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The Bible And Christianity Explained

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WHY GOD REQUIRES OUR FAITH

GOD'S FIRST COMMANDMENT: BELIEVE ME!

When God created Adam and Eve (the first parents of the human race), He placed them in the Garden of Eden. In that garden there was a special tree that God had created; the 'Tree of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong'. God summed up the entire issue of morality by giving Adam and Eve one commandment to live by:

Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die. Genesis 2:17

GOD'S COMMANDMENT WAS SIMPLE: There was only one Law, not many.

GOD'S COMMANDMENT WAS EASY: It was a commandment not to do something. No effort was required.

GOD'S COMMANDMENT WAS CLEAR: God was indicating that righteousness cannot be achieved through learning the difference between right and wrong. To learn right from wrong would be a sin worthy of death. The way of righteousness would be to simply believe God; taking Him at His word and obeying His commandment concerning the forbidden fruit. Throughout the Bible 'believing God' is also referred to as 'faith in God'.

FAITH = ACKNOWLEDGING GOD

God presented a perfectly logical idea to Adam and Eve; that a knowledge of right and wrong would enable them to achieve righteousness. It makes sense, doesn't it? How can a person do what is right if he does not know the difference between right and wrong? And God knows the difference between right and wrong, doesn't He? And look at how holy God is! But God told Adam and Eve that learning right and wrong would be a sin worthy of death. He asked them to ignore 'logic' and take Him at His word; to simply trust Him.

Why would God do that? Why would He command Adam and Eve to act contrary to their own intelligence? Because God's commandment represented the question of whether or not Adam and Eve would acknowledge Him, and His infinitely greater wisdom as the Creator of the universe. Adam and Eve were being asked to acknowledge the profound difference between God and ourselves; that the smartest of human beings are mere children in comparison to the One who created us. They were being asked to acknowledge that, no matter what might seem to make sense to us, if God says something different, then we are always smarter to trust Him rather than anything or anyone else.

Adam and Eve's choice was simple; when challenged with the most important decisions of life, would they lean upon their own understanding, or would they acknowledge God's glory and depend upon Him? In both the Old Testament and the New, God's relationship with mankind is frequently compared to that between sheep and a shepherd. God wants us to

acknowledge that in comparison to Him, we as human beings truly are 'sheep'. We need the guidance and protection of our Divine Shepherd. Sheep who wander off often come to tragic ends; those who stay close to their master enjoy safety.

Man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4

Know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 100:3

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25

I would ask my reader to bear with a personal story. Many years ago I was a public employee, working for my local county road commission. Some of the men who worked there had other careers on the side, doing construction and other things after work. Sometimes my co-workers would laughingly tease each other, saying 'Man, if I had your money, I would burn mine!' In other words they were saying that the other guy was so rich that, if they could have his money, they would throw their own money away.

Although this idea is silly, but it conveys the point that I am trying to make here. God's wisdom is so much greater than ours, that if confronted with a choice between His wisdom or ours, every one of us would be well-advised to take His and 'burn' our own. This is what the forbidden Tree in Eden represented; the question of whether or not we would acknowledge God, and how much wiser He is than we are. When God's wisdom is properly appreciated, it can rightly be said that it is He alone who really has any wisdom at all:

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17

To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen. Jude 1:25

It was not that God wanted mankind to be ignorant. He did not forbid Adam and Eve to build computers, split the atom or map human DNA. In fact, God commanded Adam and Eve to subdue the earth and rule over it. God loves human intelligence, industry and creativity. It was He who made us this way, and put these traits within us.

It is true that many professing Christians give people the impression that Christianity is a religion of ignorance and superstition, but this is not true. God does, however, require us to acknowledge that ultimately, when confronted with a choice between knowledge or simply believing Him, the truly intelligent person will always trust God above all else.

FAITH = OBEYING THE LAW

Roughly 3500 years ago, long after the days of Adam and Eve, God gave 10 commandments to the world through the prophet Moses (Exodus chapter 20). These 10 commandments sum up God's moral requirements; what we must do if we would be blessed by Him and receive eternal life. These commandments are sometimes referred to as the 'Decalogue' (10 sayings). The 10 commandments are divided into two sections. The first five address the 'vertical' relationship between ourselves and God (and our parents).

MOSES' FIRST FIVE COMMANDMENTS LOVE GOD

The second five address our 'horizontal' relationships with our fellow man.

MOSES' SECOND FIVE COMMANDMENTS LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

When God gave His one commandment to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, it represented the first five of the 10 commandments:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37

The forbidden fruit represented the question of whether or not Adam and Eve were willing to acknowledge and give glory to God. It represented the question of whether or not they were willing to recognize:

- 1) The infinite wisdom of God.
- 2) The righteousness and trustworthiness of God.
- 3) The goodness, kindness and love of God.
- 4) The infinite power of God.

WHAT WAS GOD'S PLAN?

OK, so faith is a right attitude toward God, and a summation of the first five of Moses' 10 commandments. But what about Adam's everyday relationships with other people? How would Adam obey God's commandment to love his fellow man?

God's plan was simple. As Adam fulfilled the 'primary righteousness' of believing God, God was going to enter Adam's body through the Holy Spirit and live inside him. The love, kindness, goodness and compassion of God Himself would flow out of Adam's heart. If Adam was willing to acknowledge and glorify God, God's intention was to share His glory with Adam.

This is still God's plan today. God wants to share His own nature with us. He wants us to truly know what it is like to be God.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit" says the Lord of hosts. Zechariah 4:6

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin; He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:1-4

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God. Romans 8:14

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

To whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1:4

Righteousness belongs to God alone. It is a supernatural trait. For instance, the ability to love our enemies is supernatural; we are not capable of it. But we can experience this divine righteousness if we are willing to provide the 'primary' righteousness of believing and obeying our Creator.

LOVE FOR GOD MUST COME FIRST

A proper attitude toward God is the foundation of all other righteousness. When our hearts are right toward Him, they are 'tuned' to relate properly with our fellow man as well. It is impossible to love our fellow man if we do not love God first. The logic of this is straightforward.

Suppose a thief commits murder during a bank robbery, killing a bank employee. Do you suppose that he will be concerned about running stop signs during his getaway? Of course not. If he has committed the greater crime, he will have no regard for lesser laws. The same thing applies to mankind. If we are willing to despise our Creator and even to declare war against Him, how can we love lesser beings who are mere creations? It is impossible to truly value a human being, if we are unwilling to value God.

The apostle Paul explained how all of man's wickedness toward our fellow man flows out of our first and greater crime of disrespect for God:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and evil-mindedness. They are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1:28-32

King David also recognized this connection between how we view God, and how we treat our fellow man, confessing that his adultery and murder had their roots in his opposition to God:

Against You (God), You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight. Psalm 51:4

This connection, between faith in God and obedience to God's entire Law, is seen in God's two-part description of Abraham's character. First God acknowledged the righteousness of Abraham's faith, and then acknowledged Abraham's fulfillment of His other laws:

Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness. Genesis 15:6

Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws. Genesis 26:5

To believe God is to be pure in heart. When we repent of our unwillingness to acknowledge and glorify our Creator, forgiveness and reconciliation with Him become possible for us through His grace. The Lord Jesus referred to this in His sermon on the mount:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

The apostle Peter also pointed to the 'heart-purifying' nature of faith. In explaining to his fellow Jews why he declared the gospel of Jesus Christ to 'unclean Gentiles', Peter said...

