND EAT THE CURE.

QUESTION 58: WHY COULDN'T THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS HANDLE THE TRUTH ABOUT SATAN?

The New Testament exposed and judged Satan. (Col. 2:15; Jn. 16:7-15). We have now been equipped (transformed, enhanced and enriched) to be the executors of that judgment. (Matt. 16:19; Heb. 2:6-12; Lu. 10:19; Ps. 149:5-9; Rom. 8:14; 16:20; Rev. 12:11). The best way to judge Satan is to completely remove him from our image of God. There must be no more confusion between them in our minds. They are day and night, oil and water, fire and rain. They do not mix--- at all!

The Old Testament saints couldn't handle the meat of truth, only the milk. (Jn. 16:7-12; Gal. 4:1-7; Heb. 5:12-14). The Old Testament view of Satan and evil was dim and partial. Jesus came to reveal the truth about Satan's evil (1 Jn. 3:8) and God's goodness (Jn. 1:18; 10:30; 10:10; Acts 10:38; Lk. 9:51-56).

We must be careful to always read the Old Testament through New Testament eyes. The Old Testament always said that all things, good and evil, come from God. The New Testament says not so: evil comes from Satan or man. Good only comes from God and God is only Good. (Jn. 10:10; Jas. 1:12-17).

It is not that the Old Testament is wrong, but it was written by spiritual children for spiritual children. In some areas, especially with regard to Satan and the problem of evil, it needs to be transformed, enhanced and enriched by the New Testament anointing.

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Matt. 11:11. No Old Testament saint was greater than John the Baptist, but he was least in the New Testament. Why? The Old Testament saints had Moses' Law. They also had supernatural experiences and miracles galore. They even had both the Ark of God's presence and the Temple of His glory. If they were able to receive all this from the Lord, then why could they not handle the truth about Satan?

As radical and different as Jesus' teachings were, He nonetheless affirmed the prophetic value of the Old Testament Law. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matt 5:17-18.

Jesus knew that His teachings and actions APPEARED to conflict with Old Testament teaching. He wanted to assure the Jews that any apparent conflict came from their "hardness of heart" which kept them from properly processing God's word. (Matt. 19:8). Jesus' anointing fulfilled the law by elevating its truths from literal to spiritual. Only Jesus had the righteousness to "fulfill" the Law, to "fill it full" with God's Spirit in other words.

The unavoidable conclusion is that the Old Testament can be misused when it is read with unspiritual eyes. Satan misapplied the literal meaning when tempting Jesus in Lk. 4:9-12. The Old Testament cannot be fulfilled by always reading it literally "on its face." It must be spiritually transformed, enhanced and enriched by New Testament eyes enlightened by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is not easy, yet it is mandatory for meat eaters. (Heb. 5:14).

The Old Testament must be excavated, elevated and renovated. In Jn. 1:18, we are told that Jesus came to earth to "declare" (explain) the Father because nobody really knew Him--- His nature, His character, His true personality. Hallelujah, Jesus came to explain what the Old Testament fully meant, who is the author of evil and how perfectly good His father is. He allowed the indwelling Spirit to bring to light the Old Testament shadows (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Shadows lack three dimensions and are often hard to identify what exactly they represent until we look at the actual object in the light which is casting the shadow.

The New Testament Kingdom of God is the actual object casting the Old Testament shadows. Let's not get trapped in the dark shadows of doubting God's goodness. Instead, let's allow the spirit of Christ within us to fulfill the Old Testament law by transforming, enhancing and enriching it into the New Testament Kingdom of God.

Consider the well known "Boogey Man" principle: We don't expose our young children to dark, scary images of devils, monsters, vampires, etc. because they don't have the emotional equipment to handle it. They would be overwrought with continual fear and nightmares, scared of the dark, scared of being alone, etc. As they mature, they are able to better process fearful images constructively and courageously. God did the same with the Old Testament saints (Gal. 4:1-7).

Because they walked in their "own" righteousness, as opposed to walking in the righteousness which is "of" God (Romans 10:3-10), the Old Testament saints lacked the fortitude, faith and authority to cast out devils or rebuke Satan. The "indwelling" Holy Spirit allowed them to do miracles, defeat physical enemies and build the temple, but no Old Testament saint ever rebuked demonic enemies directly.

In fact, the few encounters with evil spirits recorded in the Old Testament inaccurately claim the evil spirits were "from" the Lord. In fact, Old Testament saints were largely ignorant of demonic enemies existing on a large scale. To quote a famous movie line, Old Testament saints "couldn't handle the truth" about Satan as the prince of this world.

Jesus began to tell them about the realities of the Spirit realm in John 16:7-11, but then had to stop because they had yet to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but YE CANNOT BEAR THEM NOW. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." Jn. 16:12-13.

For Old Testament saints, their enemies were physical, not spiritual. But when Jesus came, He imparted to us His righteousness through the "indwelling" Holy Spirit. Now, we are capable of maturing quickly and grasping the following truth: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Eph. 6:12-13.

God protected the Old Testament saints from the dark truths about Satan by allowing them to assign all things, good and evil, as coming from the sovereign will of God. Just as a young child holds a parent responsible for all things - - bad weather, bad news, bad circumstances, bad toys – Old Testament saints held God responsible for all things that happened – the good, the bad and the ugly. They had to blame evil on something or somebody, and since they couldn't handle the truth of the Satanic realm, they assigned evil to God.

Satan was out of the loop altogether, or at best was seen as a servant of Jehovah fulfilling his role in the heavenly act. Seen in this light, God and Satan played "good cop/ bad cop" with mankind. God was the good cop trying to protect suspects from His evil partner Satan. Satan was a mean and ugly angelic officer who wanted to beat and abuse suspects into confessing their unworthiness and guilt. God, as the good cop, would restrain Satan as long as the suspect cooperated. Otherwise, God would let Satan have a few minutes alone with the suspect to coerce cooperation through the use of sickness, destructions, disasters, or oppressions.

From this angle, God and Satan were both working on the same side. They just used different techniques. Jesus lambasted this view by stating His purpose in coming to man was to destroy the works of Satan, not to work with Satan in any kind of alliance.

The Holy Spirit is the key to all this. Because we are indwelt with the Spirit, we CAN handle the truth of Satan as the prince and god of this fallen world. And not only can we handle it, we can take dominion over all his evil and rebuke it to oblivion. The whole earth, according to Romans 8, is groaning for the mature sons of God to manifest on the earth. "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall in any wise hurt you." Luke 10:19.

QUESTION 59: BUT AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO READ THE BIBLE "PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT AND LINE UPON LINE?"

NO! That is the way we're NOT to read the Bible!

There is a famous teaching ministry called "Precept Ministries" which bases its name on Isaiah 28:13. Their focus is to teach the word of God "precept upon precept, line upon line" using what they call "Inductive Bible Study." The key to rightly reading the Bible, this ministry holds, is to cover all the Scriptures into a system of orderly precepts using rules of logic.

Here is the hilarious catch.

The very passage this teaching ministry names themselves after is quoted COMPLETELY out of context. The Isaiah passage clearly says NOT to read Scripture "precept upon precept, line upon line," for to do so will cause us to "fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."

But don't take my word for it. Here is the passage:

"Therefore shall the word of Jehovah be unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little; that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." Isaiah 28:13.

Just as 2 Corinthians 3:6 warns us to NOT read Scripture "by the letter, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life," this Isaiah passage warns us to NEVER read the Bible as mere precepts to be systematically arranged according to the logic of men. To do so will cause us to fall backward and be taken by Satan's snare of literalism.

I find this so amazingly funny, that the very name of their ministry violates their own central rule of interpretation which forbids taking any scripture out of context. "Precept upon precept" is a bad thing, not a good thing.

Go figure. And, in fact, the context of this Isaiah 28:9-13 passage reveals another dynamic truth.

"For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, 'This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest, and, This is the refreshing:' yet they would not hear." Isaiah 28:11–12

Paul quoted verse 11 above in 1 Corinthians 14:21 right in the middle of his teaching on tongues.

This is the only New Testament reference to this Isaiah passage that I am aware of, so what is said here is crucial. His point is amazing. The people who only read the Bible "precept upon precept, one upon line" are unable to "hear" supernatural knowledge revelation from the Holy Ghost through the gift of tongues, an experience Isaiah prophetically calls a "rest" and "refreshing."

But, because those who read the Bible "by the letter" choose to view God's word as mind-formulated precepts rather than spirit-quickened rhemas, they will not be able to hear the teachings of the Holy Ghost, and so will fall backward and be snared.

Nothing is more offensive to the legalistic mind than relying on tongues and their interpretation. Paul is promoting BOTH tongues and their wonderful "interpretations" as well when he quotes this Isaiah passage.

This doesn't mean we still don't fervently esteem and meditate on Scripture, but it does reveal that the catalyzing agent of all heavenly revelation has got to be the Holy Ghost alone. It's the supernatural "way" we receive from God here that matters, not some man-made rule of interpretation we are chained to follow.

Jesus said the Holy Ghost leads us not all truth, not the Scriptures.

