

Light On the Dark Side Of God

CONDENSED



By M. M. Campbell

Light On the Dark Side Of God

CONDENSED



M. M.Campbell
Third Edition

©1989-2020 MC
All Rights Reserved

Available at:
<http://www.The-Character-of-God.com>

ISBN 978-1-7324842-2-1

Edited by Floyd Phillips
Supplemental Content by Kevin Straub
Cover Design by Ed Guthro
Cover Art by Darrel Tank

Printed In USA

Biblical references are to *The Amplified Bible* (Amplified), copyright ©1967 by the Zondervan Corporation and The Lockman Foundation. *Complete Jewish Bible* (CJB), copyright © 1998 by David H. Stern, published by Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., PO Box 615, Clarksville, Maryland 21029. *The Jerusalem Bible* (JB), copyright © 1971 by Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York; *The King James Version* (KJV); *The New American Standard Version* (NAS), copyright © by Lockman Foundation, *The New International Version* (NIV), copyright © by the International Bible Society; *The New King James Version* (NKJV), copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee; *The New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee; *The Revised Standard Version* (RSV), copyright ©1946, 1952, 1971 by under International and Pan-American convention; published in Cleveland by William Collins and World Publishing Co., Inc. *Young's Literal Translation* (YLT), Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. *World English Bible* based on *American Standard Version*, translated by Rainbow Missions, Inc. without copyright.

Dedicated To
God's Invisible Church on Earth

*“The anger of the Lord will not turn back
until He has executed and performed
the thoughts of His heart.
In the latter days you will understand
it perfectly.”(Jeremiah 23:20; 30:23, 24)*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	GOD’S PERFECT PORTRAIT	1
Chapter 2	HOW THE BIBLE EXPLAINS ITSELF	23
Chapter 3	THE JOB SYNDROME	39
Chapter 4	WHO TORCHED SODOM AND GOMORRAH?	51
Chapter 5	THOSE “HOLY” HEBREW WARS.	58
Chapter 6	WHAT REALLY CAUSED NOAH’S FLOOD?	75
Chapter 7	THE EVERLASTING BURNING	83
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	109

1

God's Perfect Portrait

“God is light, and in Him

is no darkness at all.” (1John 1:5, KJV)

You say God doesn't have a dark side? Really? What about Noah's flood? What about Sodom and Gomorrah? What about eternally burning hell? Drowning humans? Burning them alive? Burning them alive *forever*? Some would say this picture of God is very dark. God seems to be saying, “Obey me or I'll burn you—forever”? Doesn't this contradict everything that God claims to be—merciful and gracious, patient, and abounding in goodness and truth—including His commitment to free will? Does this not throw the entire subject into confusion?

The God of Freedom

God's enormous respect for our freedom, little discussed in religion, is nonetheless paramount to understanding and appreciating the truth about

His character. Throughout these pages you will read much about freedom—our freedom to choose His ways or ours; our freedom to turn away from Him, to spurn His love and demand that He exit our personal space. This may at first seem strange given how many view God's sovereignty as this: He always gets His way no matter what. But it is inextricably tied to love, for without each person having freedom to reject God without fear, it would be impossible to love Him from true appreciation for that true character.

This is where we part ways with most of the religions of the world. Insisting that God fiercely protects the freedom of even His worst enemies is scandalous and blasphemous to many people. But this is because they have no appreciation for true freedom or consider the central role it plays in providing us capacity to return His love.

God's love first led Him freely to give us His Son to provide a ransom for us when we were lost and dead in trespasses and sins and there was no other hope for us. But more relevant to the present topic, God also provided Him for a role model of His and His Father's character in order that we might pattern our characters after His own. Jesus said, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." ¹

God, As Jesus Revealed Him

Jesus revealed a creative, redemptive, healing God, who never brought needless pain to a sensitive soul. Even when in love He rebuked the leaders of His day, we can almost hear the tears in His voice as He uttered His scathing words, which rather than being destructive, were designed to redeem.

Startled by His disciples' suggestion that He call down fire upon the Samaritans who had slighted Him, He responded, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of."² What does this tell us about God the Father? Would the fact that God performed such an act alter its "spirit"? Or is the

evil nature of such an act eternally carved in granite? This event in our Lord's life suggests the latter. Burning humans alive in the name of religion is always and only the work of an evil spirit; Jesus insists it is not something our loving heavenly Father would do.

Jesus healed the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, gently rebuking Peter who had severed it while trying to cut off his head, saying, "Put your sword in its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."³ "Love your enemies," He said. "[B]less those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."⁴ Why? "*That you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*"⁵

¹ John 8:19, NKJV.

² Luke 9:55, NASV.

³ Matthew 26:52, NKJV; Revelation 13:10.

⁴ Matthew 5:44, NKJV.

⁵ Matthew 5:45, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

God the Father, as Jesus consistently presents Him, does not behave toward His enemies as other portions of Scripture seem to say. In the face of such apparent contradictions, we hear God saying, "My child, you must go deeper in the word."

The Man, Christ Jesus

Jesus was a man's man who walked great distances on the dusty roads of ancient Palestine, traveling stretches for which people today are awarded prizes. He taught vast multitudes, healing the sick, rebuking demons, standing his ground fearlessly before authority figures, telling them things they didn't want to hear, rising early while others slept to spend time with His Father. If ever one were qualified to take command of

armies, it was He. Yet He refused the sword of earthly conquest held out to Him and chose instead the path to Calvary.

An Eye For An Eye?

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’” but Jesus said. “I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”⁶ Today people of depth and moral substance ponder this Man with wonder. From where did He acquire His intimate familiarity with the fine points of greatness? He carried the word of God built into His inner life. “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”⁷ Jesus—so sound as a human, so full of insight and peace and power—never descended to self-serving in His daily human interactions. He rose above those common instincts and, in benevolence and warmth toward all, always continued to do right.

Some have suggested that Jesus came the first time to show the kindly side of God, but when He returns in glory He will then demonstrate His vengeance. However, nothing in the gospel record supports that view which rests on a human version of justice that is very different from how the Bible defines it. Scripture says Jesus is the same “yesterday, today and

⁶Matthew 5:38-42, NKJV.