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them (the Gentiles) by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us (Jews); and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8-9

Faith (believing God) represents obedience to the first and greatest commandment. And where genuine faith is found, love for our fellow man and fulfillment of the rest of God's commandments will be certain to follow. This connection between faith and love is also found in the book of Revelation, where believing the Gospel and keeping God's commandments go hand in hand:

And the dragon (Satan) was angry with the woman (Israel), and went to make war with the remnant of her seed (Christians), which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12:17

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Revelation 14:12

FAITH WITHOUT LOVE - LOVE WITHOUT FAITH

Many who call themselves Christians are devoid of love for their fellow man. Because of their hypocrisy, others have come to despise Christianity. But the fact that there are Christian hypocrites does not nullify Christianity itself. God's coming judgment has been described clearly, and He has said throughout the Bible (in both the Old Testament and the New) that all men (including those who have experienced His forgiveness and saving grace) will be judged according to their deeds and reap what they have sown (for a further discussion of the fact that Christians must continue in obedience to God, see my web page titled The Necessity of Christian Perseverance).

The apostle Paul wrote about the connection between faith in God and love for man, declaring that faith without love is useless, and teaching that whenever genuine faith is present, the trait of love for our neighbor will also be found:

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge, and though I might have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which works by love. Galatians 5:6

But the Bible also talks about 'love without faith'. The fact that God requires us to love our fellow man does not mean that everyone who 'loves' will be accepted by Him. Today many people proclaim that 'It's not religion, but love that matters'. There is a growing worldwide consensus that says 'If we love our neighbor as ourselves, then it does not matter which God we believe in. If a Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim loves his neighbor, then he will be justified by God as surely as any Christian will be'.

But the first commandment is that we must love the one, true, living God. There is only one such God, and He has fully revealed Himself to the world through His creation, through His word, through the human conscience, and through His Son, Jesus Christ. If we will not acknowledge and honor this God, then it is impossible for us to truly love our neighbor. All talk of loving our neighbor while we promote 'religious tolerance' is simply masked hatred for God. Yes, Christians must be tolerant. But to claim that one person's religion is as valid as another's is rebellion against God. The Book of Proverbs warns about the foolishness of believing that by loving our neighbor, joining 'hand in hand', we can escape the judgment of God:

Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered. Proverbs 11:21

Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished. Proverbs 16:5

THE LOGIC OF DISOBEDIENCE

There was a serpent in Eden who contradicted God, challenging Eve about what she should believe:

And the serpent said unto the woman 'You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' Genesis 3:4-5

In effect the serpent was saying 'God knows right from wrong, and He is righteous. If you learn right from wrong, you will be like God, and be able to achieve the same results that He has achieved!'

Adam and Eve were confronted with a life and death decision about whom to believe. God had said 'You shall surely die!', and the serpent said 'You shall not surely die!'. Because God had placed a strong survival instinct within Adam and Eve, and they faced a 'life and death' choice, they would have to be completely convinced about the wisdom of their choice. Despite God's warning of death, Adam and Eve believed the serpent instead of Him. They disobeyed God and ate the forbidden Fruit.

What convinced them that they would not die? They believed that the Fruit would give them two kinds of power:

- 1) The power to produce their own righteousness.
- 2) The power to tempt others, preventing them from being more righteous.

Adam and Eve believed that God would not be able to condemn them because they would be able to achieve a degree of morality, while at the same time preventing anybody else from achieving a morality greater than their own (through faith). They believed that they would be able to compel God to compromise on the subject of morality. Instead of righteousness being defined by God, it would become 'a relative thing', defined through a confrontation between God and man. Instead of man meeting God on His terms, God would have to meet men on their terms.

The serpent told Eve that by eating the forbidden fruit, she would become like God. It was the blackest lie ever told. By disobeying Him, Adam and Eve became as different from God as it is possible to become.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, a spirit that the Bible calls 'Sin' entered and possessed their bodies. This evil spirit is the counterpart to the Holy Spirit on God's side of the struggle between good and evil. If Adam and Eve had chosen to believe God, they would have been giving themselves to the Spirit of God to be indwelt by Him. In learning the difference between right and wrong, Adam and Eve were giving themselves to the spirit of Sin. They became the property (slaves) of Sin, and indwelt by evil in its most potent form.

THE WORKS OF THE LAW

Adam and Eve's belief, that they would be able to use a knowledge of right and wrong to achieve morality, is seen throughout the Bible. God describes such efforts as 'the works of the Law' (Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, 3:1-14). Adam and Eve are a perfect example of this. When they discovered that they were naked, they tried to deal with the moral issue of human sexuality by making clothes out of leaves. But their efforts at self-righteousness exposed their disobedience, and God condemned them.

The Bible describes our self-righteousness, and our efforts to cover our moral nakedness, in simple terms:

There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.
Proverbs 14:12

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags. Isaiah 64:6

Before becoming a Christian, the apostle Paul followed this same path. His mistake was typical of many of the Jewish people, who believed that a knowledge of the Law of Moses would enable them to achieve righteousness (see my web page titled Testing Christianity for an explanation of why God gave the 10 commandments to the world). Paul wrote the following words about his mistake, and what he learned:

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the Law of righteousness, has not attained to the Law of righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the Law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; As it is written "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed". Romans 9:30-33 (Isaiah 8:14, 28:16)

Today our world is still characterized by many people who want to 'do the right thing'. Some want to restore the earth and its environment. Others strive to erase the economic disparity between rich and poor. Some seek world peace through international unity, while others reject such unity, believing that 'righteous' nations must impose their will upon evil nations through

economic and military power. Some people support 'liberal' causes and agendas, and some embrace 'conservative' ones. And many churches and professing Christians have joined these efforts to achieve 'practical good'.

Although these various groups often oppose each other and argue about how things should be done, they all have one thing in common: they trust their knowledge of right and wrong more than they trust God. They are like the Israelites over 3000 years ago:

**In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes.
Judges 17:6, 21:5**

Ultimately these efforts to put the world 'right' will lead to its destruction, because those who trust in their knowledge of right and wrong will inevitably find themselves doing the exact opposite of what they desire (see Testing Christianity).

The Bible's first question is 'Must we keep the Law?', and the answer is a definite 'Yes!'. The self-righteous person is right about this. But we must go beyond the first question to answer the Bible's second question, 'How can we keep the Law?' The answer to that question is 'Through faith in Jesus Christ'.

In past years it was common to see people wearing necklaces and bracelets saying 'WWJD' (What Would Jesus Do?), the idea being that Christianity is a matter of figuring out what Jesus would do in any given situation, and then doing that. In reality this concept is Adam and Eve's disobedience masquerading as Christianity, because the person who does this is simply using his knowledge of right and wrong to determine what he thinks Jesus would do. Christianity is not figuring out what Jesus would do, but believing God and allowing Jesus to live and work within us so that He does what He wants to do, often without us being aware of it.