Once we contrast how striving, soulish and self-willed "precept upon precept, line upon line" Bible reading truly is when compared to Holy Spirit-quickened glowings and showings, then we see the need to open ourselves to God's supernatural way of "revelating" over our own natural way of "precepting." This is the "rest" and "refreshing" these two passages open for us.

Make sense?

QUESTION 60: ARE WE ALLOWED TO WITHSTAND PETER TO HIS FACE?

If Paul had the guts to "withstand Peter to his face" (Galatians 2:11) for possible spiritual error, shouldn't we too have the guts if, of course, the Holy Ghost so leads?

When Peter appears a little too quick on the trigger to tell people to "drop dead" for their transgressions (Sapphira and Simon in Acts 5 and 8), should we willing to withstand his actions if our conscience compels us?

Do we follow the Holy Ghost or Peter? Jesus or Peter? I honestly can't see Jesus telling anybody to drop dead on the spot. That ain't the way He rolled. Jesus might rattle their religious cage, but He never cursed someone to die on the spot. Be merciful seven times seventy, overcome evil with good, bless your enemy and pray for them that despitefully use you. Don't see "curse them to die or perish on the spot" on that list in Matthew 5:38-48.

And don't get me wrong, I love Peter, but are we to assume he was flawless in his every dealing? Paul sure didn't. None of us are yet flawless in ministering the mercies of God. After telling Simon to "perish" along with his money, Simon asks Peter to pray for him that the things Peter spoke not happen to him. But, Scripture is silent as to whether Peter then prayed for him. I sure hope he did. I would definitely withstand Peter to his face if he didn't on that issue. Jesus is our model, not Peter.

QUESTION 61: RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

1) James and John wanting Jesus to call down killing fire on the Samaritans for rejecting them in Luke 9:54 (just like Elijah did to the rebellious Samaritans in 2 Kings 1:10, 12);

2) The Pharisees wanting to execute Jesus' disciples to death for Sabbath-breaking in Matthew 12:1-7 (just like Moses commanded all Sabbath breakers stoned to death, no exceptions, in Exodus 31:14-15 and 35:2, and who in fact stoned a man to death in similar circumstances for just picking up sticks on the Sabbath in Numbers 15:32-36);

3) The mob seeking to stone the woman to death who had been caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 (just like Moses commanded all adulterers to death in Leviticus 20:10, no exceptions);

WHAT did these would be killers all have on their side? ANSWER: The Bible. All these bloodthirsty people were relying on well known Scriptures, established Scriptures, clear Scriptures, compelling Scriptures. I cite all the passages above.

These mobs thought they all had the spiritual high ground. But you know what? They didn't.

Jesus told James and John they "knew not what spirit they were of, because He came to save life, not to destroy it." Luke 9:55. He told the Pharisees seeking to execute His disciples for Sabbath-breaking that He Himself was "Lord of the Sabbath" and that His disciples were "blameless" and "guiltless" because He "wanted mercy and not sacrifice." Matthew 12:5-8. After scattering the mob seeking to stone her, Jesus told the adulterous that He Himself did NOT condemn her. John 8:11. He cleaned all their plows of wrath with His Spirit of rescuing love.

The point here is that we all need more than JUST the Bible on our side. These people all may have had the literal Bible on their side, but they did not have Jesus on their side. They did not have the Holy Spirit on their side. And they did not have the Heavenly Father on their side.

Time and time again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the Scripture may literally SAY this, but I spiritually SAY..... This is all I am advocating here, to let Jesus' nature, Jesus' presence, and Jesus' wisdom have the FIRST and BEST say when it comes to us reading Scripture.

These three mobs had ALL had read the Scriptures literally, all had thought they clearly understood them, and were all confident they were serving God. What a chilling prospect!

Do we commit the same error today when we believe we can understand Scripture without first putting primary reliance on Holy Ghost interaction? Do we think that our "natural understanding" of Scripture is always automatically right, especially when the book of James warns us that the wisdom from "below" is "earthly, natural and demonic." James 3:15.

SATAN HIDES IN OUR NATURAL UNDERSTANDING!

THIS is why we must let the Holy Spirit mediate all Scriptural meaning to us.

THIS is why reading the Bible "by the letter kills."

THIS is why the New Covenant isn't written on tablets but on the human heart. When Jesus illuminates our reading through the Holy Ghost, THEN Scripture glows bright in each and every verse. Mercy manifests, ideas coalesce, hearts burn, minds renew, mysteries unveil and faith explodes.

QUESTION 62: DID JESUS TELL US TO BUY AND BEAR SWORDS?

Many claim "yes," he clearly did in the following passage: in Luke 22:36, Jesus tells us "he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one."

Based on this passage, wars have been started in Jesus' name, blood has been shed in Jesus' name, and killing has been done in Jesus' name.

When challenged on this point, "sword-bearers" will typically point to Matthew 10:34 for further support, citing it for the proposition that Jesus told us He came "not to send peace, but a sword."

But, is this a fair reading of Jesus' words?

Does Jesus want us arming ourselves to commit possible violence of any kind?

Jesus famously told Peter to "put up thy sword" when he struck the ear off a Roman soldier: "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matthew 26:52. This is hardly a ringing endorsement for buying and carrying deadly weapons.

But what about Luke 22:36 and Matthew 10:34? Don't they support the Christian sword? No, not at all.

Lets start with the Luke 22:36 passage along with the surrounding verses.

"And he said unto them, When I sent you forth without purse, and wallet, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. And he said unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet; and he that hath none, LET HIM SELL HIS CLOAK, AND BUY A SWORD. For I say unto you, THAT THIS WHICH IS WRITTEN MUST BE FULFILLED IN ME, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS': FOR THAT WHICH CONCERNETH ME HATH FULFILLMENT. AND THEY SAID, 'LORD, BEHOLD, HERE ARE TWO SWORDS. ' AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, IT IS ENOUGH." Luke 22: 35-38.

Beloved, do you see? Jesus told them to buy a sword SO THAT Jesus would have to be "numbered with the transgressors" in fulfillment of Isa 53:12. Carrying the sword makes us transgressors because, "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword!" Matthew 26:52.

Arming ourselves WITH and putting our trust IN deadly weapons is what makes us carnal transgressors. Jesus ONLY ordered the disciples to buy swords so that they would soon expose themselves as "transgressors" in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy which said Jesus would be "numbered with the transgressors."

Peter outwardly exposed himself as just such a "transgressor" a few moments later when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. "And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. Then saith Jesus unto him, 'Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.'" Matthew 26:52-53.

Jesus never transgressed Himself by carrying or relying on the sword, but his disciples sure did, which is why He was prophetically numbered among them. This showed that all had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, even His own disciples. There was none righteous, no not one. His violent enemies carried the sword as well as His violent disciples. The point is that Jesus alone was righteous, the only non-transgressor in the whole crowd. Since the Isaiah passage used the word "transgressors" plural, there had to be at least two sword-bearers present in His company, which is why Jesus said, "It is enough" when informed there were two swords present.

In no way can this above passage be used to support the claim that Jesus orders His disciples to carry swords in His name. Carrying a sword produces a transgressor, not a peacemaker.

As for the claim that Jesus came to "send us a sword," let me ask two questions about the Matthew 10:34 passage which is quoted below:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And

he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Matthew 10:34-38.

IS JESUS SAYING ABOVE THAT HE CAME TO BRING US A LITERAL- PHYSICAL SWORD TO GUT AND KILL ALL OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO WE MAY BE IN DANGER OF LOVING MORE THAN WE DO GOD?

OR

IS JESUS SPEAKING BELOW OF A SPIRITUAL SWORD WHICH WILL SEVER ALL IDOLATROUS TIES TO RELATIONSHIPS WHICH WE HAVE WRONGLY PRIORITIZED BEFORE OUR LOVE FOR GOD?

I hope this is a no-brainer. Option 2 above is the obvious answer. Otherwise, patricide, fratricide and homicide would be rampant. Murder would be the mark of true Christians as they went about slicing, dicing and slaughtering their loved ones, all in the name of God.

No! Never! Jesus is obviously speaking metaphorically here. He is using the sword as a symbol of the Lord's inner workings in our hearts. The Holy Spirit CIRCUMCISES our heart by cutting away all the carnal connections and fleshly relationships which keep us from loving the Lord with all out heart, mind, soul and strength.

Do you know people who love their children more than God, their spouses more than God, their friends more than God? Sure, we all know many such others. Moreover, we ourselves have all idolized certain people and relationships over our love for God. This toxic and idolatrous ties are the only thing Jesus cuts.

The only sword Jesus brings is the Hebrews 4:12 sword which divides soul from spirit, false motivations from true motivations, and cuts to the core intent of the heart. Jesus sword is spiritual, metaphorical, and symbolic. It is not literal. He is the prince of peace.

QUESTION 63: WHAT IS FREEWILL?

It's all about FREEWILL. Here is how it works:

1) God created men and angels with free will. (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:15-17; Jude 6; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). Consider this quote by C. S. Lewis:

"The sin, both of men and of angels, was rendered possible by the fact that God gave them free will; thus surrendering a portion of His omnipotence (it is again a deathlike or descending movement) because He saw that from a world of free creatures, even though they fell, He could work out (and this is the re-ascent) a deeper happiness and a fuller splendor than any world of automata would admit." (Miracles, chap. 14, para. 20, pp 121-122). The Quotable Lewis, Tyndall House Publishers, Inc. (1989), p. 228.