⁷ Proverbs 16:32, NKJV.

forever” and that He doesn’t change.⁸ God cannot and will not require humans to adhere to a standard He rejects for Himself. His

commandments form not only the foundation of His government in heaven and on earth; they actually depict His character in words⁹ as a novelist draws the inner life of characters with the pen. The principle which says “You shall not kill,” which Jesus expanded to mean You shall not hate or damage in any way, originates in the heart of His Father God.

Reviewing the life of our Lord from Bethlehem to the Mount of Olives, from which He ascended to return to heaven, we find no evidence of any inclination to force on others allegiance to Himself, little we could interpret as destructive. “[T]he Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”¹⁰ In fact, there was nothing in His life to correspond to a presumed destructive side of God. Yet the life of Jesus offers insights into God’s ultimate plans for dealing with the terrible problem of sin.

Far more relevant than we have realized was a behavior of His, little commented on up to now. When spurned or subjected to disrespect, when He conversely longed for fellowship and the opportunity to teach, He deferred to those who rejected Him and simply walked away. He accepted that His "grace in the face of rejection will be a witness to them"¹¹ and kindly left the place where He was not wanted.

The God Who Goes Away

Throughout Jesus life there were occasions when He longed to bless and benefit the people, but they didn't want His blessings. Too shallow to understand the depth of His love, they often turned Him away. What did Jesus do at such times? Was He wrathful? Did His white hot anger flash out to teach them a lesson? Remember, He had access to power to respond in any way He wanted—yes, with anger and violence if He chose. But what did He do when people rejected Him? His little-noticed response contains great lessons for us today, because in everything He did He revealed the Father.

⁸ Hebrews 13:8, NKJV; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17.

⁹ See Psalm 119: 172; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16.

¹⁰ Luke 9:56, NKJV.

¹¹ Mark 6:11, TR.

The Crisis in Nazareth

The first time we're told of was in Nazareth, His home town. According to Luke, after His baptism the Holy Spirit guided Him into the wilderness of temptation. Returning from that experience to where He was best known, He entered Nazareth where He was raised. His fame spread "through all the surrounding district." He enjoyed the praises of all as He taught in their synagogues.¹² "[A]s was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read,"¹³ says Scripture. Everything went well for awhile.

But something He said filled them with sudden rage. When He referred to the many times the Lord favored the gentiles over the Jews, they ignored the fact that often the Jews did not want His blessings. Their national prejudice was ignited at the reminder of God's favoring the very ones whom they despised, so much so that they "drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill . . . in order to throw Him down the cliff."¹⁴

Do you think He wanted to leave His family and friends, those who had nurtured and encouraged Him throughout His growing years? Did He not have other things to share with them, rich layers of grace and truth to impart? Yet Scripture says, "[P]assing through their midst, He went His way," came to Capernaum, and settled there. So angry were they at His giving recognition to gentiles that they wanted to murder Him, so he moved to another city to preserve His life.¹⁵

He didn't want to leave, but He left anyway, because He always obeyed the guidance of God's Spirit in His life. And in everything He did He reflected the Father.

The Madmen of Gadara

Another event in the life of Jesus occurred following a wind-swept crossing of the Sea of Galilee. When they arrived on the shores of Gadara, one or two demon-possessed madmen¹⁶ burst out of the tombs and rushed them. The disciples instantly scattered in every direction. But not Jesus. He calmly stayed, and when the disciples finally returned they discovered

¹² Luke 4:15, NAS.

¹³ Luke 4:16, NAS.

¹⁴ Luke 4:29, NAS.

¹⁵ Luke 4:31, 32, NAS; Matthew 4:13-16, NAS.

¹⁶ Matthew says two, but Mark says one.

the former madmen sitting quietly, clothed, and in their right mind. Jesus had healed them. This profoundly affected the surrounding populous, who alternated between fear and awe as they considered what had just happened to these men.

However, one event occurred in connection with their deliverance that provoked great feelings of resentment related to this healing. The demons had requested to be allowed to enter a herd of swine feeding nearby and Jesus allowed it, whereupon the swine, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep embankment and drowned in the sea.

The herdsmen were filled with consternation and the owners were most likely livid. Perhaps care for the swine included financial responsibility as well; we're not told. But we do know that the herdsmen ran into the city reporting on what had just happened and brought everyone back with them.

"And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region."¹⁷ Jesus didn't want to leave; He had come to this place for a reason. Was it that He had things to teach them, things they needed to know? Did He want to rest from the unceasing labor that constantly wore on Him? We can only surmise. Nevertheless, "[g]etting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea"¹⁸ and returned to the place from which He had just come.

We seldom think of other options Jesus had at such times. Why didn't He rise up in protest, telling the populous that they had no business herding swine anyway, and putting the people in their place? Wasn't eating swine's flesh forbidden by Leviticus 11:7? He could have gotten into a theological debate over what they were presumably doing and left His opponents in emotional shambles. But no. He didn't argue. He didn't raise His voice. With His disciples He simply got into the boat He had come in and returned back across the sea. In this action we do well to remember that He depicted not only His own character but that of His Father as well. "He will not shout, nor raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street."¹⁹

¹⁷ Matthew 8:34, NAS.

¹⁸ Matthew 9:1, NAS.

¹⁹ Isaiah 42:2 WEB.

Samaritan Rejection

Only Jesus knew that this would be His last trip to Jerusalem. On this journey He sent some messengers before the main company to find suitable lodging and to make other appropriate arrangements for their stay. The messengers went ahead into a city of Samaria, maybe even where Jesus had once met a woman at a well, and at her word the entire

community had come out to hear Him speak. At that time they had believed Him to be the Messiah and received Him as such. Maybe He anticipated other similar speaking opportunities this time. One may imagine that the messengers didn't expect to encounter trouble in Samaria.

But Jesus' ultimate destination was Jerusalem. Upon learning of this, the animosity existing between Samaria and Jerusalem, dating back to the days of Nehemiah, ignited the resentment of the Samaritans. It was common for the people of these cities to want nothing to do with each other, certainly not to offer lodging to individuals passing through on their way to the other city. So the messengers were flatly denied the expected hospitality for Jesus and His disciples.