The path of faith is defined by what God can do. But when a person ignores God's glory and decides to rely upon himself, he is seeking to glorify himself. This is why the Bible describes pride as one of the primary traits of the wicked:

The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low. Isaiah 2:11-12

"For behold, the day comes that shall burn as an oven. And all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble. And the day that comes shall burn them up" says the Lord of hosts, "that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Malachi 4:1

God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5

DECLARING WAR AGAINST GOD

In choosing to rely on their own righteousness, Adam and Eve also had to make sure that nobody else would become more righteous than themselves. They would have to tempt others to sin, in order to insure their own moral superiority and survival. This willingness to promote evil was a betrayal of God, and a declaration of war against Him. It was a decision by Adam and Eve to give themselves completely to evil, as the means of insuring that nobody else's righteousness would excel their own.

God has given us a picture of this betrayal in the relationship between Samson and Delilah (Judges chapter 16). Samson shared the secret of his strength with Delilah as a token of love and trust between them, but Delilah betrayed Samson for money. God also revealed the secret of His strength to Adam and Eve, and they betrayed Him for all that money can buy. When Adam and Eve learned right from wrong, they were binding God and forcing Him to serve them, just as Samson was bound and forced to serve the Philistines. How could this be?

Because God is obligated to judge and condemn sin. By obtaining the power to tempt people and lead them into sin, Adam and Eve were compelling God to oppose Himself; forcing Him to destroy human beings whom He loves and wants to bless. This is why the Lord Jesus saved His strongest warnings for those who lead others astray (Matthew 18:6, 23:13, Romans 14:21, 2 Corinthians 11:29, Revelation 2:14).

In a previous section of this web page titled 'Love For God Must Come First', I have pointed out that it is impossible to love our fellow man if we are unwilling to love our Creator. If we are unwilling to respect the Greater, we cannot respect the lesser. But in this section we see that not only did Adam and Eve render themselves incapable of loving their fellow man, but they actually had to commit themselves to the destruction of their fellow man, if necessary, in order to win their moral battle against God. Their deceitful choice to deny everything that they knew about God required a simultaneous commitment to the promotion of wickedness in others. The prophet Jeremiah has described this duality of deceitfulness and evil:

**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?
Jeremiah 17:9**

At the cross the Lord Jesus gave His own life, just like Samson did, in order to 'knock the pillars out from beneath Satan's kingdom'. After having overcome every trial and temptation that could be thrown at Him, Jesus gave Himself as a perfect, spotless sacrifice in order to bring Satan down. Through His death Jesus has conquered the devil, while making escape possible for all of us who have lived in Satan's kingdom of lies, fear and death.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part in 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

God now calls each one of us to choose whether we will continue in our rebellion, or repent and take advantage of the mercy that His 'Samson', the Lord Jesus Christ, has made possible through His cross.

THE 'MORE' TREE

Why did Adam and Eve disobey God in the first place? What was the motivation that prompted them to disobey God? The Bible tells us that the Fruit was attractive in three ways:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat. Genesis 3:6

The Fruit was attractive to Adam and Eve because

- 1) It was beautiful to look at.
- 2) It was a tasty and brought physical pleasure.
- 3) Its knowledge would exalt them, raising them to God's level of wisdom.

The forbidden Fruit was the one beautiful thing, the one sensual pleasure and the one degree of glory that Adam and Eve were not allowed to have. But to Adam and Eve the forbidden Tree represented much more than just the Fruit itself. Because of the knowledge it contained, the Fruit represented the possibility of an unrestrained pursuit of unlimited pleasure and self-glorification, without any fear of God's judgment.

Although God had created them and given them life, had given them a relationship with Himself, had given them authority over a magnificent planet, had given them marriage and the prospect of raising children, and had set before them the possibility of eternal life as well, this was not enough for Adam and Eve. They wanted more.

The Bible refers to such over-the-top, unrestrained desire as greed, lust or covetousness. The apostle Peter attributed all of the moral corruption in the world to lust, and the apostle John set forth the clear distinction between loving God and loving the things of this world:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1:4

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

Why does John say that it is impossible to love the world, and to love God at the same time? Because that was the choice that originally confronted Adam and Eve; a choice between a close and personal relationship with the Creator, or the pleasures and self-glorification that might be obtainable in the created world. They desired the creation rather than the Creator. Instead of worshiping the living God, they chose to direct their admiration toward created things. This is why Paul equated covetousness with idolatry (the worship of created idols):

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry. 2 Colossians 3:5

It is interesting to observe that when the Lord Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He also was tested around these same three aspects of desire (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-12). First, after having fasted for 40 days, Jesus was tempted to satisfy His physical desires (His hunger) by turning stones into bread. Secondly, Satan took Jesus up to a high mountain so that He could see the visual splendor of all of the kingdoms of the world. Jesus could have had all of the fine cars, corporate jets, palaces, jewelry and beautiful women that He might have wanted; but He refused it.

Lastly, Satan took the Lord Jesus up to the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem. He then challenged Jesus to glorify Himself as the Son of God by casting Himself down and letting angels protect Him. Such a demonstration of His divinity would have been most appropriate in that Holy place. But rather than claim what was rightfully His in any of these situations, Jesus chose to humble Himself and put His identity as a servant above His identity as God.

Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God (in heaven above) did not consider it a thing to be clung to, to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, taking on the form of a servant, and came (to earth) in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death; even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every other name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; of those in heaven and those on earth, and of those under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE LAW

In this web page I have explained the two paths to achieving righteousness that are presented in the Bible:

- 1) The path of believing God.
- 2) The path of 'the works of the Law'.

One path acknowledges the abilities of God, and what is possible through Him. The other path looks to what we can accomplish independently through a knowledge of right and wrong. But a problem arises for the person who pursues righteousness through 'the works of the Law'. This is because he has closed himself into the Law as his only resource. He has rejected the abilities of God and has put himself 'under the Law', with all of its limitations. Therefore when he breaks the Law, there is only one thing that the Law can do: rightly and justly condemn him to death.

The apostle Paul described this distinction, between what is possible through the Law, and what is possible through faith in a gracious God:

For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not made to Abraham or to his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the Law be heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect; because the Law works wrath. For where no Law is (as the means of achieving righteousness), there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed. Romans 4:13-16

One of the most important messages of this entire web site is the Biblical claim that when Adam sinned in Eden, every member of the human race was consciously present within him, individually and independently choosing to commit the same sin that Adam was committing:

For by one man (Adam) sin came into the world, and death through sin. And so death passed upon all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12

I will not discuss our connection with Adam any further in this web page, except to say that all mankind was in a 'Trinitarian Union' with Adam. Just as the three eternal Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are one God, so also the many persons of the human race were one man in Eden. I have written more about this Trinitarian Union in the other pages of this web site.