2) God will do as much as possible to encourage, enable and enhance our free will. (Phil. 2:13). Again consider C. S. Lewis on this point:

"God has made it a rule for Himself that he won't alter people's character by force. He can and will alter them - - but only if the people will let Him. . . . He would rather have a world of free beings, with all its risks, than a world of people who did right like machines because they couldn't do anything else. The more we succeed in imagining what a world of perfect automatic beings would be like, the more, I think, we shall see His wisdom." (God in the Dock, "The Trouble with 'X' . . .(1948), para. 5, pp 152-153). The Quotable Lewis, Tyndall House Publishers, Inc. (1989), p. 229.

3) God will not cross the line and violate our free will. It is a stone He has declared He cannot, must not and will not lift; for to do so would automatically abort all our free wills and render us robots rather than men. At the moment God violated the freewill of ANY man, then ALL men would undergo a Pinocchio transformation in reverse: we would all change from real boys to wooden puppets in the twinkling of an eye. God's puppet strings would be forever attached and in absolute control of our every slavish movement, thought and emotion. Freely choosing to love and unite with God would be impossible. We could no longer be free sons, but merely puppets on a string.

Again, consider C. S. Lewis on this pivotal issue:

"God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata - - of creatures that worked like machines - - would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free. . . . If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will - - that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings - - then we may take it if it is worth paying." (Mere Christianity, bk.II, chap. 3, pp. 52-53).

The Quotable Lewis, Tyndall House Publishers, Inc. (1989), pp 229-230.

4. Again, God violating our free will would make us robots and slaves, not true sons. Violating our free wills would be an act of spiritual abortion. God will not abort us, no matter how risky the pregnancy. He longs to give birth to us as manifest sons of God. (Rom. 8:19).

Having seven children, I have learned the importance of cultivating their free wills. If I make them choose what I want in every situation, then all I have are robot slaves who I have programmed with my will. But, if I nurture their free wills, encouraging them by

showing them the rewards of their good choices, and warning them by showing them the pain of their bad choices, then I have developed true sons who take full responsibility for their own spiritual lives.

If, however, I take away consequences for their choices (rewards for good and punishment for evil), then I have let their free wills remain unused, untrained and unstrengthened. This atrophied state will leave them unable to choose responsibly. Giving them choices without consequences is robbing them of their freewill. It is the consequence that should motivate every choice. If I do my child's homework for him every night, I have robbed him of his freewill because he has not experienced the reward of doing his homework well or the punishment of not doing his homework at all or doing it poorly. Similarly, if when I teach my child to ride a bike, I continually hold on to the bike, the child has not truly learned to balance the bike himself. He neither knows the reward of true effort or the failure of giving up. I have kept him from choosing. God will not make this mistake. He lets us learn to ride the bike or not, to do our homework or not, to choose blessing or cursing - - truth and consequence.

5. God desires us to freely and fully choose to receive and return His love.

a. Love is the GOAL: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." 1 Jn. 4:7-21.

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matt. 22:37-40.

b. Freewill is the MEANS: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou

mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." Dt. 30:19-20.

c. Risk is the PRICE: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:12-17.

God "risks" that we will choose to co-create evil with Satan rather than co-create love with God. Of course, few consciously choose Satan, but an unbelieving heart defaults to Satan with or without our conscious awareness. Not choosing God by faith in any situation is choosing Satan's will for the matter. Satan doesn't care what you do as long as you do it without faith. Satan's great secret to defeating us comes as we fall prey to his master strategy: we fail to see him coming. In disguise, usually using our own voice, he whispers thoughts of doubt, despair and deceit. As we accept these thoughts as our own, faith is evicted and unbelief moves in.

a. Whatever is not from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23; Jn. 16:9).

b. All unrighteousness is sin. (1 Jn. 5:17).

c. Non-love is sin. (1 Jn. 4:8; Ga. 5:6).

d. Hardness of heart is evil. (Heb. 3:12-13; Matt. 19:8; Mk. 10:5; 3:5; 16:14).

7. The "created will" authors evil: Satan and man operate in conjunction. Satan and man co-operate to co-create evil, just as God and man co-operate to co-create good. Because of God's goal of love, He gave creatures freewill to freely choose or reject Him. He risked the possibility of evil developing because true love was worth the risk. Anything less than this makes us all robots, not free men. God never creates evil, but He has created a "free universe" where we (men and Satan) can sub-create evil. God creates freewill. Freewill either allows Satanic evil to be created or allows Godly virtue to create good.

8) The good news, however, is that evil is NOT eternal. Evil is a potential "growing pain" that is temporarily possible only during this finite earth age. I remember reading once that children often suffer "growing pains" in their joints and bones. I know I suffered them horribly in both my shins when I was nine years old. The pain was almost crippling.

The suspected cause of "growing pains" is MISUSE from over-exertion. Similarly, spiritual evil comes from our MISUSE of our free will. But, just like literal "growing pains" subside when maturity comes, so too does the "growing pain" of evil EVENTUALLY subside as we spiritually mature in this life and/or the next. For some, maturity PAST the "growing pains" of evil can occur in THIS lifetime because they are consistently allowing their minds and hearts to be renewed daily to the good, perfect and acceptable will of the Lord. For others though, maturity will have to come in the AFTERLIFE, where the Lord uses His chastening flames of correction to purge away a lifetime of unrepentant misuse of free will and the resultant "growing pains" of evil.

QUESTION 64: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH?

The below passage about Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is often cited for the following horribly wrong propositions:

- 1) "God sent Paul a thorn in the flesh."
- 2) "Paul's thorn in the flesh was some sort of sickness or disease."
- 3) "God repeatedly rejected Paul's prayers and refused to help him remove the thorn."

Before dismantling these three errors, let's first look at this challenging passage:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, THE MESSENGER OF SATAN to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord THREE TIMES that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong. Behold, the THIRD time I am ready to come to you This is the THIRD time I am coming to you." 2 Corinthians 12:7-14; 13:1.

So, now let's revisit the three BOGUS propositions cited above which give rise to numerous CRUEL THEOLOGIES prevalent today. By cruel, I mean those wrong "thorn in the flesh" theologies which paint God as a harsh "control freak" who literally sculpts

us using the knives of pain, sickness and affliction. These CRUEL THEOLOGIES portray God as a torturer rather than a healer.

This twisted image of God resembles a mean little boy experimenting on insects, who delights in tearing wings off butterflies so that he can see them struggle to survive. Except, in God's case, WE are the butterflies on whom He experiments. He tears our wings off with sickness and affliction, so that we will learn humility and learn to give Him glory in the process. How nauseatingly disgusting this image of God is! It is so dishonoring and incompatible with the the nature of God revealed in and by Jesus. Yet, millions of people worldwide still believe in this deformed image of God!

So, let's restate each of the three BOGUS propositions. After each, I will respond and refute the claim.

1) "God sent Paul a thorn in the flesh." WRONG!

This point is easily disproven. Paul calls his thorn in the flesh "the messenger of Satan" in verse 7, and NOT "the messenger of God." Case closed! The "thorn" was FROM Satan AGAINST Paul. Satan is NOT a servant of God. Satan is NOT fulfilling God's will, but OPPOSING it on every level. Scripture proclaims Satan a cosmic rebel, the accuser of the brethren, the tempter, a liar, a murderer from the beginning, the destroyer, a thief, a devouring lion, the god of this world, and the prince of the power of the air.

Jesus came to destroy Satan's works, not implement them (1 John 3:8). Concerning Satan's "thorny" attacks, the New Testament tells us to "resist them stedfast in the faith," to "quench all the fiery missiles of the devil," and to "cast out" all demonic influence. We have ALREADY been given the grace keys to "bind and loose" spiritual forces upon the earth, to bind all things Satan-empowered and loose all things Christ-empowered.

The bottom line? Don't let anyone tell you God sends "thorns in the flesh" to afflict men. This is Satan's work, not God's. Once we are resolute on this point, we can then wholeheartedly resist EVERY Satanic missile, thorn, attack and oppression. Honestly, if we have ANY doubt or suspicion that our "thorns" are FROM God rather than FROM Satan, we will NOT fervently resist, rebuke and remove the thorns of affliction from our lives. Instead, we will accommodate them by accepting sickness, affliction and oppression as the Lord's will for our lives. And this we must not do.

2) "Paul's thorn in the flesh was some sort of sickness or disease." WRONG!
There is not one clear indication in Scripture that Paul's thorn in the flesh was a sickness or disease of some kind.

In 2 Cor. 12:10, the word "infirmities" (Strongs #s 769 and 770) means "weaknesses" and is used primarily by Paul to refer to natural limitations in man's abilities. See Romans 4:19; 6:19; 8:3, 26; 14:1-2; 1 Corinthians 8:11-12; 2 Corinthians 11:30; 12:5, 9, 10; 13:4, where all these verses refer NOT to physical sicknesses, but rather to weaknesses in man's natural ability to accomplish the righteousness of God. Where

man's abilities end is where God's ability begins. As God is given free reign in our lives, He then re-energizes and renews our natural ability with His supernatural ability.

