

TRUTHS OF GOD

Bob Young

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For any who choose to understand truths of God,

CHAPTER 1 - Acknowledging the purpose of right and wrong

We all walk in darkness, which is the ignorance of the things we do not know or understand. We don't all accept that this is so. Many of us choose to believe that we know the important things that are right for us as individuals. We choose to believe that we are the masters of our own understanding, and that there is no darkness. We refuse to believe that there are things active in our lives, and in the lives of others, that are more than we can understand. Many of us choose to believe that there is no greater purpose in what we do, and we should therefore only do what is right for us, what profits us best, or what profits people we perceive to be like us. When we regard the consequences of our actions, or lack of action, in this way, we tell ourselves that we did the best we could given the circumstances as we could understand them regardless of what actions we choose. We can never be wrong. When we err, when we make mistakes, when we hurt other people, and ourselves, we say that we did our best even when we realize that we could have done better. The good among us often believe it is enough that we did not intend to hurt the people harmed by our actions. Other times we admit that we made a mistake, but we choose to look for ways to blame those we hurt for the pain we cause them. We tell ourselves that it was the other person's fault for being ignorant, or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it is often too painful for us to tell ourselves that the harm we caused was the likely outcome of our wrongful choices; that the pain we caused is our responsibility to repair to the best of our ability. It is difficult for many to acknowledge that the things we have done have hurt others at all. It is too easy for us to say that we did not know better. When we make the same mistake again, when we hurt others again, we give the same excuses, over and over again. We are too filled with pride to acknowledge the darkness that surrounds us, and we refuse to acknowledge that we fear our own lack of understanding. It is often easier to say, "I know what's going on," when we often do not, and our refusal to acknowledge our own ignorance creates a perpetual loop of ineffectiveness and failure in the aspects of life we intend to care most about.

Many who know that we do not understand the truth of things instead choose to drape ourselves in the cloak that the darkness provides. Acknowledging that we do not know the entirety of what is right and wrong for us and others, we proceed blindly and boldly forward with the comfort that we are not responsible for our actions, our decisions, our effect on other people. We say, "I am a flawed creation, incapable of knowing what is right and wrong." We say, "all people are sinful, and I am no different." We admit that we don't truly understand that which is right, and then we do as we please or as we have become comfortable believing without question. We say that we should not be blamed for our lack of understanding, because we were born this way. Too many of us who so blindly and happily go forward believe that our idea of God has absolved us of responsibility for our actions, and the consequences thereof. In the day of this writing, many could be heard to say, "My mistakes, whether they hurt others or not, are forgiven, because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my

savior, and all my sins are forgiven.” Some others might be heard to say, “I acted on what I thought was the will of God, so if I sinned and harmed others, I am not responsible for the harm caused.” Still others might be heard to say, “I have been given a Jihad, so I am not responsible for or to the innocent people I have hurt. Anyone who stands in the way of my holy war is an enemy of God.” Still others who hurt the innocent might be heard to say, “My purpose for God is good, so any innocents who are hurt are merely collateral damage.” We may instead say, “There’s no one to hold me accountable, let alone a God, so who cares.” We say anything to recuse ourselves of the responsibility for hurting the innocent for our own gains, whether our gains be profit or simply a sense of self satisfaction, control or self purpose. We acknowledge the darkness, and we believe that it absolves us of personal responsibility.