Here I simply wish to point out that, inherent in Paul's words is the conclusion that, in Eden, we all rejected the divine moral glory that God originally intended for us. This is the point that Paul makes in the following verse; that we have all come short of God's original intention for us:

But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. For there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:21-24

It is impossible for a condemned sinner to provide an atonement for his sins, or a fresh start in his life. This is something that only God can accomplish. This is why the Bible says that salvation belongs to God:

And the Lord passed by before Moses and proclaimed "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and Who will by no means clear the guilty. Exodus 34:6-7

After this I beheld and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and with palms in their hands. And they cried with a loud voice, saying "Salvation belongs to our God Who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb". Revelation 7:9-10

Entrance into God's salvation simply requires that the sinner reverse his original decision in Eden (to not believe God, but rather to trust in a knowledge of right and wrong):

Therefore leaving the (first) principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection (maturity). Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God. Hebrews 6:1

So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse: for it is written "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them". But that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God is evident: "For the just shall live by faith". And the Law is not of faith, but "the man that does them shall live in them". Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us. For it is written "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree", that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:9-14

WHAT DID THE FORBIDDEN TREE LOOK LIKE?

The story of Adam and Eve has been the object of ridicule for centuries, and never more so than at the present time. Adam and Eve have been so caricatured both by Christians and non-Christians, and there have been so many cartoons and humorous advertisements lampooning the Garden of Eden that now, in our post-modern era, the story is considered 'dead on arrival'. Strangely enough, however, a replica of Eden's forbidden tree has become known worldwide as the second most-recognized symbol of Christianity (after the cross); the Christmas tree.



Every year people erect trees in their homes and businesses that incorporate everything that the original forbidden tree represented. First they make this tree (and the other decorations and gifts associated with it) a feast for the eyes. Secondly, they incorporate many physical pleasures in their 'worship of the tree'. They focus primarily on food and sweets. But some add alcohol, sex and even drugs to the mix. Thirdly, the gift exchange associated with this tree gives people the opportunity to boost one another's egos. Whether a gift says that the receiver is important, or that the giver is thoughtful and generous, every gift serves to bolster somebody's self-esteem.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying beautiful things, physical pleasures and the love and respect of others. These things are all God-given, and good if properly enjoyed. But Jesus Christ came into the world because we allowed these pleasures to interfere in our relationship with God. In partaking of the forbidden Tree, Adam and Eve set things in motion that would eventually require the death of the Son of God in order to make our forgiveness possible.

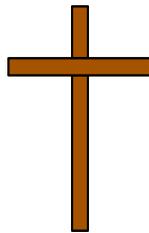
To observe the birth of the Savior by erecting a tree that duplicates mankind's first rebellion against God, represents a profound ignorance of Christianity at best, and at worst a direct insult to God. The fact that today's Christians are oblivious to this parallel says a lot about where Christianity is today. Christians need to consider the words of the apostle Paul:

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

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the Christmas tree is that children are taught to be covetous. The message that Jesus was born to atone for our greed, lust and pride is nullified. Many families sing carols and read Bibles around the tree. But what is a child more likely to value; verses and carols, or lights, candy and presents? Later in life, when some of these same children are confronted with the real claims of Christianity, they view the message as 'unbiblical' because it isn't the pleasure-oriented Christianity that they grew up with.

GOD'S SECOND TREE

God has now placed a second special Tree in the world. He has commanded all people to believe Him and eat its Fruit if they want forgiveness and the ability to experience God's righteousness. That Tree is the Cross of Jesus Christ, and its Fruit is His broken body and shed blood.



Jesus told people that that they must eat His flesh and blood in order to be saved:

Then Jesus said unto them, 'Truly, truly I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you'. John 6:53

When confronted with this idea, the Jews asked "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" It's a good question, and the answer is simple. When we eat food, it enters every cell in our bodies; the proteins, carbohydrates and fats become a part of us. We become united (or 'one') with our food; we truly are what we eat. In a similar way, people who repent of their sins are united with Christ. They become one with him in His death, burial and resurrection, and experience the 'spiritual nutrition' and new life of being born again with Him.

That is why, in John 6:35 & 48, Jesus called Himself "the bread of life". Union with Him gives our souls life, just as union with ordinary food gives our bodies life.

This union with Christ is not achieved by water-baptism, communion or the Roman Catholic Mass. It is a spiritual union that the Holy Spirit performs when a sinner repentantly judges himself and turns to Christ in sincere faith. So what is this repentance that can unite us with Christ? Jesus described it in terms of picking up one's cross.

One day Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was (Mark 8:27-38). Peter said that Jesus was the Christ, and Jesus responded by telling Peter that he was correct. Then Jesus began to tell His disciples that He was going to be killed at Jerusalem. Peter took Jesus aside and began to object, at which point Jesus rebuked Peter, even calling him 'Satan'. Jesus was planning to go to Jerusalem to die for the sins of mankind, and Peter was trying to talk Him out of it. Then Jesus made an important statement about His death, and the meaning of that death for Christians:

And when He had called the people together with His disciples also, He said unto them "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me."
Mark 8:34

Some think that Jesus was talking here about Christians suffering as they follow Him through their lives. While it is true that Christians must be prepared to endure poverty and even death if called upon by God to do so, I do not think that this is what Jesus was talking about here. When He said 'follow me', I believe that He was saying 'Follow Me to the place of crucifixion'. Nowhere in the Bible are people who are already Christians ever called upon to carry a cross. In fact, in the epistles the cross is described as something that has already happened to the Christian; it is a past experience. The apostle Paul pointed this out:

Know you not that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
Romans 6:3-4

For I through the Law am dead to the Law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:19-20

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 2:17

So what was Jesus saying in Mark 8:34? Jesus was talking about repentance, and the necessity that sinners (if they would be saved) must condemn themselves to the same criminal execution that Jesus Himself was about to endure. The New Testament does not describe the cross primarily as a place of persecution and martyrdom, although Jesus was indeed persecuted. It describes the cross as a Tree where criminals are punished for their crimes:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, for it is written "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree. Galatians 3:13, Deuteronomy 21:23

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 you were healed. 1 Peter 2:24

Jesus was saying that, if someone wants to be a Christian, 'he must be crucified with Me'. The word 'deny' (in Mark 8:34) does not mean to deprive one's self of something, but rather to judge, despise, disown and repudiate one's self. When Jesus spoke of picking up one's own cross, He was talking about condemning one's self. He was talking about sinners seeing their need for atonement.

It is only as a sinner is willing to acknowledge and accept condemnation for his sin, that he can truly see and believe that Jesus' death on the cross is the solution for his problem. Repentance and faith always go hand-in-hand. The clearest example of one 'picking up his cross' was the thief who was crucified next to Jesus. As he acknowledged that he deserved to be crucified, his eyes were opened to recognize the Savior who was hanging on a cross next to him:

And one of the criminals which was crucified railed at Jesus, saying "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us." But the other answering rebuked him, saying "Do you not fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong." And he said to Jesus "Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom." And Jesus said to him "Verily I say to you, today shall you be with Me in paradise." Luke 23:39-43

For if I build again the things which I destroyed (my old sinful self), I make myself a transgressor. For I, through the Law, am dead to the Law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:18-20

The Lord is near those that are of a broken heart, and saves such as be of a contrite spirit. Psalm 34:18

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Psalm 51:17

But to this man will God look; to him that is poor (spiritually) and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word. Isaiah 66:2

I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Matthew 9:3

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8-9

The faith of the thief on the cross was the faith of Abraham; a faith that is truly righteous in the sight of God because it condemns sin while turning back to the God that we have despised and opposed. And while faith accepts the righteous condemnation of the Law, it looks beyond that condemnation to what God alone can do; offer forgiveness, new life and genuine righteousness through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son.