Notice Jesus' response to this direct insult. When James and John informed Him of their rudeness, they concluded with an offer posed as a question. "[D]o you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"²⁰

This outcome was what they had expected and they were eager to utilize the supernatural powers Jesus had given them previously on their missionary ventures to carry out what they believed was God's will against His enemies. Yet if you have come to know Jesus well, you can imagine the pained look that must have come over His face. No. We won't be doing anything of the sort. He did not, would not, respond in such a way. When faced with prejudice and rejection of a humble request for a simple kindness, He did not reflect the same spirit back to them. He may have hoped for one last chance to teach the people, and everything in Him may have longed to visit where He had before been received with such love. Yet Scripture says He merely moved on to another village. No wrath, resentment, or indignation here as might have been our response. He never forced His way in anywhere. Always He met rejection with the greatest

²⁰ Luke 9:54, NASV.

courtesy. What can we learn of the Father's character in these stories of Jesus' kind response to rejection? He merely, reluctantly, withdrew and went somewhere else.

Yes, there are times and situations in which God walks away. But it is *always* based on human choice and initiative.

Jesus Demonstrates the Anger of God

"He entered again into the synagogue, and there was a man there who had his hand withered. They watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse him. He said to the man who had his hand withered, 'Stand up.' He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to kill?' But they were silent. When he had looked around at them with *anger*, being *grieved at the hardening of their hearts*, he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored as healthy as the other. The Pharisees went out, and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him."²¹

When we consider how Jesus related to feelings of anger, we can see here how He modeled the way we should respond. When we look for examples of when Jesus might have gotten angry, we usually think of the times He cleared the temple, or possibly the time He cursed a fig tree. However, in none of these accounts is it recorded that He got angry. John says, "[H]e made a scourge [whip] of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables"²² Although we might envision Him exploding with rage on those occasions, Scripture doesn't report anything about anger during those events.

However, as the above text says, just before He healed a man's withered hand He looked around Him *angrily*. This provides an important clue that an examination of this event in Christ's life promises key insights on how He dealt with His own anger, both here and possibly at other times. Since the antithesis of anger is arguably joy, let us first take a closer look at joy to discover key insights about anger.

Studies of the human brain and how we experience emotions have led brain scientists to identify six major negative emotions people experience

²¹ Mark 3:1-6, WEB, emphasis supplied.

²² 2:15, NAS.

that can cause problems if one does not learn how to properly relate to and recover from them. The normal brain, according to these studies, is designed to reside in a condition they call 'joy.' This joy is not 'happiness' as we usually define it but rather the joy of being bonded with another mind and heart, particularly with someone who is glad to be with us.²³

This joy is not just an occasional emotion we might experience sporadically, but rather it involves living with a sense of knowing that someone genuinely wants to be with us. This is now known from studies to be the most basic and intense craving of the human brain. This desire for joy lies at the deepest levels of human subconsciousness and involves the bonding circuits that deeply connect us with another person.

So what does this have to do with anger and Jesus? It has a great deal to do with it, for living a life continually resting in the mindset of joy means you never lose sight of your true identity and thus can remember how to act like yourself no matter what other kind of emotion you may find yourself experiencing. Having someone who knows you well and loves you unconditionally provides a stability and perspective with an emotional anchor so that you can avoid acting out of character while experiencing the intensity of some negative emotion.

Because Jesus lived every moment of His human life on earth in constant fellowship with His Father, and because He anchored Himself securely in His Father's love every morning, He modeled for us how we

may avoid becoming overwhelmed by any negative emotion or experience that we may encounter. Jesus demonstrated how to act like our true selves no matter what circumstance we may experience. Therefore, by studying how Jesus acted in all kinds of situations and emotions, we can learn much about being faithful to our true identity while we experience negative emotions just as He experienced them.

Interestingly, the story in Mark 3:1-6 is the only one in Scripture specifically mentioning Jesus becoming angry. Thus this story serves as the model for us whenever we have to deal with the emotion of anger. Keep in mind that Jesus endured constant harassment and hounding, facing what we might call 'sting operations' intended to trap Him, discredit His ministry, and diminish His effectiveness. Jealous religious leaders felt threatened by Jesus' popularity and incensed over His teachings and

23 James G. Friesen, Ph.D. et. al. *The Life Model: Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You*. (East Peoria, IL: Shepherd's House, Inc., 2004) , pp. 61-68.

example, partly because He presented a loving God in sharp contrast with their dark teachings about Him. If this God of whom Jesus spoke came to be accepted by the world, the leaders saw that the common people would soon rebel against their corrupt system of power and control. The end result would be that the entire social structure might collapse if people took Jesus too seriously. The leaders were therefore becoming desperate to put an end to the growing, undermining influence of Jesus' teachings.

Jesus realized as He walked into the synagogue that this was another setup intended to discredit Him concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. The Jews (not God) had classified healing as an act of working, and since work was forbidden by God at any time on the Sabbath day, if they could catch Him healing someone on the Sabbath they could then publicly declare Him to be a lawbreaker and invalidate His claims to represent God with any authority. They also knew Jesus well enough to trust that His intense compassion would not allow Him to ignore a man with a withered

hand; therefore, they had arranged the whole setup with this purpose in mind.

Because Jesus always kept open His connection with His Father through the Spirit, He was not intimidated by this trap. "He looked around at them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts." Here we see that Jesus experienced an anger rooted in grief that the leaders' hearts were hardening as their opportunity for eternal life was slipping away. The connection He had with His Father prevented His anger from being about Himself, rooted in personal offense or self-centeredness. He did as the apostle Paul admonished, "Be angry, and yet do not sin,"²⁴ for feelings of anger are not sin when they are born of genuine righteous indignation aroused in defense of the Father's honor, so long as we also reflect the humble, caring Spirit of the Father. These are the kinds of things Jesus felt as He "looked around at them with anger."

A Key Question

At this point in the story we need to ask a key question. What would Jesus do if He had not been angry? What would He have done with any intense negative emotion like shame, fear, anger, or any other? How would He have acted out of His true identity had He not been feeling any negative emotion?

²⁴ Ephesians 4:26, NAS.

Could there be any other reasonable answer than that, if Jesus were not angry He most likely would heal this man's withered hand, Sabbath or no? So did Jesus act any differently while experiencing intense emotion than He would were He feeling normal? The answer is clear —He would have acted exactly the same with or without the negative emotion.