The darkness of ignorance is a part of the human experience, transcending faith and dogma. Sometimes we choose to believe we know better and move forward as though blind, and sometimes we believe we can’t know better and move forward as though blind. How are the people described in the first two paragraphs different from one another? Is there any true right and wrong? Is there any meaning in the things we do? Do the things we do ultimately matter? For a simple example, a soldier fighting in a war, whether he is right or wrong, whether the war is right or wrong, encounters a young woman hiding in a house in a battle zone. He has many courses of action he can choose to take at that moment. He has seen many of his friends die in this war. The woman is shaking and frightened, and she is of the race or the country of the enemy. She poses no visible threat to his life. He can choose to rape her for his own pleasure. He can choose to kill her for his own pleasure. He can do both of these things. He can choose to kill her because he believes it is his duty or because he believes there is a chance she may eventually harm him or a fellow soldier. He can also choose to move on and simply leave her there, or he can take her into his custody and deliver her to his superiors. Let us assume that there is absolutely no way he will be held accountable for whichever action he chooses. Does it matter, then, which action he chooses to take? By either philosophy above it matters little which action he chooses, but standing before the witness of all who could be aware, does it really matter what he actually chooses to do? Substituting yourself in his place, do you believe it matters which action he chooses? Putting yourself in the place of the woman, does it matter which action the soldier takes? Is the woman a person as he is a person, or is she an enemy that is less than a person? Is she collateral? She poses no visible threat, but she can also make choices. If there is an unlikely chance that she could hurt the soldier, is he absolved of taking her life on the chance that she could take his or that of his comrades?

There is another category of people. There are people who simply do not care about what is right or wrong and who act purely on what is their best self interest, be it pleasure, survival, or otherwise. They do not believe that their actions were done according to right and wrong. They do not care about the feelings, or will, or thoughts of others, except those others who might have the power to condemn wrong actions or simply disapprove of them. They only care that their own will be done. There is no justification for these, and they seek none, but for the praises of other men to serve or reward them. There is only what pleases them best. They don’t care what is right, or what is wrong, because right and wrong are determined simply by what pleases them best. We all know these people, because they are common in our lives. Many of them do good, often for a show, but even

when they do good for others they ultimately choose to do what serves them best, and too often what serves them best comes at the expense of others. It is not really fair to necessarily say that they choose evil, but they do not choose good and are not at all concerned with right and wrong. To the best of them, good and evil are merely illusions, and the worst of them do in fact choose to do evil.

We all walk in darkness. Certainly none of us can truly understand the consequences of all things. What then should we who would choose good, we who would choose to love others even above ourselves, conclude? We should conclude, we must conclude, that there is some reason that we must stand up for what is good and right. Most of us are intuitively aware from childhood that there is a difference between right and wrong. In the example above we can put ourselves in the place of the woman who could be raped and killed, and we can put ourselves in the place of the soldier who risks his life every day for a purpose greater than his own. We all walk in darkness. No one truly knows what each other person experiences in life, but we can try to do our best to understand what they experience by putting ourselves in their place as we can best understand it. There is little more that can be asked of those that seek to do good than this. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It is a tenet widely expressed in most faiths and cultures. But still we allow the darkness to take this understanding from us. Still we who know better allow ourselves to be tricked into believing, and into espousing, that we know better, or that we can not know better, or that the difference between right and wrong is an illusion.

It is good for us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This is good enough. But given our innate lack of understanding, how do we determine what is good for others as we would have them do to us? And how do we teach others who do not have this understanding, or who believe that our actions have no negative consequences for which we should feel responsible? How do we teach others who serve the darkness and who do and teach evil in our midst for the sake of concealing their own sins? Most of us have our own ideas of what is right and wrong. We all have our own hatreds, our own prejudices, our own fears. It is not wrong for us to feel the way we feel. We help no one by denying our own natures. If we have prejudice and deny it, we create conflict within ourselves that can manifest itself in ugly ways. It is difficult to be happy with ourselves without accepting our own flaws. When we are not accepting of ourselves, it becomes more difficult to be accepting of others. Given this understanding, we are not defined by how we think or what we feel. Clearly the key element of, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is "do." It is what we believe that defines us to ourselves, but it is what we do that sets our example for others. So the real question in any situation is less, "What should I believe?" or "How should I think?", and more "What should I do?" The answer may be a matter of whether one believes there is a difference between right and wrong. I tell you truly there is a difference. I tell you truly, all things we do matter when they have consequences for us and for others, and this letter will explain why.