THE NECESSITY OF MERCY

For Christians a life of faith is about both "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1), and also acknowledging their sins and moral failures. And the Christian knows that the only solution for those moral failures is the grace and mercy of God. But the Christian must also know that the mercy of God is impossible for himself, if he is not merciful toward others.

For he shall have judgment without mercy, who has shown no mercy. Mercy rejoices against judgment. James 2:13

Mercy is a requirement for entrance into God's grace, and it is a requirement for continuing in that grace as well.

One of the great threats to the Christian is pride; forgetting the moral debauchery and shame that God saved him from, and his desperate need for the mercy of God when he was in that hopeless condition. Another threat to the Christian is the false teaching 'Once Saved, Always Saved' (see my web page on The Necessity of Christian Perseverance). This doctrine is simply a repetition of Satan's lie in Eden: "You shall not die", and leads to carelessness on the part of the Christian, and a disregard for the importance of mercy.

The Lord Jesus reinforced the necessity of mercy over and over again:

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Matthew 5:7

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:12,14-15

Jesus told the parable of a servant who owed his master a great debt. But after the master forgave him the debt, he then went out and demanded that a fellow servant pay him a much smaller debt. When that fellow servant could not pay, he had that servant thrown into prison. Jesus warned that God's anger toward unforgiving Christians is like the anger of this servant's master when he found out about what had happened:

And his master was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. Matthew 18:34-35

Jesus condemned the judgmental Pharisees by quoting the Old Testament:

But if you had known what this means, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the guiltless. Matthew 12:7, Hosea 6:6

The importance of mercy is also revealed in the behavior of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, when he discovered that the woman who he was engaged to (Mary) was pregnant.

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly (break off their engagement). Matthew 1:19

Joseph had not yet known that the Spirit of God had caused Mary's pregnancy. He made the logical assumption that she had been unfaithful with another man. But although he probably was hurt and felt betrayed, the Bible says that he intended to cover Mary's sin rather than vengefully expose her and hurt her.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between confronting someone about their sin and warning them about God's judgment, and condemning them for their sin. When Jesus said "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1, Luke 6:37), He was saying 'Condemn not, that you be not condemned'. But He also warned that Christian's must let their

light shine in the world (Matthew 5:16), and that they will be held responsible if they fail to warn others of God's judgment (Acts 20:26-27). In fact it is unmerciful not to recognize sin and warn people about it:

When I (God) say unto the wicked "O wicked man, you shall surely die". If you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity. But his blood will I require at your hand. Ezekiel 33:8

But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Jude 20-23

The world likes to condemn Christians for being 'judgmental', just like the citizens of Sodom sought to justify their aggression against Lot and his visitors (Genesis 19:9). But Christians must understand the difference between recognizing sin and warning people about it, and condemning people for their sins. Judgment is something that is reserved for God. The common proverb that 'People who live in glass houses should not throw stones' applies very much to the Christian.

And the Christian should not call down God's judgment upon someone who is injuring him. Jesus had much to say about patience, and forgiving those who hate or hurt us:

You have heard that it has been said "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy". But I say unto you "Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you". Matthew 5:43-44

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

In the book of Revelation we are warned about a 'Mark' that will be imposed upon mankind in the final days before the second coming of Christ (Revelation 13:16-18, 14:9-12, 15:2, 19:20). It is called the 'Mark of the Beast'. No one will be allowed to buy or sell anything in the world unless they have taken that mark in their forehead or in their hand. And it will be associated somehow with the number '666' (Revelation 13:18).

But with Revelation's information about the Mark of the Beast there also comes a grave warning. All those who take this mark in their forehead or in their hands will join Satan to be tormented eternally and never-endingly in 'the Lake of Fire and Brimstone':

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever. And they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints. Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus". Revelation 14:9-12

This information in the book of Revelation prompts three questions:

- 1) What is this 'Mark of the Beast'?
- 2) Why will the 'Mark' divide humanity?
- 3) Why will taking the 'Mark' be so evil?

WHAT IS THE MARK?

I believe that the 'Mark' will be a computer chip that will allow people to become part of the world's new 'Internet of Things'. I expect that it will be an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification Device) implanted under the skin, that will enable sensors throughout the world to identify people, interact with them and manage their lives and the world's affairs.

These devices are not new. People have been implanting similar chips in many things for years. They have been implanted in animals in order to manage livestock on farms and in zoos. Today they are also being implanted in the products we buy at the store, allowing businesses to track inventory, prevent theft and manage sales. And there are now people around the world who are being 'chipped' for various reasons by their employers (or voluntarily, because they are impressed with the technology). But it's not the chip itself that we need to understand; it is the chip's role in a much bigger computerized system.

Today the nations and corporations of the world are racing to implement something called 'blockchain' or 'distributed ledger' technology. This is computer software that will allow business to be transacted around the world through a system that is secure and 'trust-based'. Institutions engaged in it will no longer have to worry about whether or not it is accurate, or somebody else is cheating them. And the system will be extremely fast and economical to run. It is going to revolutionize the way the world operates in the very near future. This technology first surfaced, in primitive form, shortly after the world recession of 2008. It was the Bitcoin cryptocurrency. But now the nations of the world have taken Bitcoin's concepts to a whole new level.

WHY WILL THE MARK DIVIDE HUMANITY?

Very simply, the Mark will divide humanity because of what God has said about it in His word. Mankind will be confronted by a choice to simply believe God and obey Him, or to disbelieve and take the Mark.

The parallels between God's commandment to mankind in the Garden of Eden, and His commandment concerning the Mark, are striking. As I pointed out in the first section of this web page, God's first commandment was simple; there was only one commandment, not many. God's commandment was easy. It required no effort. It was a commandment not to do something. And God's commandment was clear; it could be summarized in two words: 'Believe Me!' These same traits are found in God's warning about the Mark.

This is why I have included a discussion of the Mark in this web page on faith; because these two commandments from God at the beginning of world history, and now at its end, focus very sharply upon the single question of whether we will believe God or not. It all began with a simple piece of fruit hanging on a tree, and it is now ending with a simple Mark placed under the skin. God is bringing all of His interactions with humanity to a head, and the Mark is going to bring an end to God's conflict with the mankind very effectively. Simple is good. Simple is powerful. And the complex technology of the Mark will once again confront all of mankind with the same simple choice; will we trust in knowledge, or trust the all-knowing God:

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Corinthians 1:25

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Eden, they were not only embracing moral knowledge; they were embracing the concept that all knowledge carries within itself the ability to do better

and become greater. Today what mankind has been able to achieve through intellectual knowledge is evident all around us, and is very impressive. And our knowledge and achievements are growing at an accelerating pace. It would seem that knowledge does indeed represent the promise of humanity's survival and success.