We can apply this important principle to any other event in Jesus' life in order to understand better why He acted the way He did under various circumstances. If Jesus had felt anger while cleansing the temple, would He have done any differently than if He had not been angry? The right thing to do is to always act out our true self, our true identity given us by God. Jesus' example educates us as to how we may respond in any situation and any emotion instead of forgetting who we are and acting out the natural instincts of our heart, the grievous character of the enemy, only to regret it later.

Remember that His Father through the Holy Spirit was the most significant Person in His life, always there, never surprised by the traps and setups with which Jesus constantly dealt. His Father's hand kept Him steady as He journeyed through life eventually to end at the cross. Negative emotions sometimes assailed Him, but sharing His Father's heart, He passed successfully through every challenge. In the way He related to anger He modeled how we may respond when we struggle with dark feelings. No matter how He felt, He did the right thing—the thing He had begun to do before the dark feelings came.

This then is how God deals with anger when He experiences those feelings in His heart. We have seen Jesus angry. What did He do? He kept on doing the right thing for the healing of His people. Terribly hurt or grieved, He nevertheless didn't change His purposes but rose above His feelings to accomplish the good He had planned. Visions of God brutalizing His children for any reason exist only in society's imagination.

Jesus Saves—and Heals

The original word translated "save" or "saved" is also many times translated into the word *healed*; these two words mean the same thing. Because many do not realize this, they imagine that "being saved" means going to heaven. But this is only a small part of what God wants to do in

our lives. His intention is to save us back to our original design to be reflectors of His great heart of love, living in such close intimacy with Him that everything we think, feel, and act out will reflect how He thinks, feels and acts. Thus He saves humans through oneness with Himself, through a deepening relationship of trust with Him. Our good works merely reveal that this union of intimacy exists. Through this relationship He transforms our thinking²⁵ and thus our disposition from what the world and our own sinful nature have taught us about our perceptions of reality and truth, enabling us to think and live in the totally different heavenly way, thus fitting our characters to enjoy eternal life with Him in His kingdom of love.

The Atonement

This model is God's ideal for us; He calls it the Atonement, or At-one-ment, the restoration of humans back into oneness with Himself. But what does this really mean? It is not what so many have come to assume about this word, that it is appeasing the anger of an offended God who contrived a way to have His own Son killed in order to make a way to forgive repentant sinners. Far from this dark picture of God, the truth about healing atonement or restoration through intimacy with His people, this at-one-ment, is actually found most clearly in our human experience through the example of a healthy marriage. Let's let Jesus explain.

The Pharisees came to test him and asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a certificate of divorce to be written, and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will join to his wife, and the two will become one flesh, so that they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."²⁶

The religious leaders in Jesus' day attempted to be meticulous law-

keepers. They believed that God was only interested in works, performance, outward behavior while completely ignoring their disposition, spirit, and attitudes toward those around them. Focusing only on the external and imagining that heavenly living had little to do with the

²⁵ Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

²⁶ Mark 10:2-9 WEB.

content of their heart, their relationships with other people reflected this, and their marriages suffered as a result. Because they saw Jesus' teachings and ideas about God as threatening their stiff, demanding, legal version of Him, they decided to challenge Jesus with a legal question about divorce. Thus they thought to discredit Him in front of the people by showing that He disrespected the laws of Moses which defined what it meant to be an obedient follower of God and a good Jew.

Sadly what they failed to recognize was that their external-only religion was worthless compared to what Jesus wanted to give them. Jesus came to this earth to reveal the immense love of a gentle, compassionate Father, not a demanding One, waiting to punish every infraction of His strict demands, as religion tends to portray Him. The God Jesus came to reveal was far more interested in cultivating relationships than in studying performance. The answer Jesus gave in this exchange about divorce reveals God's desire to have His children grow up to become capable of entering into such an intimacy with Him that they can become a bride for His Son. He wants children who understand Him and can enjoy all the love and respect and joy that is possible in a relationship like that of a close marriage bond.

The religious leaders had in mind a completely different paradigm for a correct relationship to God. Jesus revealed to them their actual problem. It was not whether divorce could be considered legal in the eyes of God. It was the hardness of their own heart that led them to want a divorce from their wives in the first place. By referring these men back to the story of

creation, Jesus pointed to the original design, which was starkly different from what these religious men had imagined God had in mind. These leaders believed in a system of earning God's favor by trying to keep myriads of rules while ignoring the condition of their heart. Jesus was sent to this earth to announce that God's favor was already there, simply waiting for us to believe in it and embrace it.²⁷

In the Garden of Eden

What do we find in the origins to which Jesus referred that can tell us what God had in mind for His original design and to what He intends to restore us if we will only let Him? He said, "Let us make man in our

²⁷ Luke 2:13-14; 4:18-19.

image, after our likeness...." "God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them."²⁸

This is what Jesus quoted in answer to the men who were looking for excuses to divorce their wives in order to acquire one more to their liking. God's original design as created was two uniquely complementary human beings reflecting His own heart of love that had the potential and natural desire to draw closer to each other in intimacy until it could be said that they were no longer two but one. Jesus explains this in order that we might grasp God's purpose for our existence as well as for marriage. But more importantly by far, He portrayed marriage as an active parable revealing to us the far greater purpose God has for us. God intended for humanity to ultimately enter into something like a "marriage" experience with Deity to the point that they could be His bride in a state of At-onement. "For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will join to his wife, and the two will become one flesh, so that they are no longer two, but one flesh."²⁹

If this sounds strange or almost scandalous, consider that Paul picks up on this same theme in Ephesians when discussing relationships between

husbands and wives, a passage also largely misunderstood, again because our own hearts are still hard today. After trying to explain how husbands and wives should interact, respect, and love each other mutually, he concludes his discussion by doing what Jesus did—referring us back to God's original design at creation.

"Even so husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord also does the assembly; because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones. For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife. The two will become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and of the assembly."³⁰

"In Him"

A vital component of this heavenly marriage and God's design to heal us and bring us back to His original plan involves the theme "in Him" or "in

²⁸ Genesis 1:26-27 WEB.

²⁹ Mark 10: 7, 8, WEB.

³⁰ Ephesians 5:28-32 WEB.