CHAPTER 2 - The necessity of law

Most of us acknowledge the need for law to protect the innocent from the wrongful actions of others. Law is generally only effective if there are consequences when it is broken, and those consequences generally entail that people governed by the law, or governments representing those people, inflict some degree of harm on the individuals and groups that break it. Most who would say they believe in right and wrong understand that inflicting harm on individuals is always wrong, so the law that permits us to inflict such harm, that directs us to do so in many cases, must be both absolutely necessary and generally proportional to the harm that is caused. Law is necessary, but if people are not careful, it becomes a useful mechanism for those who would choose to inflict their hatreds, prejudices and personal anger on others. If we are not careful to make it serve the good of others, law can easily become a tool for evil.

There are well-known and easily-perceived examples of law becoming a tool of evil, both in history and in the modern day. Many of us know of these few examples provided here and many, many more like them. During the Salem witch trials of Massachusetts, people were tortured and executed by religious zealots claiming to serve God over simple accusations that those executed were “in league with the devil.” Often those executed were victims of their own convictions: they simply refused to lie and say that they served the devil, and they refused to denounce others as evil to protect themselves. When the evil and the pitiless use the law to destroy people of good conviction, we are at our worst. During the French Revolution, tens of thousands were executed, often dehumanized and stripped naked in advance in the most brutal of public spectacles, for political reasons masquerading as reasons necessary and lawful. Better known of those executed were often careless nobles, kings and queens who had harmed others or allowed others to be harmed because their self-serving delusional lives didn’t allow them the opportunity to consider the suffering of those beneath them. But it was not long before maids and carriage drivers were being put under the guillotine, ostensibly in the name of the citizenry, in the name of the greater good, but truly in the service of evil. Following the United States Civil War many were lynched in the name of the greater good, but truly to serve angst and hatred. The Nazis systematically dehumanized and murdered millions to serve their cause of dominating all other peoples, treating them as criminals against the state, which was legal and necessary by their national creed. Stalin had many millions of his own people, often the best and brightest and most faithful to their fellow citizens, brutally killed as criminals against the state. Many of those who did the killing for him told themselves that they were doing it to serve some greater purpose, but they did it out of fear for their own lives and because they didn’t believe there was a greater purpose in right and wrong. They did not know the reason for putting others above themselves. Much as with Stalin, this world we live in today has been full of dictators who murder their own for their own personal power, gain and preservation, with Saddam Hussein being only one of many. The Supreme Court of Iran near to the time of the writing of this letter absolved of murder a gang of youths who beat a young couple to death for being affectionate in public. The Court’s decision was predicated on a law that permits citizens to act in the furtherance of moral decency. Their law permits open murder in the street in order to prevent public affection. In Saudi Arabia religious police with red beards walk the street unchallenged beating the common people with sticks in the enforcement of such laws. In the United States today, in our time of prosperity, we

execute a greater percentage of our own than most “free” nations. We put more of our own citizens into violent and torturous prisons than at any time in our nation’s past, and at a greater rate than most other free nations. At greater and greater rates decade by decade we continue to create more and more new laws to declare certain of our citizens to be criminals against the state. These are all well known facts, but there are numerous other examples that are as insidious where the law becomes an instrument of evil in the name of a greater good.

If a people chooses to be a nation of laws, then there must be a good basis for those laws. We as human beings have shown a great propensity for making laws that promote evil over good, that promote profit over rights, and that promote control over freedom. We must have some greater law to guide us. At the inception of the United States, we declared that, “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” We as the American people declared that the purpose of our government is to protect these rights. This sentiment inspires resentment among some of us. Some resent the idea that the budding government at the time did not act to protect these rights regarding race or gender, but the declaration is generic to such classifications. All people are intended to be afforded these protections. Because these declarations were at the foundation of our beliefs we as a people have acted better and better, over time, to see that all are equal in the eyes of the law. Though we have done terrible things, our history, for two hundred years or so, has been one of improvement. It has been one of expanding rights. It has been one of bettering lives and better loving the rights of one another over time. It must always be so if we are to survive, but it can only be so if we believe that it is the law above our statutes and ordinances. Others resent the notion in this day because it acts to stifle their ability to profit at the expense of others or to maintain control of the lives of others for the sake of doing so. Still others are offended that it puts the idea of a higher power over our lives, and many others are offended that it puts the concepts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness over their strict notions of what should be the laws of God.