But this 'progress' has not impressed God. It was foretold by Him over 2500 years ago. He told the prophet Daniel that, in the last days, 'Many will run to and fro, and knowledge will be increased' (Daniel 12:4). Man's increased knowledge has not been unforeseen, and it should not come close to impressing us as much as God Himself impresses us.

Ever since the Garden of Eden people have believed that knowledge represents the path to human success. Some trust in intellectual knowledge and some in moral knowledge, but the Bible warns that knowledge without an acknowledgement of God will always lead to disaster.

Thus says the Lord, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, and let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight' says the Lord.
Jeremiah 9:23-24

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
Psalm 118:22-23 (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, 1 Peter 2:7)

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign (from God), and the Greeks seek after (intellectual) wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25

Knowledge puffs a person up... 1 Corinthians 8:1

This is the division that the Mark will produce, centered around these questions; 'Can mankind now take its intellectual and moral knowledge to a whole new level, and 'evolve' toward a glorious future?' 'Are we on the brink of unlimited possibilities and taking our rightful place in the universe?' 'Are we finally about to confirm our belief that knowledge contains unlimited potential?'

WHY WILL THE MARK BE SO EVIL?

Why has God warned that those who take the Mark will experience a degree of punishment reserved for only the most evil of beings? For Satan himself? I believe that the answer can be found in Jesus' words about various degrees of punishment in the final judgment. In the gospel of Luke the Lord Jesus described the basis upon which He will judge men when He comes back to earth:

And that servant which knew his lord's will, and did not prepare himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required. And to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. Luke 12:47-48

The reason that those who take the Mark will receive the severest punishment is not only because it will represent the same issue of faith that has been at the center of God's relationship with mankind for thousands of years, but also because this is a generation that knows, like no other generation before it, that creation testifies to us, that the gospel testifies to us, that God's judgments testify to us, and that God's prophecies testify to us.

CREATION TESTIFIES

With man's increase in knowledge (which God foretold in Daniel 12:4) has come the revelation that our universe, our planet, and all biological life are the handiwork of an infinitely wise, powerful and capable Creator. The theory of evolution explains nothing about biological life. It only reveals the foolishness of those who embrace it. By attributing mankind's existence to the survival-struggles of micro-organisms and apes, they fulfill the words of the apostle Paul:

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Romans 1:23

Mankind has despised and rejected God's claims about our origins:

Know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 100:3

Yes, there is 'micro-evolution' within species, allowing the entire species to adjust to changes in the environment over time. But this represents the genius of God, who intended that various species would be able to adapt and survive over long periods of time. Today it is seen in the racial differences within the human race existing in the various climates of the world, and in the ability of species of microorganisms to become resistant to various antibiotics.

The sudden springing into existence of the universe, beginning nearly 14 billion years ago, testifies to us about the eternal power of God (Romans 1:20). And our unique planet, with its great variety of light and heavy elements, its atmosphere and its water cycle, all wonderfully capable of protecting the planet and supporting biological life, testify to us of the wisdom, goodness and glory of God. This is why, in the book of Revelation, the gospel message is summed up in this command:

Worship Him that made heaven (our atmosphere), and earth (the land), and the sea (oceans), and the fountains of (fresh) waters. Revelation 14:7

Today the world's leading scientists continue to reject any discussion of how the world reveals a Creator. They insist that a purely materialistic explanation for the origin of everything represents the backbone of true science. And in doing so they fulfill God's condemnation of them; that they possess the truth, but suppress it in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

I would add that the personal, intimate nature of God is also revealed to us through a human race that has been created in 'the image and likeness of God' (Genesis 1:26-28). I believe that

the image of God in mankind is seen in more than our intelligence, our social capacities and the possession of a moral conscience.

I believe that a heterosexual God, which is a Family comprised of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is also reflected in mankind. It is seen in the heterosexuality of maleness, femaleness, and in God's first commandment given to mankind; to be 'fruitful' and bring forth children. The children of mankind correspond to the only-begotten Son of God in the divine Family; the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul states that even these intimate and personal aspects of the "Godhead" are revealed to us (Romans 1:20, see my video titled "Created in the Image of a Heterosexual God").

THE GOSPEL TESTIFIES

The gospel of Jesus Christ has been possessed by the human race throughout its existence, beginning with God's promise that the 'the Seed of the woman' would someday crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). God also testified to mankind about His way of forgiveness and salvation, when He killed innocent animals and used their hides to provide clothing for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21).

The gospel was front and center in Noah's preaching to the world as he built the Ark (Genesis 6-9, 2 Peter 2:5). Noah's Ark represented mankind's only hope of salvation in the face of God's coming flood. The message was 'Enter the ark and be saved, or reject the ark and perish'. This is the same message presented to the world in the gospel. Jesus is God's true 'Ark' of salvation. If a person is 'in Christ', he will be saved. If we reject union with Christ as our Savior, we will be lost.

And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life. And he that does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:11-12

Now in 'historical times' God has proclaimed the gospel to the world through His covenant with Abraham, and His promise that Abraham's 'Seed' (the Christ) would bring blessing upon all the nations of the world (Genesis 12:3, 22:18). He has also proclaimed the gospel to the world through the Mosaic Covenant, with its laws and animal sacrifices practiced by Israel, forshadowing the coming of God's true 'Passover Lamb'; Jesus Christ. And finally God had proclaimed the Gospel to the world through Jesus Christ Himself; through His preaching, His self-sacrificing crucifixion upon a Roman cross, and through the testimony and teaching of His apostles.

Those who reject the Gospel will not be damned because they didn't hear or believe some strange message, but because they rejected the testimony of their own conscience (Romans 2:14-16). We all know that there are such things as sin, wickedness and evil. And we know that human beings are capable of wickedness, and that righteousness and justice demand the death of wicked criminals. Therefore we also know that the testimony of the Gospel is true:

And almost all things are by the Law purged with blood. And without the shedding of blood is no remission (cleansing or forgiveness). Hebrews 9:22

In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus told His disciples that He would not come back to earth again, until His gospel had been preached to the whole world:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then the end shall come. Matthew 24:14

Today the Bible has been distributed throughout the world, along with teaching materials helping people to understand it, like never before in history. People throughout the world are reading the Bible, and information about it, on their smart phones. The Bible has been translated into all of the languages of the world, and is now potentially present in every house. The leadership of China is seeking to suppress the Christian religion within its boundaries, but God is bringing the Gospel to China anyway.

This final worldwide preaching of the Gospel, prior to Christ's second coming, is portrayed for us in Revelation chapter 14. First the Gospel is proclaimed in the three messages of the angels (Revelation 14:6-13). Secondly, those who believe the Gospel are 'harvested' (saved, Revelation 14:14-16). Thirdly, those who reject the Gospel and oppose God are also 'harvested', to be punished in the 'great winepress' of God's wrath. The ultimate message of Revelation 14 is that God is going to judge the entire world with finality, but not until after He has made His Gospel thoroughly known to that world. This, therefore, is the second reason why those who take the 'Mark' will partake in the severest punishment revealed in the Bible; because they will have been thoroughly evangelized and warned.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS TESTIFY

As I explain throughout this web site, the Bible claims that death hangs over every one of our heads because, when Adam (the father of the human race) disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, every member of the human race was consciously present within him, joining him in committing that same sin.