Christ." He says it is a "mystery" which He presents in symbols in a tireless effort to engage our minds and trigger our understanding. Sadly, in most churches today this theme is scarcely noticed and rarely mentioned, even though Scripture presents it as a prominent Biblical topic. Whereas this theme should be number one and studied by all, it hardly registers a blip on the churches' radar.

Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."³¹ Here He equates His flesh

with bread, yet *living* bread. What do we do with bread? We eat it and it nourishes us, literally becoming our own body. That's the purpose for bread. Clearly in these words He must mean that we are to symbolically "eat" His flesh; but living bread is alive, sentient. This bread that our Lord offers us has consciousness; it is a Person. How do we eat a conscious Being in order to complete the marriage metaphor? How can He literally become a part of us, acquire a place deep within us?

"He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."³² Eat His flesh? Drink His blood? We cannot imagine it! Jesus soon made clear³³ that His flesh and blood symbolize *His words*. Yet, still, what powerful imagery to explain returning to God's original design and making us eligible to live forever. The experience He describes will make us immortal beings! As ingested food goes into the body to sustain and empower it, so too does His word ingested into the mind create the reality of mutual abiding.

Just before leaving our world to return to the Father, this marriage relationship was uppermost in His mind. He said, "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. . . . abide in My love."³⁴

God assures us that each of us may have this close, intimate relationship with Deity; by studying His character His ways become reproduced in us. His word also heals us and brings us back to our original design to be reflectors of the truth about our loving Father.

³¹John 6:51, NAS.

³²John 6:56, NAS.

³³ v. 63, NAS.

³⁴ John 15:1-11, NAS

Still other Scriptural metaphors clearly symbolize this intimate relationship. Jesus told a story about a wedding to which one guest arrived

without a wedding garment. "Friend," said the host (representing the Father), how did you come in here without wedding clothes?"³⁵ The host had provided a festive garment for every guest, and to come to the wedding without it would be strange and unthinkable. That garment is alive, sentient, aware and saturated in love. And as the host, God the Father, places it over our shoulders, it actually soaks in all through us as it transforms us on the inside. This is the presence of the Holy Spirit which, if our eyes could be opened to spiritual realities, we could see actually living inside us. The marriage is complete. This symbol, found throughout Scripture, underscores the kind of intimacy which God longs to create with His people.

"Awake, awake. Clothe yourself in your strength, O Zion; Clothe yourself in your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city."³⁶ Everywhere you look in Scripture, God admonishes us to put on our beautiful garments. The True Witness counseled the Laodicean church that white garments represents one of her most vital needs. "I advise you to buy from Me . . . white garments so that you may cloth yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed."³⁷ "He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."³⁸

(Of course, not all references to garments translate into what we are talking about here. But they often do. It is a prominent theme throughout Scripture, sometimes symbolized as a "hedge" or a "shield.")

Notice the last reference that mentions obtaining "righteousness" through having this garment. The wedding garment, in fact, represents Christ living in us through the Holy Spirit, which is God's design for us. Many give lip service to this idea but too few understand what it really means by experience. Only the Holy Spirit has righteousness to give, to share; the only righteousness available to us in earth and sea and sky, the kind of righteousness which prepares us for heaven. Do you see that if we

³⁵ Matthew 22:12, NAS.

³⁶ Isaiah 52:1, NAS.

³⁷ Revelation 3:18, NAS.

³⁸ Isaiah 61:10, NAS.

want to enjoy heaven we must arrive there with the Holy Spirit living in our hearts? This is God's original design to which He is calling us back.

In this connection, have you noticed how often Scripture speaks of living "in Him"? You can almost open the Bible to any random page and find the author speaking of dwelling "in Christ." "To the praise of the glory of his grace, which He freely bestowed on us *in the beloved*."³⁹

God can bestow His grace on us while we live "in Him." Why would we not live in Him every moment, sensitive to His abiding presence? "For in him we live, and move, and have our being."⁴⁰ "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*."⁴¹

Immediately before His crucifixion and return to heaven, Jesus wanted to leave a treasured Gift for the blessing of those He would leave behind. "Do not let your heart be troubled," He comforted them. "[B]elieve in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you."⁴² "If you love me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."⁴³ Notice, the last thing He did before leaving this earth was to promise the Holy Spirit to His disciples to be His representative to them and to us.

His Message Today

And what is His message to us today? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."⁴⁴ Where is Jesus? He is standing outside the door, knocking for entry. He wants us to know Him as He knows us. He wants us to know His true character, how He relates to others and to be privy to His divine purposes. He wants to share an intimate, insider's relationship with us.

³⁹ Ephesians 1:6, NAS, emphasis supplied..

⁴⁰ Acts 17:28, KJV.

⁴¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21, NAS, emphasis supplied.

⁴² John 14:1, NAS.

⁴³ John 14: 15-17, NAS.

⁴⁴ Revelation 3:20, NAS.

This is the ultimate reason for existing as a human being, to enter into this stunning, privileged relationship of being so intimate with God that we become no longer separate as two entities but one flesh with Him. This is the true meaning of at-one-ment. This is why Jesus came in human flesh—in order that humans who live in that same flesh may become one flesh with God, just as a married man and woman can enjoy the ecstasy of a one-flesh experience with each other as their hearts are united in the kind of love God has toward them. Toward this end He constantly draws us and seeks to educate our thinking. Although His efforts have produced limited success through the centuries, He has never been without those who have responded to Him. And prophecy is clear that before His return He will finally have *a people* who have come to understand and who choose to enter into this level of intimacy with His heart, which has been His ideal from the beginning of creation.

The Role of Law

The Pharisees and Sadducees pushed Christ aside in their fixation on the law which could never heal them. The law is only provided to inform; it has no capacity to cleanse. The apostle James says that the law is like a mirror that can give us a true picture of our condition when we look into it,⁴⁵ but that is the limit of its power. The law is just a written outline of God's character in one dimension. We must look to Christ the living One to observe God's character lived out in everything it means to be human.

Cleansing, healing, saving us back to our original design—all these are outside the scope of the law's ability and purpose. These require the involvement of two—the human and the divine, us and the tangible living Christ who comes close to us, revealing His great compassion for us and lifting us to Himself.

And then we remember. Yes, the law is just His character written down, not the real essence of who He is. It is His essence, the reality of Him, that we want.