If Paul WERE referring to physical sicknesses, it surely seems he would have mentioned them a chapter earlier in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, where he details exactly WHAT his infirmities were:

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." 2 Cor. 11:23-30.

On this list were labors, stripes, prisons, deaths of those around us, beatings, stoning, shipwreck, perils of water, perils of robbers, perils by countrymen, perils by heathen, perils in the city\wilderness\sea, perils by false brothers, weariness, painfulness, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness and the care of all the churches. NOWHERE IS SICKNESS MENTIONED. Rather, these infirmities were all various types of Satanic and human RESISTANCE and PERSECUTION against the Gospel.

Most importantly, these infirmities were NOT to be accepted as God's will. Paul rejoiced in these infirmities, NOT because they brought him continual defeat in his ministry, but because He knew God's power was then free to be released in full measure to bring victory. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Romans 8:37.

God supernaturally delivered Paul OUT of each of these trials, each in a different way, but all bringing maximum impact of God's glory in the situation. God gets NO glory from us meekly surrendering to the thorns of our flesh. Rather, God gets the glory when we utilize His all-sufficient grace to OVERCOME and REMOVE the thorns from our flesh altogether.

Paul's suffering through these infirmities always led to a supernatural release of God's power to deliver Paul from Satan, while at the same time fully delivering the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul didn't give in or give up because of these infirmities: he resisted and resisted and resisted and resisted them with the power of God. He gloried in the affliction, not because of it: "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1 Thessalonians 5:19. We are to give thanks not FOR everything (including afflictions) but IN everything (including afflictions).

This is entirely consistent with James's view: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James 1:2-4. It is also consistent with Hebrews 6:12, "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

So what WAS Paul's thorn in the flesh? Looking closely at the context of the passage, an amazing answer presents itself. The thorn may well have been the Corinthian church itself.

Paul prayed THREE TIMES for for the thorn to depart. Paul went out of his way to repeatedly say that he was about to visit the Corinthian church for the THIRD time. Was Paul's repeated use of the number three a mere coincidence, or was Paul giving the Corinthians a not-so-subtle hint on what the mysterious thorn in his flesh was?

But how could the Corinthian church be a thorn in Paul's flesh? Well, we know the Corinthians had repeatedly challenged Paul's motives, standing and apostolic authority (2 Cor. 10:1-2; 11:21-28; 12:11-15; 13:3; 1 Cor. 3; 4:1-4; 9). We also know the Corinthians were carnal, divisive and often petty. They continually flooded and vexed Paul with bad reports, constant strife and ugly ingratitude.

So, perhaps this whole episode simply indicates that Paul's messenger of Satan, his thorn of the flesh, was the carnally minded Corinthian congregation itself. Nothing hurts MORE than having a group of people, for whom you have laid your life down, continually challenge your apostolic authority, doubt your motives, and ignore your counsel.

Perhaps Paul struggled with their sinful defiance to the point where he asked the Lord to remove their burden from his ministry. But, God responded to Paul that His grace was sufficient for Paul to STAY connected and committed to Corinth as an apostle, to clean out their sin stables, and in his manly weakness Paul would be made perfect in Godly strength.

Again, what could be more discouraging than ministering to people who doubt your motives, standing and authority - - who seem to only be able to know you after the flesh and not after the spirit?

But, even IF the above analysis is wrong and Paul's thorn in the flesh was a continuing attack of some kind of physical affliction, this passage still can't be used to claim such an attack is from God's will. Again, Paul said the source was Satan, not God (2 Cor. 12:7). Moreover, as an alternate possibility here, consider Agnes Sanford's view of Paul's thorn in the flesh in the event it WAS a physical ailment:

"What about St. Paul and his thorn in the flesh? St. Paul's thorn in the flesh has become a veritable thorn in the spirit to thousands of Christians, who take St. Paul as an example for cherishing illness. In this they are not consistent. If St. Paul were really their

example, they could raise the dead. For in seeing him as an example, of the invalid saint, they do the utmost violence to the Biblical picture of a man strong enough to endure shipwreck and exposure, stoning and imprisonment and still accomplish more than ten ordinary men could.

Behold the impressive roll-call of saints given in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Is there a weakling among them? Noah, who in his five hundredth year built an ark the size of a modern cargo ship; Moses, who at the age of one hundred and twenty stated that his eyes were not dim nor his natural strength abated; Elijah, who girded up his loins and outran the king's chariot horses; David, who slew a lion and a bear with his bare hands. There is no record in the whole Bible of a holy man who remained an invalid. Stories of illnesses we find, but these stories are almost funny in the portrayal of a tremendous urge toward health. The prostrated holy men were outraged at illness, regarding it as a sign of being cut off from God's love and cast out of His presence. From David (who made his couch to swim with his tears) to Job (who sat upon a dung-heap and cried unto the Lord till he recovered) we find no instance of an acceptance of illness as the will of God. . . . St. Paul had been miraculously healed more than once. He had shaken off a deadly serpent and felt no sting whatsoever from its bite. He had been stoned and left for dead, and had risen from under a pile of stones and walked into the city. He had accomplished the most amazing of miracles, even the raising of the dead. Yet, toward the end of his ministry, he was troubled by a thorn in the flesh. He prayed about this matter and God said to him, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. He did not receive an instantaneous healing. Instead of that, he received every day enough of the Grace of God for that day's needs. So do I. And if God's perfect strength accomplished through me as much as it did through St. Paul, I would be well content." THE HEALING LIGHT, by Agnes Sanford.

3) "God repeatedly rejected Paul's prayers and refused to help him remove the thorn."
WRONG!

GOD NEVER TOLD PAUL "NO! I WON'T HELP YOU!" Paul prayed three times for the thorn to depart (v. 8). But, God's answer to Paul was, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness (i.e. I've already given you the resources to deal with it. My ability begins where your ability ends).

God's response was not, "No, Paul, I won't help you." Rather, it was, "Paul, I have already given you the grace to deal with it in my perfect strength. You need only receive it by acknowledging your weakness in your own ability. As you embrace my ability by forsaking your own, then the perfect power of the anointing will rest on you."

Whatever the thorn was, God knew that Paul wanted a super-quick fix, as do we all, by seeking God to kiss the "boo-boo" to make it quickly go away. But, God wanted a quality deliverance that soaked down deep into Paul's character. In fact, Paul stated that Satan's access to afflict him came from Paul being in danger of becoming exalted above measure through the abundance of the [third heaven] revelations. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to

me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." 2 Cor. 12:7.

Again, this seems to indicate an attack on Paul's character by the carnal Corinthian church rather than an attack on his body, but regardless, Paul wanted to leave this battlefield behind. Whereas Paul was tired of this battle, God responded, "This is the battlefield I have called you. You don't need reinforcements. Just use the resources I have already given you. Your character, fortitude and anointing will all greatly benefit. And you will be a much better man for it because you know and depend on my spirit more than ever."

The Greek word "thlipsis" is translated in the New Testament as affliction, but it literally means pressure. (Strong's #2347). Satan's "pressure" on our lives through afflictions eventually renders our natural abilities useless. Satan seeks to destroy us in this state of weakness by crippling our faith, hope and love. But, God sees this state of weakness as a place of brokenness and trust where we can draw closer to Him and receive a fuller measure of grace. (1 Pet. 1:13). This process works patience (joyful endurance) in our character, so that we can rule and reign as champion sons of God. In our gritty and gutty resistance to Satan's pressure (persecution, temptation, sickness, oppression, depression, failure), our character develops patience (joyful endurance) which, when mixed with our faith, releases the anointing of power.

But wasn't Paul a martyr? God didn't deliver him out of that affliction, did he? Doesn't that mean it's good to die young? Why didn't Psalm 91 work for Paul? All these questions misunderstand what a true martyr is. A martyr is not someone whose life is taken from him. A martyr is someone who voluntarily lays his/her life down by refusing to accept the Lord's deliverance in the situation because his/her death would have maximum impact at this point in time. Just as nobody took Jesus' life because He voluntarily laid it down, so too nobody took Paul's life without his consent. The Holy Spirit gave him plenty of advance notice of what dangers awaited him at Jerusalem, yet Paul freely embraced the martyr's death (Acts 21:10-14).

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephtha; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, NOT ACCEPTING DELIVERANCE; that they might obtain a better resurrection." Hebrews 11:32-35.

Do you see? Paul had the faith to be delivered out of any peril, but he CHOSE to lay his life down for maximum impact at the time of greatest exposure (as revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit). The Lord shows many of His beloved sons the point in time when their sacrifice can cause the most damage to Satan and bring the most glory to God. They

then freely choose to lay their life down, NOT ACCEPTING DELIVERANCE as the above Hebrews passage says, and thereby obtain a better resurrection.

God doesn't promise we won't have affliction (demonic pressure). But He does promise we can always overcome it. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Romans 8:37. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." 1 John 4:4. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4.

Jesus clearly taught that this life of an overcomer was to be experienced in THIS life, and not just in heaven. "Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But HE SHALL RECEIVE AN HUNDREDFOLD NOW IN THIS TIME, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." Mark 10:28-30.