For by one man (Adam) sin came into the world, and death through sin. And so death passed upon all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12

Hence the apostle Paul could rightly say, in his opening words to the Christians in Rome, that the wrath of God has been revealed against all of the 'ungodliness and unrighteousness of humanity' (Romans 1:18). The universality of human death, stretching all the way back to Adam, testifies to us of our own sin in Eden and the certainty of God's punishments.

The certainty of God's judgment has been further revealed in His destruction of the world through Noah's flood (Genesis 6-9), His destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), His destruction of Egypt and Pharaoh as He delivered the Israelites from bondage (Exodus 10:7), and His destruction of the wicked nations that inhabited Canaan when He led the Israelites to take possession of that land under Joshua.

But maybe, more clearly than anywhere else in historical times, the present reality of God's judgment has been exhibited to the world through His dealings with Israel. God warned the people of Israel, through Moses, that if they rebelled against Him their punishments would be severe (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). The world first saw the fulfillment of those warnings in the removal of Israel's 10 northern tribes by the kingdom of Assyria at around 740 BC. And it saw the second fulfillment of God's warnings with the conquest of Israel by Babylon beginning around 600 BC.

Ultimately, because of Israel's continuing resistance against Babylon, the king of Babylon completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its great Temple, bringing an end to the Mosaic animal sacrifices and the reign of David's family in Israel. And not only did he leave the

land of Israel largely desolate, but the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) also enslaved and dragged many of the Jews all the way back to the part of the world where Abraham had first started 1300 years earlier. God could not have delivered a more clear and angry rebuke to the people of Israel than He did.

But it is very important to read a warning that God gave to all the other nations of the world, through the prophet Jeremiah, as He carried out His punishment Israel:

For behold, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by My name (Jerusalem). And should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished. "For I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth" says the Lord of hosts. Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say unto them "The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation. He shall mightily roar upon His habitation. He shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth, for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations. He will plead with all flesh. "He will give them that are wicked to the sword" says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts "Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried. They shall be refuse upon the ground.

Jeremiah 25:29-33

This was a singularly important warning from the God of Israel to the nations of the world. But now, at a point in history over 2500 years after Jeremiah, the world has also seen the coming of Israel's promised Messiah. It has also seen the warning that Jesus gave to the people of Israel regarding a second desolation and dispersion at the hands of the Gentiles, because of their murder of Himself and their opposition to the preaching of His Gospel to the rest of the mankind (Matthew 21:33-44, 23:34-39, 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). And finally, the world has witnessed the fulfillment of the Christ's warning about the approaching punishment of Israel; a punishment that has been far more severe than the 70 years of desolation that they experienced under Babylon.

At the end of World War 2 the nations of the world watched as the Jewish survivors of Hitler's camps began streaming back to their ancient homeland after 1800+ years of wandering and persecution. The world watched as the 'dry bones' of a long dead Israel began to come back to life (Ezekiel 37). The world knew that the Jews' origins were in the land of Israel because the Arch of Titus, built shortly after Rome's destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, was still standing in the city of Rome, depicting that conquest in its carvings.

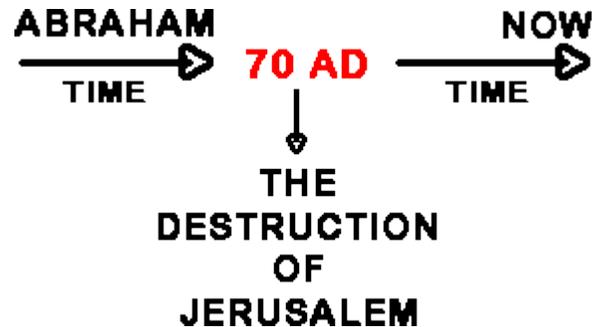
And at the same time the world had also witnessed man's capacity for mass warfare for the second time in 30 years, with the second world war ending with the first use of nuclear weapons; foreshadowing an apocalyptic future for humanity. No confluence of events could have encouraged the world more powerfully to consider the warning of God in Jeremiah 25, than those. And so through the universality human death, through God's various judgments in the history of the ancient world, and now through the history of Israel, God has clearly testified to the world about the certainty of His punishments.

GOD'S PROPHECIES TESTIFY

The number of Biblical prophecies given and fulfilled regarding a Savior for mankind, and His eventual victory over sin and Satan, are too numerous to present here. I would direct my

reader to the section on Bible Prophecy in this web site, and to my several videos on Bible prophecy.

In this web site I focus heavily upon a famous prophecy given to Daniel after Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians; the '70 Weeks' prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. In that prophecy God gave Daniel two separate timetables for the first and second comings of Israel's Messiah. The first timetable was 69 weeks long; each week lasting 7 years, for a total of 483 years. But the 70th week is not like the first 69 weeks. It is not a week of years. Rather it is the 'Great Week of the Abrahamic Covenant', beginning with God's promises to Abraham roughly 4000 years ago, divided in the very middle by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, and soon to be completed at the second coming of Jesus Christ.



THE GREAT WEEK OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

I will not spend time in this web page explaining my conclusions about Daniel's 70th Week. I would refer my reader to my pages titled 'An Introduction to Prophecy', 'The Olivet Discourse', and 'The Timetable for Jesus' Return'. Here I will simply say this: God has set the history of the world and the time of Jesus' second coming clearly before us. It can be easily understood if we rightly understand Jesus' Olivet Discourse (a prophetic message given to His disciples just prior to His crucifixion), and John's Little Book (found in Revelation chapters 10-13).

These two New Testament passages supply completion to our understanding of Daniel's 70th Week. And they are so simple, so straightforward, and so easily understood that I do not believe that God could have given the world a more accurate sense of when the Lord Jesus will return, unless He had announced the very day itself.

OBJECTION #1: WHY THE 10 COMMANDMENTS?

A very logical and reasonable question that someone might ask is 'If God did not want us to know right from wrong, then why did He give the 10 commandments to the world through Moses?' The answer to that question is very straightforward. God gave His Law to the world as a tutor or schoolmaster, pointing mankind to the true way of salvation through faith in Christ. The Law was given to show us both the penalty and the power of sin in our lives:

Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24

Firstly, the 10 commandments were given to show us the standard of righteousness that is required for salvation. It shows us where we have failed to meet that standard, and the just penalty that we deserve for breaking the Law:

Now we know that what things soever the Law says, it says to them who are under the Law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the Law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:19-20

Secondly, the 10 commandments were given to show us the power that Sin has over us. When a person learns more about right and wrong, the spirit of Sin within him becomes excited, and is stirred up to break the Law (see my web page titled 'Testing Christianity'). The Law shows us our weakness and bondage under this spirit called 'Sin', and our need for God's power to obtain deliverance from it:

What shall we say then? Is the Law Sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known Sin but by the Law. For I had not known lust, except the Law had said 'You shall not covet'. But Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the Law Sin was dead. Romans 7:7-8

The sting of death is Sin, and the strength of Sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:56-57

When we think about the Law of God, we must remember one thing:

**GOD'S LAW IS THE STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,
BUT NOT THE MEANS OF ACHIEVING IT**

OBJECTION #2: SALVATION IS 'APART FROM THE LAW'

When people read some of the things that Paul wrote in Romans chapter 3, they mistakenly think that God has chosen to set aside His Law in providing man's salvation. They conclude that people are not saved by obeying the Law, but through some other way:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. Romans 3:21-22

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law.
Romans 3:28

What needs to be understood is that when Paul used the phrases "apart from the Law" and "without the deeds of the Law", he was referring to 'the works of the Law'; the pursuit of righteousness through a knowledge of right and wrong. Paul was not saying that we do not have to obey God's Law. Rather, he was pointing to the truth that I have already explained; that faith constitutes obedience to God's Law, while a pursuit of righteousness through the knowledge of right and wrong is a breaking of the Law.