But doesn't that law have a function in all this? Yes. The written law then becomes a barrier, a fence if you will, to warn us when we are tempted as well as to reveal the true condition of our selfish heart. Our part is to rest in the knowledge of the invisible presence of our Lord who

⁴⁵ 1:23.

then teaches us His paths.⁴⁶ The law will never heal or save us back to our original design. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can do that as He works quietly in the shadows of our mind to make Jesus a living reality in our day-to-day experience.

God intended that we abide in this intimate relationship with Deity. Thus it broke the heart of God when humanity went astray into the abyss of Godless selfishness and sin, because He knew the sorry end of that lifestyle. The human race was on a collision course with death—a death of their own making. Humanity would experience the consequences of living without the great Life Generator. Humanity would be hopeless, lost, and spiraling down a dark and lonely corridor ending in oblivion had not God intervened.

Who Delivered Christ to Die?

In the councils of heaven the plan was conceived for Christ to come to this dark earth and take all the results of sin upon Himself. He would shed His blood and die for the inhabitants of earth. Jesus was the Son of God sent to fulfill this mission and save us from our predicament of sin.⁴⁷ In the days leading up to the climax of this plan, near the end of His ministry, Jesus sought to prepare the minds of His disciples for the coming crisis. Repeatedly Christ tried to share the reality of His upcoming death with them. "For He taught His disciples and said to them, 'The Son of Man is being *delivered* into the hands of men, and they will kill Him.'" "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be *delivered* to the

chief priests and to the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death.”⁴⁸

But a key question we must ask is this: Who was “delivering” Him? Judas certainly planned to, yet Jesus was not referring to him. Just who had the authority to deliver Jesus to death? The apostle Paul makes clear who “delivered” Him up:

“He that spared not his own Son, but *delivered Him up* for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”⁴⁹ It was the Father who delivered Him (or released Him) to the destructive forces around Him.

⁴⁶ Psalm 25:4, NAS.

⁴⁷ Matthew. 1:21.

⁴⁸ Mark 9:31, NKJV, emphasis supplied. See also Matthew 26:2, 14, 15; 27:18; Mark 20:33, 34; 14:10; 15:1, 11; Luke 22:4; Acts 2:23.

⁴⁹ Romans 8:32, KJV.

Significantly, Pilate also “delivered” Christ over to be crucified, but not before our Lord informed the proud ruler he would have no power to do this if God did not allow it.⁵⁰

Does this mean that the Father was complicit in the execution of His beloved Son? Not at all! At the cross "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself,"⁵¹ but the enormous heaviness of the darkness of our sins on Him caused Jesus to lose the sense of His Father's presence. According to their agreed-upon plan, conceived in the far reaches of eternity past, the Father could not lift His hand to help Him in any way, because Jesus was now experiencing the death of sinners. The Father and all the agencies of heaven stood down that day and "delivered up" our Savior to whatever fate awaited Him outside the circle of heavenly protection that surrounded Him. Jesus attested to this reality when on the cross He cried out the first line of a prophetic psalm He had no doubt memorized long before, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"⁵² Clearly, while God's role in the crucifixion of His Son, the Sin-bearer, was to withdraw divine protection and release him to the powers of

darkness,⁵³ with this one exception, God the Father had *no involvement* in the execution itself . . .

even though Scripture says He did!

‘Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, [a]gainst the Man who is My Companion,’ [s]ays the Lord of hosts. ‘Strike the Shepherd, [a]nd the sheep will be scattered.’⁵⁴

Jesus claims these words as a prophecy of Himself: “Then Jesus said to them [His disciples], ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: “I will strike the Shepherd, [a]nd the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”’”⁵⁵ Both Father and Son agree; God the Father

⁵⁰ John 19:10, 11.

⁵¹ 2 Corinthians 5:19, NKJV.

⁵² Matthew 27:46, NAS; Psalm 22:1, NAS.

⁵³ Even though He was released, those to whom He was released were still accountable for what they did when He was handed over to them.

⁵⁴ Zechariah 13:7, NKJV.

⁵⁵ Matthew 26:31, NKJV; Mark 14:27, NKJV.

claims to “strike” Christ, although we would certainly not describe it that way. The Old Testament prophecy from which He quotes also suggests use of a “sword,” or violence, “Against the Man who is My Companion,” a clear reference to the intimacy of relationship between Father and Son. Yes, Christ died violently, but not by His Father’s hand. Isaiah 53, universally accepted within Christendom as a Messianic prophecy, says,

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, *smitten of God*, and afflicted.” “Yet *it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief.*”⁵⁶

Do we consider God's removal of His protection from humans as an act of aggression against them? Scripture insists that God “struck” His Son, yet is this how God strikes? Closer examination of Scripture reveals that God's wrath is expressed by His withdrawing and releasing humans to the destructive forces around them. Once understood, this pattern helps make sense of many other situations. But if this is true, why would God allow Himself to be described as the agent of execution?

Jerusalem Destroyed

In searching through Christ's life for clues about God's role in the final death of lost sinners, we find one incident particularly enlightening. For centuries God had sent prophets to Israel to warn them of the consequences of their entrenched rebellion against heaven and to plead with them to repent. At last He sent His Son.

But as Christ sat upon a colt on Mount Olivet's brow one of the last evenings before His death He looked out over the beautiful city of Jerusalem and wept, because He knew the people would shortly seal their centuries-long rejection of heaven through His own crucifixion. He saw the armies of Titus besiege the city some forty years in the future, saw indescribable woe descend upon the people, saw the temple of God in flames unquenchable through any human effort.

He also saw the interplay of invisible forces that would finally open the door to this catastrophe, and He wept. His thoughts found expression soon in a confrontation with the nation's religious leaders.

⁵⁶ Isaiah 53: 4, 10, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, *as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings*, but you were not willing.”⁵⁷

Jerusalem perished after they, by crucifying the One sent to save them, abandoned their connection with God and thus their only life and protection. The symbol of a protecting parent bird, usually an eagle, spreading wings over its young, abounds in Scripture, revealing the nature of the relationship God wants to have with His people and their need of total dependence upon the heavenly provision available only in that connection. It was perhaps the nearest heaven could come to describing invisible realities in human language. Yet it was by no means the only symbol Scripture used to represent this same truth.