The Lord's deliverances work in different ways at different times. Mark 16:18 promises poison and snake bites (i.e. afflictions) won't harm us. Sometimes we are warned in advance of the snake or poison so we can avoid it. Other times, the snake bites us or the poison enters our system. At these times, our faith keeps us from being harmed by the poison\venom.

God didn't promise we would never be bitten by affliction, but He did promise we would never be harmed by it IF we fight the good fight of faith. "Behold, I GIVE UNTO YOU POWER to tread on serpents and scorpions, and OVER ALL THE POWER OF THE ENEMY: and NOTHING SHALL BY ANY MEANS HURT YOU." Lk. 10:19. Therefore, NO Satanic "thorn of the flesh" has the power to defeat us IF we by faith exercise the overcoming grace ALREADY given to us by Christ. In other words, don't pray for more grace but instead use the grace we already have. Christ has already given us more than enough grace to make us more than conquerors.

QUESTION 65: IF GOD IS ONLY GOOD, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THESE FIVE PASSAGES?

1. Isaiah 45:7 "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."
2. Isaiah 54:16 "I have created the waster to destroy."

3. Prov 16:4 "The Lord has made all things for himself, yes even the wicked for the day of evil."

4. Lamentations 3:38 "Out of the mouth of the most High proceeds both evil and good."

5. Amos 3:6 "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

I will begin by explaining the first verse, then respond to the following four passages together as a group.

1. Isaiah 45:7 "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

When Isaiah is speaking here, he is translating the divine impulses of inspiration from the Lord the best he can. But remember, he had an undifferentiated view of God, a fundamental blind-spot which affected and limited everything he received from the Lord. He wrongly believed, as did all Old Testament saints, that Satan was the left hand of God, an obedient extension of Yahweh's wrathful will.

This is why John 1:18 says no Old Testament saint had truly beheld God at any time. Jesus came to DIFFERENTIATE and DIVORCE our understanding of God AND Satan, to completely separate and forever sever their natures, wills and purposes. As for Isaiah, he certainly knew God created light and was full of goodness, BUT he did not know that Satan was a cosmic rebel totally operating without Divine permission or sanction.

Isaiah in this verse was misattributing, or perhaps better described, "improperly blending" his images of God and Satan into one bi-polar UNDIFFERENTIATED image. Jesus couldn't be clearer that Satan was a liar, murderer, and rebel being, and that he did not operate at the command of the Heavenly Father. Sometimes, OT authors were improperly attributing Satan's works and words to Yahweh. Other times OT saints were rightly attributing Yahweh's mighty deliverances to Yahweh alone. But, still other times, such as in this Isaiah passage, the OT saint is hearing God and Satan TOGETHER at the same time. Much like a radio dial receiving two different remote station signals at the same time, what comes out is a mish-mash of conflicting notions and ideas.

Similarly, what comes out in this Isaiah verse is a confusing and contradictory statement in need of New Testament re-translation.

SPIRITUAL EXEGESIS OF ISAIAH 45:7

Isaiah 45:7 "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

Step 1) God sends a "divine impulse" to Isaiah. Satan is not involved in the original impulse. Thus, the original impulse IS "inspired" by God in totality. 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Step 2) The divine impulse is not in any human language, and so the impulse must be processed by Isaiah through his mind and heart. Here Satan CAN be involved in "distorting" the TRANSLATION of that original divine impulse into human language.

Step 3) Because the Old Testament saints had an undifferentiated view of God, this further affected their ability to perfectly translate the original divine impulse into human language. The original divine impulse here contained information about BOTH the good things God does and the evil things He does NOT do (the evil which Satan does, in other words). Isaiah 45 says many wonderful things about God, but also a few "by the letter" misattributions, wrongly translated ideas about God which should have been EITHER attributed to Satan OR denied as being from God.

2. Isaiah 54:16 "I have created the waster to destroy."

3. Prov 16:4 "The Lord has made all things for himself, yes even the wicked for the day of evil."

4. Lamentations 3:38 "Out of the mouth of the most High proceeds both evil and good."

5. Amos 3:6 "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

I will answer the question to these last four passages all together. They each need to be redivided by New Testament illumination. To say that God creates evil, approves evil, speaks evil, or intentionally uses Satan as a destroyer to harm us---- to say all these things totally contradicts the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ and the New Testament. 1 John 3:8 says Jesus came to "destroy" the works of the devil, not to "use" them as some sort of sculpting tool.

The word "evil," in all the above verses you quoted above, is translated from the Hebrew word ra' and means "evil, distress, adversity, wrong, evil (ethical) and refers to both deeds and actions."

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil , neither tempteth he any man : But every man is tempted , when he is drawn away of his own lust , and enticed . Then when lust hath conceived , it bringeth forth sin : and sin , when it is finished , bringeth forth death . Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above , and cometh down from the Father of lights , with whom is no variableness , neither shadow of turning . Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth , that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures ." James 1:13-17.

The word "tempt" in James 1:13-17 is the Greek "peirazo" and means "to test, entice, discipline, prove, tempt, or try." Thus, the passage in saying that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man," is declaring that God doesn't "test"

anybody with evil, "entice" anybody with evil, "discipline" anybody with evil, "prove" anything with evil, "tempt" anybody with evil, or "try" anybody with evil.

In short, the strong implication of this James passage disconnects evil from "God's tool-belt" altogether. This total disconnect of God from evil is reinforced by considering the statement in verse 17 that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." This passage clearly says God has no creative or causative connection with evil, and "let no man say" He does. God overcomes evil with goodness, and He commands us to do the same. Matthew 5:38-48. In this passage, Jesus shows us all verses are not created equal. Jesus repeatedly trumped Old Testament scriptures with His New Testament light.

And while the immediate context of Isaiah 45:7 may speak to Persia, the broader point is that God is being painted here as the creator and bringer of evil calamity, even if it is over non-Israelites. Plus, Amos 3:6 in its context is not referring to any foreign power, but Israel. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Most any book on Jewish Theology book sees Satan just as Calvinism sees him, as God's official "minister of wrath" just carrying out God's express orders. The only difference is Calvinism might claim Satan isn't aware he is cooperating with God, while Judaism paints Satan as an obedient angel serving his God-given role. Their bottom-line is the same though-- evil comes from God.

The Old Testament remains locked for so many. Because of it, 21st century Christians still believe God is a KILLER. He sends plagues, fire, tornadoes, tsunamis, wars and countless other "acts of God" to oppress, destroy, torture and afflict sinful man. This, despite the fact that Hebrews 2:14 says Satan has "the power of death," not God; this despite the fact that Jesus said in John 10:10 that Satan is the one who "steals, kills and destroys," not God; this despite the fact that Jesus repeatedly called Satan "the ruler of this (fallen) world," not God.

In the Old Testament, God appears to order countless men, women and children to be slaughtered. He orders a man executed merely for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:31-36). In fact, certain types of sinners are routinely stoned to death, including disobedient children. Deuteronomy 28:15-68 lists the chamber of horrors which awaits those who dare disobey the "voice of the Lord" -- curses spread over them like cancer, in the city, in the field, at work, in finances, in their children, in sickness, in depression, in defeat, in madness, in blindness and astonishment of heart, in oppression, in poverty, in lack, in frustration, in misery, in lost relationships, in slavery, in want of all things, in hunger, in thirst, in violence, in barren lives, and in "wonderful plagues" in which the Lord "delights" to inflict on those who displease him. Read Leviticus 26:14-17, 21-22 and Deut. 28:58-63, and let the Holy Spirit show us whether we could EVER hear Jesus saying these things. This ain't the Jesus we know. Satan yes, but not Jesus.

Author Raymond Schwager has famously documented six hundred passages of explicit violence in the Old Testament, one thousand verses where God's direct punitive violence is described, a hundred passages where Yahweh expressly orders others to kill certain individuals, and several instances where God kills or attempts to kill for no stated reason, such as in Exodus 4:24-26. Combine this with "God" wiping out millions of children and adults in a world-wide flood, "God" killing every first born male child in the vast nation of Egypt, "God" calling down fire from the sky to kill those who reject him, THEN we are left with a monstrous image of God-- one that we SHOULD fear, SHOULD dread, SHOULD hide from, SHOULD obey "or else" face total destruction.

And where was Satan during all the Old Testament destruction? Twiddling his thumbs while God was doing all the killing, oppressing and destroying? No! Satan was doing what he has always done since the fall---- kill, steal, deceive and destroy. Again, the Old Testament had an undeveloped and undifferentiated understanding of God and Satan.

But Jesus came to reveal the difference between Satan and God, between good and evil, between death and life, between grace and law, between love and wrath. He came to affirm where the Old Testament was correct about His Father's nature, and to correct where it wasn't. Since the Old Testament thought Satan was an angel of God doing His bidding, when calamity did happen, they would describe it as coming from God's hand. Jesus never did that. He rendered unto Satan what was Satan's (death, destruction, sickness, and deception), and unto God what was God's (life, light, love and truth). The answer I believe is alarmingly simple. We, as Spirit-Baptized ministers of the New Testament, must redivide Old Testament passages to separate what was of God and what was of Satan. Jesus did it and so can we BECAUSE He lives in us.

Make sense?