Regardless of the petty resentments of many, if our laws are to serve the idea of good, and if we would choose that other differently thinking peoples in the world embrace our laws and our ways, then we must have some core understanding with which to communicate the basis for our understanding of right and wrong. We must have something more than, “I believe this is right because it profits me,” or, “I believe this is right because it keeps a degree of order that I am comfortable with,” or “I believe this is right because it is right for me” or “it doesn’t hurt me or those I love.” Even saying “I believe this is right because it is good,” or “because it serves the greater good,” is not enough to communicate our purpose. If we do not hold a belief in right and wrong that we can translate to one another serving the purpose of good, then we do not really have a way to trust one another.

If each of us believes that all of our decisions are made according to what is best for ourselves, then we will always assume that other people are acting according to what is best for themselves as well, and we will be at odds with one another in most every situation. Life in this circumstance becomes one giant cage match, where we and those we love are more important than every other person in the cage. With limited space and resources little can be accomplished but fighting. If we instead believe

that all of our decisions are based on what is best for the group, and we allow our belief in right and wrong to be swept away by a group mentality, we will always be slaveholders and slaves, with the strong dominating the weak, with the many dominating the few, in most public aspects of life. The minority in every conflicting circumstance will be required by the majority to give up its dissenting rights. There is no way to find a middle ground between these two divergent positions without having a greater law in which we can believe and agree to uphold. As mankind, we can precariously vacillate between these two positions in groups, within our nations and between nations, but given enough time, we will find ourselves repeatedly on the brink of destruction. We have shown a propensity to do this very thing. We as the United States, and the world we have led, are precariously close to the edge of that very destruction.

Many of us believe that there is a greater law, a supreme law, higher than the complicated notions that we choose to believe to justify our laws. We who hold this truth are of divergent faiths, and varying religious, or non-religious, backgrounds. We believe that there is a right and wrong that goes beyond what serves us, or even what serves the greater mass of people of which we might perceive ourselves to be a part. Often what we perceive to be our religion, or our opposition to religion, pushes many of us to believe that faith in this greater belief must be wrong, or flawed, but all religions have been shaped in part by men who are flawed and who serve themselves, their own profits, or some other self-serving beliefs. Some of those who claim to serve religions or philosophical convictions are true servants of darkness, and some of those servants choose to be so because they are filled with hate which they often cover with a mask of benevolence. The fact that such philosophies or religions have at times been led and influenced by evil men does not necessarily make these religions flawed at the core, and it does not necessarily make those who are critical of them correct, but it does add to the complication of the darkness in which we dwell. We seek to cloud the truth with the beliefs we have chosen, because we all want our long-held beliefs to be correct. For most of us, it is so very difficult to hold a belief strongly and to be wrong.

CHAPTER 3 - A Biblical understanding of the greater law

The following is written only to those who believe that there is a difference between right and wrong. I provide examples that have been shown, or presented, to me. It is certainly not intended to alienate or offend good people of any particular faith, or people who do not believe in God, or any particular idea of God. The path of my life and understanding have been heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian teaching that have led me to the truths I have been shown to be shared openly with any who would choose to read and understand. Christian teaching and doctrine have been an integral part of my finding truths of God that we must know now which will be revealed and explained later in this letter. This part of the letter in particular can touch sensitive areas of belief for people who have decided that their understanding of things is already as complete as it needs to be, but its inclusion is necessary and provides new insight to nonbelievers and believers of all faiths.

Many writings have attempted to codify the greater right and wrong in known history, and they have persisted for varying spans of time. One set that has had the greatest persistence and prevalence over time, over people on this Earth, are the Ten Commandments of God's law. Someone might ask, "Why should I be persuaded by something written 3,500 years ago by someone that had nothing to do with me?" That these laws have persisted over such a period speaks to their veracity, but there are more logical and substantial reasons worth consideration by people not predisposed to believe that God would give men laws with which to live. Sometimes proof can only be derived from logic and effect, but logic and effect mean little without purpose. If there is good purpose to such laws, and if that purpose can be supported by logic and effect, then the significance of the two together must be given the weight of evidence when a contrary purpose is lacking.