⁵⁷ Matthew 23:37, NKJV, emphasis supplied

2

How the Bible Explains Itself

*“For precept must be upon precept,
... line upon line, ... here a little,
and there a little.” (Isaiah 28:10, KJV)*

Imagine, if you will, that you live in a land where the word “tooth” means “tree stump.” If you journey to my world and attempt to get your tree stump uprooted, you might get some interesting looks when you ask, “May I use your tractor to uproot my tooth?” How much progress would you make with this project until you learn how to speak in the local tongue? Likewise, our difficulty in seeing the true Bible picture of God’s character is often a language problem—a problem easily cleared up when some careful comparisons are made within Scripture.

In order to see God in His beautiful character and reasonable mind, you will be asked to learn a new language, the language of Scripture. Where do you go to learn it? Not to the Internet. Not to a linguist. Not to the clergy. You will find this new language within the pages of the ancient Scriptures themselves, as it defines its own terms. We have too often made the mistake of using Webster’s dictionary to define Biblical terms, and that has often caused unnecessary confusion. Regardless of our native

tongue, allowing Scripture to provide its own definitions will help to clear up many long-standing mysteries about God's character.

For instance, to lay a proper foundation for discussing specific incidents of God's vengeance we must first look at some idiosyncrasies of Scripture and how God expresses Himself. In so doing we may then delve into other related themes. These are not digressions, however, for all the issues of redemption intersect in the central truth about the character of God. Therefore touching on these related themes, besides addressing some peculiarities of Scripture, can also help to unravel some of the mystery of God's actual role in destructive acts attributed to Him.

Paradoxical Principles

First, it is often helpful to learn to think in reverse in order to more easily understand truths of the kingdom of God. No one can ever come to know God as He desires to be known, until they begin to think and live by God's "paradoxical" principles. Of the numerous instances throughout Scripture we shall examine only these few:

- He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.¹

- [T]o everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.²

- God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are

despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.³

- [T]hrough death He...destroy[ed]...the devil.⁴

The abundance of these apparent paradoxes in Scripture says something about God's way of thinking that is vital to understanding the present topic. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, [n]or are your ways My ways, says the Lord."⁵ Public opinion almost never reflects the mind of God. Therefore, we should not be surprised to discover we have misunderstood in the arena of God's "vengeance" as in so many others.

There is always the need to be careful when approaching new ideas, as any perspective can easily be carried to excess. Accept only what the

¹ John 12:25, NKJV.

² Luke 19:26, NKJV.

³ 1 Corinthians 1:27, 28, NKJV.

⁴ Hebrews 2:14, NKJV.

⁵ Isaiah 55:8, 9, NKJV.

Bible clearly supports relying most importantly on the view of God provided by Jesus Christ. The point is, we should not be surprised to find heavenly truths that are the very reverse of popular beliefs and teachings.

When we consider "divine retribution" as *Christ's life* expressed it, how can we avoid seeing that something is amiss. There was no "divine retribution" in His life. No vengeance; no getting even. Perhaps truth on this topic lies opposite of where we have always believed. Can we

understand "the wrath of God" and God's "anger" in ways other than we have understood them in the past?

The first step in decoding this mystery is to examine some Biblical contradictions, starting with the one below.

Biblical Contradictions

A prominent argument in Christendom, the issue of how law (works/obedience) and grace (faith) apply to our salvation will help us here. Some say we are saved by grace through faith, basing their belief on such texts as:

- [B]y grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, *not of works*, lest anyone should boast.⁶

- [A] man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be *justified by faith* in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.⁷

On the other side of the picture we have this:

- And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged *according to their works*, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one *according to his works*.⁸

⁶ Ephesians 2:8, 9, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

⁷ Galatians 2:16, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

⁸ Revelation 20:12, 13, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

• [F]aith without works is dead....A man is justified *by works*, and not by faith only.⁹

So here we have a classic Scriptural contradiction, providing a basis for argument, alienation, and division within Christendom.

None of this need happen, if Christians determined to harmonize these apparent contradictions through serious Bible study, allowing Scripture to be its own interpreter, until a clear picture emerges of the truth of the matter.

Juxtaposing ideas sometimes helps to clarify; therefore, at this point we shall introduce a format that will become familiar as we move along:

How does God save humans?

One Perspective

[B]y grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.¹⁰

Another Perspective

[F]aith without works is dead . . . A man is justified by works and not

In this case we are fortunate to have a third set of data that explains the apparent contradiction:

Comment

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision [works] availeth anything, nor uncircumcision [faith]; but *faith which worketh by love*.¹²

Galatians 5:6 defines saving faith as a faith which “works” through a special kind of other-centered love called *agape*. Therefore, the works which humans cannot generate in and of themselves, flow out of the life powered by genuine faith. When heaven looks at a life and sees the “beauty of holiness” expressed in reverence for God, sensitivity to others’ needs and feelings, and the ability to rise above the harmful instincts of our human nature, they know Someone else lives there besides the human

⁹ James 2:20, 24, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:8, 9, NKJV.

¹¹ James 2:20,24, NKJV.

¹² Galatians 5:6, KJV, emphasis supplied.

and His are the works they see. Paul in Galatians 2:16, KJV, calls this “the faith of Jesus Christ” or we might say, Jesus living out His life in the believer. This faith works, and the faith that works is the faith that saves, heals, transforms, restores.

The writings of Paul the apostle are sometimes hard to understand principally because we have not understood this dynamic which forms the very core of his message.

The Love of God

Agape, the great love principle, is the mortar that holds together the temple of the Lord. *Agape* will always do what is in the best interest of those who put their simple trust in God; in fact, of everyone who will let Him. If all else fails, *agape* stands fast forever.

But the *agape* idea cannot fully convey the depths of the emotional side of God's love for His children. Think what love it took for the Father to allow His unique and dearly beloved Son to come to this dark earth to live and die for you and me. It took far more than a principle to motivate that depth of emotion. God *is* love. "Love" does not describe how He acts but what He is as a Person. The Father loves us with a love far above ours for our children or anything else we can understand. He loves us in a personal way. In fact, it would not be a stretch to speak of God's love as a consuming, passionate fire.¹³ If you have any doubts of His love for you, read the book of Hosea or Song of Solomon, great messages of God's love for His children, in prose, in poem, and metaphor.