QUESTION 66: DID JESUS EVER APPEAR TO CONTRADICT OR CORRECT THE PLAIN "ON ITS FACE" MEANING OF OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES?

Yes! In the below passages, the New Testament verses listed have Jesus contradicting the Old Testament passages listed parenthetically afterward.

Regarding "Revenge": Matt. 5:38-42; Lk. 9:51-56 (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Dt. 14:21).

Regarding "Hatred": Matthew 5:43-48 (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 23:6; Psalm 41:10; 139:21-22; Dt. 7:9-10; Ex. 17:14-16; Dt. 25:17; 7:2,16; Ps.18:33-42).

Regarding "Food": Mark 7:14-23 (Leviticus 11:2-47; 20:25; Deut. 14:4-20; Acts 10).

Regarding "Murder": Matthew 5:21-26 (Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17).

Regarding "Adultery": Matt. 5:27-30 (Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18).

Regarding "Divorce": Matt. 5:31-32; 19:8 (Dt. 24:1; Jer. 3:1).

Regarding "Swearing": Matt. 5:33-37 (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Nu. 30:2; Dt. 5:11; 23:23).

Note that in all the above verses Jesus says the Old Testament verses "had been said." In most direct references to the law, Jesus referred to it as "Moses' law"; ("Moses commanded" Matt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14; Jn. 8:5); ("Moses said" Mk. 7:10); ("Moses wrote" Lk. 20:28; 24:44); ("the law of Moses" Jn. 1:17; 7:19, 23; Lk. 2:22; Mk. 12:26).

But notice this one conspicuous thing. Jesus didn't quote Moses law as being said "directly" by God. Perhaps, He meant that the Old Testament saints heard God the best they could, but their limitations resulted in them stating incomplete or shallow versions of God's pure word.

Paul called the Old Testament law "the ministration of death" (2 Cor. 3:7) because "the letter of the law kills" (2 Cor. 3:6). But our New covenant has been "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). Because of this, our complete sufficiency is in God: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." 2 Cor. 3:6.

And yet consider:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matt 5:17-18.

Jesus knew that His teachings and actions appeared to conflict with Old Testament teaching. He wanted to assure the Jews that the conflict came from their "hardness of heart" which kept them from properly processing God's word. (Matt. 19:8).

Jesus' anointing fulfilled the law by elevating its truths from literal to spiritual. Only Jesus had the righteousness to fulfill God's truth with God's spirit.

The unavoidable conclusion is that the Old Testament can be misused when it is read with unspiritual eyes. Satan misapplied the literal meaning when tempting Jesus in Lk. 4:9-12. The Old Testament cannot be fulfilled by always reading it literally and on its face. It must be spiritually transformed, enhanced and enriched by New Testament eyes enlightened by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is not easy, yet it is mandatory for meat eaters. (Heb. 5:14). The Old Testament must be excavated, elevated and renovated. In Jn. 1:18 we are told that Jesus came to earth to declare (explain) the Father because nobody knew Him.

Jesus is the trump card! His New Testament light always dispels Old Testament shadows.

QUESTION 67: IS IT WRONG TO CALL JESUS "SUPER-HEROIC?"

Am I embarrassed to call Jesus' exploits super-heroic? No, I'm embarrassed NOT to.

I don't compare Jesus to superheroes, but I do compare their super-heroic qualities to Jesus.

Jesus walked THROUGH doors (John 20:26), walked ON water (Matthew 14:25), and walked unscathed PAST homicidal stoning-mobs (John 8:59). He descended DOWN into the depths of Hell's darkness to rescue us (Ephesians 4:9). He later visibly soared UP into the high heavens to sit at the right hand of power next to His Father (Luke 22:69; Acts 1:9).

Sounds super-heroic to me!

Jesus, with supernatural power and authority, commanded demons to depart (Lk. 4:36), angels to arrive (Matt. 26:53), fevers to go (Lk. 4:39), wholeness to come (Mk. 5:34), deadly storms to stop (Matt. 8:26), dead hearts to start (Jn. 11:43), violent men to fall down (Jn. 18:6), sick men to get up (Jn. 5:8) and Satan himself to back up (Mk. 8:33).

Sounds super-heroic to me!

Jesus walked in divine power which formed a protective and energizing shield around Him. This shield has been called different things in Scripture, "Job's hedge" (Job 1:10), "the secret place of the most high" (Ps. 91:1), and the "full armour of God" (Eph. 6:13-17).

Consider this: the religious Jews sought to throw Jesus off a cliff, "But passing through the midst of them he went away" (Lk. 4:28-30); they "sought to destroy Him" (Lk. 19:14); they sought to stone him but He escaped "through the midst of them, and so passed by." (Jn. 8:59); they "sought to kill him" (Jn. 7:1); they sought to slay him (Jn. 5:16); they sought to capture him "but he escaped out of their hand" (Jn. 10:39); and they manhunted him continually (Jn. 11:57).

Isn't it remarkable that all His enemies were out canvassing to kill Him, but Jesus continued to minister out in public places right under their noses. They simply couldn't gain access to Him because of His hedge of power.

Sounds super-heroic to me!

Jesus could boldly say as the end approached, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." (Jn. 14:30). Jesus even was forewarned about Judas' betrayal so that it could have been avoided. Jesus instead allowed His supernatural hedge to be

removed in order to pay Satan's blood ransom. When an army of soldiers came to arrest Jesus, He told His disciples that, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Matt. 26:53. What a wonderful scripture for the power of prayer!

Sounds super-heroic to me!

Yet, Jesus' enemies could not penetrate His divine hedge UNTIL Jesus heroically laid His life and protective power down by taking all our sins to bear on the cross. Jesus, in His subsequent three days in Hell, then prevailed against ALL the demonic principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and all the various forms of spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. (Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 6:13). Like the mighty Samson, Jesus tore the hinges off the enemy gates of Hell, carrying them away and discarding them at the foot of the cross, nevermore able to lock anybody away from God's love again. He then ascended out of Hell, "leading captivity captive" (Ephesians 4:8). Through all this, He conquered the powers of death and Hell like the champion warrior He is (Revelation 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-17). And He did all this in the name of LOVE: super-rescuing, super-epic, and super-powerful LOVE!

Sounds super-heroic to me!

Maybe we all could use some wide-eyed wonder restored to our faith by putting the SUPER back in Jesus' heroism. Romans 8:36-37 confirms that we, like Jesus, are NOT helpless lambs led to the slaughter, but rather we, and He, are to be "super-conquerors" in all things (Greek "hypernikao"). It would not be stretching this word at all to translate it as "super-heroic."

So really, if it's not super-heroic, it's NOT God. And it's in our basic nature to worship heroes, be they war heroes, sports heroes, literary heroes, entertainment heroes, etc. We each have a hero-shaped vacuum in our hearts waiting to be filled by Jesus' power and presence. We've just up to this point chosen faulty heroes to worship. But that can change in the twinkling of an eye. Hero worship is a great thing IF we are backing the greatest, and really only, super-hero of all time.

Don't we too WANT to be a mighty man or woman of God able to walk in supernatural ability at home and work? Don't we want to do heroic deeds for the Lord, our spouses, our children, and all mankind? Scriptures speak of God's mighty men who can run through a troop, leap over a wall, break a bow of steel and put a thousand to flight. Ps. 18:29, 34; Deut. 32:30.

The New Testament refines this super-heroism as laying healing hands on the sick, dispensing love's provision on every level to the needy, casting out devils, ministering miracles to the masses, feeding the hungry, valiantly visiting those in affliction--- widows, orphans and prisoners. These are the battlefields for the New Testament super-hero. In the heart of every believer there is a longing for the power of this supernatural warrior.

All creation groans for this manifestation of the champion sons of God. Rom. 8:19-22. Culture itself cries out for gladiators of glory. From comic books to martial arts movies; from the awesome feats of the Olympic Games to the acrobatic choreography of professional wrestling; from the dragon-slaying knights of King Arthur's Round Table to the universe-saving abilities of the Jedi Knights of the Star Wars movies and books; from the courage shown in the Greek epics of Homer to the exploits of the mighty Beowulf and Gilgamesh: all of these images reflect the hunger in every man's heart for the super-hero.

We don't need to be embarrassed about this hunger for the heroic, but instead see it as an archetype which is deeply imbedded in all of our consciousnesses, just waiting to be fulfilled from the original source. Jesus IS the heroic light which lights every man that comes into the world.

Am I ashamed to call Jesus super-heroic? No, but I am ashamed NOT to.

QUESTION 68: WHAT ABOUT THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS?

"And -- a certain man was rich, and was clothed in purple and fine linen, making merry sumptuously every day, and there was a certain poor man, by name Lazarus, who was laid at his porch, full of sores, and desiring to be filled from the crumbs that are falling from the table of the rich man; yea, also the dogs, coming, were licking his sores.

'And it came to pass, that the poor man died, and that he was carried away by the messengers to the bosom of Abraham -- and the rich man also died, and was buried; and in the hades having lifted up his eyes, being in torments, he doth see Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, and having cried, he said, Father Abraham, deal kindly with me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and may cool my tongue, because I am distressed in this flame.