God's standard of righteousness and His requirement for a relationship with Himself has never changed. It has always been the same: genuine obedience to the Law. Biblical repentance is self-condemnation for breaking the Law, together with an acknowledgment that we are desperately in need of God's undeserved mercy and power; a mercy and power revealed in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God commands repentance because it is a turning from sin to righteousness; from breaking the Law to embracing the Law. It is the necessary condition which must be met in order to enter into God's salvation.

The question isn't 'Must we obey the Law?', but rather 'How can we obey the Law?'

Some see Christianity simply as the forgiveness of our sins. The idea of a positive obedience to God's Law is unknown to them. It is true that forgiveness is a necessity. The penalty for sin must be paid. But forgiveness is only one part of that which saves us. Repentance is turning from sin to righteousness. It is a turning from the futility of self-righteousness to a righteousness which God can accomplish within us through faith and the Holy Spirit. Faith does not ignore or circumvent the Law; faith fulfills the Law in very real, practical, everyday terms.

We find this message consistently in God's word. In his letter to Titus, Paul spelled out the two things that lead to the Christian's justification by God; the washing away of our guilt through regeneration and the possession of genuine righteousness with the help of the Holy Spirit:

Not by works of (self) righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us; by the washing of regeneration (forgiveness), and renewing of the Holy Ghost (sanctification or holiness). Titus 3:5

There is no reason for us to misunderstand Paul. God's condemnation of men will be for breaking His Law, and His justification of men will be for obeying His Law:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Romans 1:18

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness. Full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents. Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Romans 1:29-32

God will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God. Romans 2:6-11

For (Jewish) circumcision truly profits, if you (a Jew) keep the Law. But if you are a breaker of the Law, your circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcised man (a Gentile) keeps the righteousness of the Law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not the uncircumcised man, if he fulfills the Law, judge you who by the letter and circumcision do transgress the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God. Romans 2:25-29

To remove any doubt about whether or not God's way of salvation is a matter of Law-keeping, I present the following three passages. They begin with God's description of Abraham, the 'man of faith':

Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. Genesis 26:5

Think not that I (Jesus) am come to destroy the Law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law, until all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

Do we then make void the Law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the Law. Romans 3:31

Little children, let no man deceive you. He that does righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous. 1 John 3:7

OBJECTION #3: SALVATION IS NOT EARNED

Many Christians recoil at the idea that salvation is something that must be earned. It seems to contradict both God's grace and justification by faith apart from 'works'. They recoil at the idea that a Christian must 'strive' to enter into eternal life (Luke 13:24). The idea that a Christian must 'work' in order to be saved seems contrary to Christian doctrine:

Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Romans 4:4-5

Once again we need to recognize that, when Paul uses the word 'works' here, he is talking about 'the works of the Law'. He is talking about whether or not it is possible for a person to be justified by God through a knowledge of right and wrong. Paul is not addressing the more general subject of working in God's service; something that is referred to in the New Testament as the 'work of faith' (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul is not addressing the question of whether or not God requires a person, once he has rejected his own self-righteous 'works', to 'work for God' in a new and living way, and as the reasonable expression of his faith and gratitude.

While Christians are not justified by 'the works of the Law', this does not mean that God does not require Christians to work. He most certainly does. And He warns Christians that a failure on their part to labor for Him faithfully in this world will cause them to lose the reward of eternal life in the next. Perhaps this combination of God's rejection of the 'works of the Law', coupled with His expectation that Christians nevertheless will 'work', is best expressed in the passages below:

For by grace are ye saved through faith. And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works (of the Law), lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who

reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors. John 4:35-38

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58

I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints - that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us. 1 Corinthians 16:15-16

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:9-12

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary." Revelation 2:1-3

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." Revelation 14:13

Those who deny that eternal life is a reward for work should consider the following passages. Those who receive God's 'spiritual talents', and faithfully put them to work, will be rewarded:

After a long time the lord of those servants came and reckoned with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying "Lord, you delivered unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more." His lord said unto him "Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of thy lord. Matthew 25:19-21

Those who have failed to put God's 'talents' to work will be cast out of His kingdom: But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest'. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:26-30

The principle of 'repentance from dead works and of faith toward God' is 'mother's milk' for the Christian (Hebrews 5:12-6:1). There is no reason why anyone who has been a Christian for a significant period of time should be confused about the difference between 'the works of the Law' and 'the work of faith' that God requires, and that is accomplished in the Holy Spirit. To use the doctrine of 'justification apart from works' to negate the necessity of Christian work is to put a stumbling block before God's people.

OBJECTION #4: I DON'T LIKE FEAR

In the Bible faith in God is also called 'the fear of the Lord'. Some people say that they don't want a God whom they must fear. They imply that such a God must be a tyrant. Their objections overlook, however, the fact that the love of God has already been clearly shown to us. It is He who has made us and placed us on this planet in the first place, and has opened the door to everlasting happiness for all of us, based simply upon the requirement that we acknowledge His trustworthiness and allow Him to lead us.

God wants to be a Shepherd to us. When He created us, He brought us into a dangerous universe where the forces of good and evil were already engaged in battle against each other.

Know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 100:3

God brought us into this world of moral conflict as free moral agents, and with this moral freedom came the possibility of either living forever (as a reward for righteousness) or dying (as the result of wickedness). And God made our choice as clear and simple as it could be.

Those who discount the value of fear in our lives are really striking at the very foundations of human society. Fear is an essential part of our everyday experience. Our fear of death prolongs our lives and guides us to success in almost every important thing that we do. We generally view fearless people as dangerous, uneducated, foolish or insane.

We teach our children to look both ways before crossing the street, and not to go with strangers, because we fear for their safety. Men dig down to bedrock before putting up buildings, bridges and dams because they fear the waste of wealth and loss of life that might result from carelessness. We pass laws about the proper testing and construction of planes, trains and automobiles because we fear crashes. NASA tests and re-tests its equipment and procedures, because it fears encountering some unforeseen situation in space. The fear of lawsuits governs doctors and hospitals in the practice of medicine.

People who reject 'the fear of God' don't really have a problem with fear; they have a problem with acknowledging and obeying God. Fearing God is the ultimate foundation of all human success. It represents the wise path that God has chosen to someday lead mankind to an eternal future where fear and death will be forever abolished.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord prolongs days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. Proverbs 10:27