Love Enforces the Law

God's kingdom is very different in key aspects to our systems. Human laws require that humans create and then enforce their laws. God's law on the other hand simply reflects who He is and requires nothing but heavenly *agape* to provide enforcement. In other words, God's laws are self-enforcing. Because the citizens of God's kingdom "do by nature the things contained in the law,"¹⁴ there is no friction in them with the law. God's presence in the human heart produces natural righteousness, yet it is also true that while abiding in Him and still retaining free will, humans

need a sin detector or standard of behavior to inform their decision making

¹³ Zephaniah 3:17; Revelation 1:12; John 3:16; 14:15-17, etc.

¹⁴ Romans 2:14, WEB

and to gauge whether they are truly living in harmony with His ways; that is, whether they are true fruit-bearing branches of the living vine¹⁵ or mere pretenders. Therefore, God wrote down His character for us and proclaimed it from Mount Sinai.

Thus the Ten Commandments inform us, even as the living Lord Our Righteousness enables us. He is the living law. If we would walk with Him and be drawn into intimacy with Him, we must allow Him to change us into His own likeness of character in order that our ways may become like His. We may daily walk in intimate fellowship with Him, learning how His ways as set out in that holy law, are actually beautiful and desirable. But it requires converted hearts to perceive this; therefore, our attitude toward His Ten Commandments reveals whether or not we have been “born again.”¹⁶ It can be seen then, that obedience to those ten principles is ultimately about both defining and protecting our relationship with God, not so much about being saved and going to heaven someday. Day by day we may abide in Him, and as we invite and consent for Him to

abide in us, “being saved” takes care of itself as His indwelling Spirit works to will and to do through us what brings pleasure to the Father.¹⁷

Those who choose to enter into this intimate relation with God sooner or later find that Sabbath observance, found at the very heart of God’s law, actually symbolizes the reality of this experience in their lives. The Sabbath literally means “rest,” and the greatest kind of rest is freedom from depending on our own works of righteousness to earn God’s favor. Thus the Sabbath, according to Scripture, is the ultimate sign of recreation, rest in the Lord, living by faith, and depending totally on the God of love to heal and save us.

“Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies them.”¹⁸ This outward sign is a signal to the watching universe that we are not the ones trying to change ourselves but rather it is the Spirit of God, the God

who is love, living inside of us that is doing the work of transformation.

¹⁵ John 15:1-8.

¹⁶ Jesus says we will know the true Christian "by his fruits" (Matthew 7:20; Galatians 5:22, 23) The law of God serves as fruit checker, whereby Christians and their associates gauge the reality of the believer's oneness with Christ through the Holy Spirit. If the experience is real, the fruit will be there.

¹⁷ Philippians 2:13.

¹⁸ Ezekiel 20:12 WEB.

Resting from our own efforts to change our lives by relying completely on the transforming power of God living inside of us, changing our thinking, perceptions, and resultant actions in the process, is best illustrated in the rest we choose to enjoy each week as we also refrain from work to support ourselves financially and physically. This is the true rest of the Sabbath as described in Hebrews 4—not a mere outward refraining from work but protected time when we can give ourselves without distraction to enjoying intimacy with the One who is becoming the love of our life and the source of all our joy.

Biblical Contradictions

Some may wonder what all this has to do with the fate of the lost. A little reflection will reveal that if the way God saves humans is through union with Himself, then eternal loss is simply a natural consequence of failure to enter into that unity. The symptoms relied on to diagnose this condition are the outward actions and behaviors that expose the true condition of the heart. To avoid a tragic end, we need to experience union with God through the Spirit.

We have explored how God will heal us through intimacy with Him if we let Him, plus we have studied how to address Biblical contradictions.

Realizing that God does not contradict Himself, we need to continue studying until we are better able to grasp the full Biblical picture all the texts convey. In seeking to know the mind of God, until we have logically and Scripturally resolved evidence in contrast to our personal views, we cannot be sure we have arrived at truth.

Following are just a few of the perplexing apparent contradictions which have puzzled students of Scripture for years. Examining them more carefully provides insight into the way God sometimes expresses Himself and reveals a principle we may use in understanding what appears to be the destructive ways of God:

Who sends a lying spirit?

One Perspective

[T]he Lord said, “Who will persuade Ahab to go up that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?” ... [A] spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said ... “*I will go out and be a lying spirit* in the mouth of all his prophets.”¹⁹

Another Perspective

[I]t is impossible for God to lie ...
God ... cannot lie.²⁰

God says in the left-hand quotation that He sent out a lying spirit, yet the quotation on the right says God cannot lie. Obviously, this appears to be a contradiction. What does it mean? We have no Scripture clarification on this point. Next question:

Who led David to number Israel?

One Perspective

[T]he *anger* of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and *He moved David* ... to ... number Israel and Judah.²¹

Another Perspective

Now *Satan* stood up against Israel and moved David to

Again, we have no explanation in the immediate passages. The surface reader usually concludes that after prompting David to do this, God turned around and punished him for it.²³ Did God have anything to do with causing David to do something that was against His will and then punishing him for it? What kind of God is He, and can we trust such a

God to be fair? Maybe this is another conundrum we need to unpack to discover how Scripture can more effectively explain itself.

¹⁹ 1 Kings 22:20, 22, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

²⁰ Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2, NKJV.

²¹ 2 Samuel 24:1, NKJV, emphasis supplied.

²² 1Chronicles 21:1, NKJV, emphasis supplied..

²³2 Thessalonians 2:11, NKJV.

Who deceives?

One Perspective

If a prophet is deceived and speaks a word, *I, the Lord*, have deceived that prophet . . .

²⁴

Another Perspective

[Satan] shall shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth.” “The *devil* . . . deceived them.²⁵

It appears that both God deceives and Satan deceives, if you go strictly by the apparent message of these two texts. Is this another of those apparently contradictory Bible texts that through the years has confirmed the atheist in his unbelief and bewildered a multitude of Christians?

Whose idea was it

to spy out the Promised Land?

One Perspective

And *the Lord* spoke to Moses, saying, “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel”²⁶

Another Perspective

Moses said, “And everyone of you came near to me and said, ‘Let *us* send men before us, and let them’”²⁷

Again, we have no clarifying comment. Next question . . .