'And Abraham said, Child, remember that thou did receive -- thou -- thy good things in thy life, and Lazarus in like manner the evil things, and now he is comforted, and thou art distressed; and besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that they who are willing to go over from hence unto you are not able, nor do they from thence to us pass through.

'And he said, I pray thee, then, father, that thou mayest send him to the house of my father, for I have five brothers, so that he may thoroughly testify to them, that they also may not come to this place of torment.

'Abraham saith to him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them; and he said, No, father Abraham, but if any one from the dead may go unto them, they will reform. And he said to him, If Moses and the prophets they do not hear, neither if one may rise out of the dead will they be persuaded.' " Luke 16:19-31.

This story is often cited by "fire and brimstone" Christians as evidence that God will send all unbelievers to eternal conscious torment. From this parable, God's character as a eternal torturer has been set in Calvinistic concrete. But there is a problem with this interpretation.

First, there is no clear consensus as to what the primary purpose is of this story. Some believe it to be a literal and historical account of two actual men's journey into the afterlife. Others consider it a fictional parable making a major "non-Hell" related point, namely exposing Israel's religious pride and hypocrisy. Still others believe that Jesus was using a well known Jewish myth of the day to make a broad satirical point to the Pharisees and/or Sadducees.

Most Christians consider that this is a parable, and thus is non-historical. Parables are frequently allegorical, and thus have symbolic meanings which are non-literal and are referring to other dynamics. Well known theologians Tom Wright and Joachim Jeremias both treat it as a "parable". The story has much in common with other well known parables, both in language and content such as the reversal of fortunes, the use of antithesis, and the concern for the poor.

John Lightfoot (1602 – 1675) treated the parable as a parody of Pharisee belief concerning the Bosom of Abraham. There is a clear connection between Abraham saying the rich man's family would not believe EVEN IF Lazarus was raised from the dead to warn them AND the Jewish priests' failure to believe in the resurrection of Christ. "Any one may see, how Christ points at the infidelity of the Jews, even after that himself shall have risen again. From whence it is easy to judge what was the design and intention of this parable" (From the Talmud and Hebraica, Volume 3).

E. W. Bullinger in the Companion Bible cited Lightfoot's comment above, but also expanded it to include a further coincidence, the priests lack of belief in the resurrection of the historical Lazarus (John 12:10). Additionally, Bullinger considered that the lack of specific reference by Luke to the story as being a "parable" was because it contains a parody of the then well known Jewish myth of "Abraham's Bosom." Jesus then, under this reading, was using one of their own extra-Biblical myths to expose their own hypocrisy: "It is not called a parable because it cites a notable example of the Pharisee's tradition which had been brought from Babylon. See many other examples in Lightfoot vol.xii. pp.159-68" (Companion Bible, p.1488).

"We have in fact one of the cases where the background to the teaching is more probably found in non-biblical sources." —I. Howard Marshall, The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke, p. 634 Some scholars, such as G. B. Caird, Joachim Jeremias, I. Howard Marshall, and Hugo Gressmann, suggest the

basic storyline of The Rich Man and Lazarus was derived from Jewish stories that had developed from an Egyptian folk tale about Si-Osiris.

Martin Luther, by contrast, believed this story was a parable of the conscience. He taught that the parable was about about rich and poor in this life and the details of the afterlife were not to be taken literally: "Therefore we conclude that the bosom of Abraham signifies nothing else than the Word of God,.... the hell here mentioned cannot be the true hell that will begin on the day of judgment. For the corpse of the rich man is without doubt not in hell, but buried in the earth; it must however be a place where the soul can be and has no peace, and it cannot be corporeal. Therefore it seems to me, this hell is the conscience, which is without faith and without the Word of God, in which the soul is buried and held until the day of judgment, when they are cast down body and soul into the true and real hell." (Church Postil 1522-23)

Still another alternative explanation of the parable is a satirical parable against the Sadducees. One writer to identify the Sadducees as the target was Johann Nepomuk Sepp. The arguments in favour of identification of the Rich Man as the Sadducees are (1) the wearing of purple and fine linen, priestly dress, (2) the reference to "five brothers in my father's house" as an allusion to Caiaphas' father-in-law Annas, and his five sons who also served as high priests according to Josephus, (3) Abraham's statement in the parable that they would not believe even if he raised Lazarus, and THEN the fulfillment that when Jesus did in fact raise an actual man named Lazarus of Bethany. The Sadducees not only did not believe, but attempted to have Lazarus killed again: "So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well" (John 12:10). This last interpretation had wide circulation in France during the 1860-'90s as a result of having been included in the notes of the pictorial Bible of Abbé Drioux.

Simon Perry has argued that the Lazarus of the parable (an abbreviated transcript of 'Eleazer') refers to Eleazer of Damascus, Abraham's servant. In Genesis 15 - a foundational covenant text familiar to any 1st century Jew - God says to Abraham "this man will not be your heir" (Gen 15:4). Perry argues that this is why Lazarus is outside the gates of Abraham's perceived descendent. By inviting Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, Jesus is redefining the nature of the covenant. It also explains why the rich man assumes Lazarus is Abraham's servant.

However, my favorite interpretation of this passage is below:

"In the parable, Christ is confronting the religious leaders' bad theology. They were lovers of money (Luke 16:14). They believed that being rich and healthy was a sign that God was on your side. If you were poor and sick then God was not with you. In the parable, the rich man, whom all the Pharisees thought was the best Jew with great rewards waiting for him in heaven, found himself in torment in Hell. The poor sick man, who was, in the mind of the Pharisees, a bad Jew, was ushered by the angels to Abraham's 'side' or 'bosom.'

The idea is not ontological (dealing with a physical place), but relational. To be at one's side or bosom represented the closest place of fellowship one could have with another. The one who the Pharisees believed was not a good child of Abraham winds up at the closest place of fellowship that there is—Abraham's bosom. Christ was being rhetorical. The rich man is unnamed and forgotten forever. Lazarus' name means 'God helps.' The rich man dies and is buried. The poor man dies and is carried by the angels. The rich man goes to hell, 'far away' from Abraham (Luke 16:23). The poor man goes to Abraham's side, in heaven." C Michael Patton, The Myth of "Abraham's Bosom."

Thus, this parable is not about Hell. It is about hypocrisy. It is about the poor in spirit thriving in the afterlife while the prideful wither. It is about the first being last and the last being first. Jesus adopted a well known myth used by the hypocrites in order to expose them in their own emotional language. Jesus, as Shakespeare said, spiritually "hoisted them with their own petard." In other words, Jesus invaded their own false mythology and blew it up by recasting them as the villains in the story.

That "Abraham's Bosom" is mythological, non-Biblical and non-historical is pretty obvious. Where else in the Bible is there any warrant for saying that heaven is "Abraham's bosom?" If heaven is "Abraham's bosom," then what happened to the righteous departed who died in the ages before Abraham? What about Abel, Seth, Enoch and Noah? Where did they go? Could "Abraham's Bosom" preexist Abraham himself? Very doubtful.

Add to the mix that this parable predates the Cross, predates Jesus' descent into Hell, predates Jesus' subsequent rescue of Hell's lost souls when He led "captivity captive" as described in Ephesians 4:8-10, and, finally, that Lazarus displays no element of saving faith or the rich man the absence of saving faith----- then this story theologically splinters as we try to use it to form a theology of eternal conscious torment at the hand of God.

Surely, the sole fact of being rich does not doom one to eternal misery, just as the sole fact of poverty does not commend one to eternal joy. No, there is another dynamic the Lord wants us to see in this parable. Time and time again in the parables preceding this one, Jesus is exposing the religious leadership as being prideful, hypocritical and unbelieving in the resurrection power of God. Those rich in the ways of the world are often poor in the ways of God. That is the point of the parable.

QUESTION 69: HOW DO WE PUT ON THE MIND OF CHRIST? USE "ABDUCTIVE REASONING!"

"Neither science nor rationality are universal measures of excellence. They are particular traditions, unaware of their historical grounding." ~~Paul Feyerabend

"You are not thinking. You are merely being logical." ~~Neils Bohr

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift." ~~Bob Samples, on summarizing Albert Einstein's philosophy of intuition and imagination in Samples' book, THE METAPHORIC MIND

"I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking." ~~Albert Einstein

"An absolute can only be given in an intuition, while all the rest has to do with analysis....Some other faculty than the intellect is necessary for the apprehension of reality."
~~Henri Bergson

"Science may be described as the art of systematic oversimplification."
~~ Karl Popper

We are addicted to rules. We snort them. We inject them. We drink them. We eat them.

Here are two ways the addiction works--- INDUCTIVE reasoning and DEDUCTIVE reasoning. We are taught to live with these two ways of thinking as our guide. But at their root, both are just rules-based thinking.

Deductive thinking comes from applying ALREADY established rules to the specific situation at hand. Inductive reasoning takes the situation at hand and tries to MAKE a general rule based on it. Either way, we are junkies trying to get mentally high on a "rule fix."

I am not saying these ways of thinking don't yield some benefit in the natural sciences. But, I am saying they yield little to no benefit in the supernatural realm of renewed spiritual thinking. And, in fact, these two thinking techniques frequently cause great harm by keeping us chained in low-functioning levels of natural understanding.

Remember, the wisdom from below is "natural, earthly and demonic." James 3:15. Avoid it all costs!

The word 'repent' (metanoia) literally means "beyond the mind." Perhaps we can relate to this by a more familiar line when people say - "Get out of your head." It's the idea of processing reality in and through a different source or dimension other than just the intellect. It doesn't mean not using your mind but more in the sense of using your mind in a different way-- a way that welcomes the input of the often illogical "heart" and the frequently irrational "gut."

The result is that imagination, intuition and epiphany now join the team of the mind. Without these other vibrant inputs, the rational mind, left to itself, defaults to rules, rules and more rules. It either automatically applies rigid rules, or automatically seeks to discover rigid rules. Either way, rigid rationality rules us with rules.

Are you tired of deductive reasoning, which legalistically applies established rules to explain your specific life observations?

Are you also tired of inductive reasoning, which endlessly strives to form new rules based on your specific life observations?

If so, then try abductive reasoning, which essentially is reasoning by enlightened epiphany, educated inkling, spontaneous speculation, intuitive insight, and inspired improvisation. It simply doesn't think in terms of applying or forming rigid rules.

Rather, abductive reasoning uses passion-infused gut-level discernment to deftly "surf" over stale, dry and legalistic thinking. It's thinking outside the box, above the literal, beneath the surface and inside the heart of the matter. It's the release of the creative juices within that open our inner-floodgates of revelation, inspiration and transcendent wisdom.

Albert Einstein was deeply abductive in the way he creatively used his thought experiments. He had no data or empirical studies to reason a conclusion. Rather, he intuited the truth throughout the use of his imagination. He famously said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."

Other great thinkers in various fields of endeavor who frequently modeled abductive reasoning were Plato, Carl Jung, William Blake, Leonardo Da Vinci, George Washington Carver and Bruce Lee.

The Christians who think abductively are usually coined mystics. Personally, I believe abductive reason is the most blessed and Holy Spirit-friendly mindset. Give it a try. Leave your rule-applying and rule-making addictions at the door. Instead, gear up your gut, salivate your imagination, and intuit away! You might be shocked at how much the Holy Spirit renews your mind with powerfully transformative thought.

Nobody was more abductive in His thinking than Jesus. Parables, epiphanies, metaphors, and allegories abound in the Bible waiting to be passionately pursued, intuitively grasped and imaginatively understood. Shall we explore this new way of thinking together?

QUESTION 70: WHAT THE MOVIE "PINOCCHIO" TEACHES US ABOUT FREEWILL

The animated film "Pinocchio" is perhaps the greatest parable on the subject of freewill ever written. Pinocchio is a lifeless wooden puppet created by Gepetto, the kind but lonely toymaker. Gepetto deeply loves the puppet and prays one night that it would turn into a "real boy." His prayer is answered the following morning, at least partially.

Pinocchio comes to life, but he is still wooden. For him to become a "real boy," a flesh and blood boy, he has to learn and develop virtue. Pinocchio, though innocent, is also impulsive and careless and frequently acts without the guidance of his conscience, which is symbolized in the story by Jiminy Cricket. While his conscience sleeps, Pinocchio allows himself to be misled by a deceptive fox named Foulfellow. By appealing to his ego to become a famous actor, Foulfellow lures Pinocchio to be captured and enslaved by the evil puppet master Stromboli, who basically uses him as a freak show exhibit. His freedom didn't last long at all once he started neglecting his conscience. What started as freedom ended as bondage. The misuse of freedom always ends in bondage.

Now, locked in Stromboli's cage, Pinocchio whistles for his conscience, who quickly returns to him, but Jiminy is not strong enough to unlock the cage. An angelic presence then appears and questions Pinocchio about his neglectful behavior. Pinocchio, not wanting to admit he was wrong, then tells a series of lies, his nose growing longer and longer with each one. The angel then frees Pinocchio, heals his nose, and warns him to always be led by his conscience if he wants to become a "real boy."

On the way home, Pinocchio again meets the fox Foulfellow, who misleads him again. Foulfellow lures Pinocchio to Pleasure Island, a place where boys can be naughty and self-willed to their hearts' content. However, Foulfellow fails to tell Pinocchio the terrible cost. Once there, the boys gradually mutate into donkeys, the ultimate fate of all those driven by self-will.

Pinocchio does manage to escape, but he now sported two donkey ears dangling from his head from where the mutation had already begun. He returns home, only to find Gepetto gone. Pinocchio discovers Gepetto, who had gone looking for him, was trapped in the belly of an evil whale named Monstro. Pinocchio rescues Gepetto by lighting a fire from within the whale, who then sneezes them out. Pinocchio then sacrifices his life to save Gepetto from drowning.

With Gepetto devastated and holding Pinocchio's corpse gently in his arms, the angel reappears and resurrects Pinocchio as a "real boy," happily declaring that since Pinocchio had discovered the virtue of sacrificial love, he was now ready to be the true and living son of Gepetto. And Jiminy Cricket gets rewarded with a gold badge for being a faithful conscience.

Wow! Do you see all the parallels? We could substitute "Adam" for "Pinocchio," and everything would be a perfect fit. God created Adam from the earth, not as a lifeless puppet with strings of control which only God sovereignly and capriciously pulls. That is not love. Love doesn't seek to create meticulously controlled puppets, but rather righteously liberated sons. "Real boys," in other words. And, when I use the word "Adam," I am not just referring to just the original man named Adam, but to all mankind since the beginning of time. We are all "Adams," individually and corporately.

Adam was originally created free, but not yet mature and perfected. While he was not a mere puppet on a string, nor was he yet a fully developed son of God. He had some growing to do by using his conscience to discover, discern and develop the ultimate virtue of sacrificial love. This priceless quality of agape can never be instantaneously imparted, only taught, cultivated and gradually harvested. Adam needed this master virtue to take dominion of the earth in the power of love. But Adam, by ignoring and neglecting his Spirit-quickenened conscience, allowed himself to be misled by hissing Serpents, prideful impulses and sinful attitudes.

When caught in his sin, Adam likewise covered up his guilt by blaming others. He now had far to go to learn the master virtue of agape. With each lie he told God, himself, and others, his nose grew. In fact, his nose grew the length of the Tower of Babel. His ears became the hardened ears of a jackass, too hardened and obstinate to hear truth in the innermost parts.

Adam became so prideful that he became easily mesmerized by the empty promises of any ego-stroking manipulator like the fox Foulfellow. He ultimately became enslaved by the evil Stromboli-like puppeteer named Satan, who convinced Adam he was free and prosperous under his reign, but who in reality kept Adam caged and chained to do his bidding.

Now, the Lord sent angels to free Adam from his various predicaments. He sent cautions and prophecies to exhort Adam to continue to covet and seek the virtue of sacrificial love. Adam would listen briefly, his nose temporarily returned to normal size by the Lord's healing hand, but then Adam would soon start neglecting his conscience again. Adam always had one eye stuck on Pleasure Island, one ear open to Foulfellow's seductive whispers, and one impulse ready to neglectfully jump into action without and ahead of his conscience's guidance.

But, within Adamic mankind, there was to come an eventual seed, a holy impulse, an anointed logos, a spark of the master virtue known as agape love, the love that sacrifices all for the sake of rescue. That seed was Jesus. That impulse was Jesus. That Logos was Jesus.

This impulse, for the first time in the history of humanity, exploded with flawless, fearless, and ferocious love. The seed was being gradually cultivated in the Old Testament womb of Israel. But now, that seed was being birthed and harvested. This

seed laid its life down for all other Adams, even going into the belly of Hell, into Monstro's gut, to lead out all who were trapped there.

But, tragically, it seemed that Jesus, that holy impulse of divine love which saved us all, had died in the wake of His sacrifice. But, because of the love of the Father, Jesus as the second Adam came back to life as a "real boy," a "glorified son," the "resurrected son of God." And now, Jesus has poured out that same master virtue in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. Jesus personifies the only thing we will ever need for all eternity ---- pure and powerful agape, all over us, all through us, all between us, and all for us!

But, Adam, like Pinocchio, would never have discovered love if he remained nothing more than a stringed puppet-- never. Agape has no strings of control. But, on the other hand, the essence of love CANNOT just cannot be instantaneously imparted and fully received. Freedom is the only soil that can cultivate and gradually harvest that love unto fruition.

Freedom and love are complementary dynamics. Just as the existence of water requires both the elements of hydrogen and oxygen, so too does being a "real son of God" require the elements of love and freedom. Pinocchio had enough freedom given to him to discover and grow into a "real son of God." And so do we.

Just remember, God doesn't control your strings, but He does quicken your conscience. In fact, in reality, Jesus has given you HIS OWN GOLD-BADGED CONSCIENCE TO LIVE INSIDE YOU AS YOUR GUIDE. And not only this, Jesus also opens all your cages, destroys all your chains, heals your hardened donkey ears, restores the nose of your integrity, and resurrects you in the power of His love. That is quite a benefit package!

So, don't ever think of God as a puppet master again. That dishonors His character and nature. He is a generous and loving Father, not an austere and domineering control freak. He only and always creates "real boys" in the making by using BOTH love and freedom. Amen!