For point of context, the Old Testament of the Bible is primarily a historical record. Much of the Old Testament is simply a retelling of what was. Other parts are stories drawn from or added to the events that took place, and other stories stand on their own without concrete historical reference. There are a number of stories related in the Bible that could not possibly be proven. Some argue that these particular stories are more or less morality tales to teach people lessons on right and wrong. Others treat each story, and the rationale provided, as recorded history. We can debate these lessons, and we would be right to do so. A common thread weaving through these stories are the instances of the intervention of God, where events that can be described as miracles happen. In many cases the stories seem silly and in others they are morally questionable. A fearful man of God was swallowed by a whale and lived in its belly for days. The prophet Elisha came upon a town and encountered a group of boys. The boys taunted him saying, "Hey baldy," and Elisha called two bears to his aid which mauled 42 of them, suggesting that if you disrespect a prophet of God for his physical imperfections, God will kill you. Even more appalling are stories where people claiming to do God's will do terrible things to one another, manipulating people through fear. A man named Joshua ordered the murder of entire cities of men, women and children in God's name, and he was not so different than Stalin or Hitler or Pol Pot, and in some ways much worse than Saddam Hussein. Christian ministers still stand up and trumpet Joshua's acts because he declared them to be ordered by God, citing that God miraculously knocked down the walls of the city. But it should be understood that many of us choose to find righteousness in killing the innocent when we can call it

the will of God because we seek to see our own will done regardless of the consequences of good and evil. We have to understand both the morality tales and the historical record in the Bible through logic and consequence together with purpose. Many of those who wrote the Bible justified the wrongness of their actions as being commanded by God, but they wrote the truth of what they did, and the truth of their actions gives us the opportunity to learn from their mistakes if we choose to do so.

Some miracles from the Bible, however, can be proven simply by combining logic with the purpose of good and looking at the cause and effect of the events that transpired. Moses was a righteous and brilliant man, a deep and aggressive thinker with an excellent memory, and he had the benefit of having great faith in God. The Torah did not exist, but this is a people that remembers its history, such things please God greatly, and the lessons from Abraham and others before Moses' time were remembered. Moses was not perfect. There were times when he acted cowardly and others where he acted out of rage, but he was what he was. He chose to serve God, and he loved his people. His faith brought his people out of slavery, and it was a miracle indeed.

Moses, a prince of Egypt born of the Hebrew slaves of the Egyptians, was banished into the desert armed only with his wits and what he had learned of the one true God that his people endeavored to follow and serve. While he was in the desert, away from the civilization that nurtured him and gave him great opportunity, but also negatively affected his actions, he realized that the servitude of the Israelites was intolerable. It has been argued that the Israelites were a functional part of a successful society, but an Egyptian could kill an Israelite with little provocation and with little consequence. Moses no doubt agonized over things that he had done as a prince of Egypt. He was a good and God-loving man, but he knew that when he was a lord in Egypt, he acted as the Egyptians. He was able, mostly through resolving his own guilt through repentance and armed with the power of God in doing so, to realize that the only thing he could do is to love God now and to do right. Regardless of what was done in the past, he could repent his sins and dedicate himself to serving God, and he could make the wrong things right to the best of his ability.

As a relevant interjection, we might ask here what we know of miracles as applied to God's purpose, because much of this understanding is shrouded in the darkness. Are God's people limited to any particular race, religion, or school of thought? God is our creator, God is all powerful, and God could appear and walk amongst all peoples if he chose to do so. God will not choose to do so, because he is everywhere, and he has always been as he is, everywhere. Are God's miracles limited to humanity? It is vain beyond vain for men to insist that we are the only life in the universe with all of the evidence that God has provided to the contrary. Vain and evil men persecuted Copernicus and Galileo in the name of Jesus Christ for saying that the Earth revolves around the sun. They bore false witness, labeling Copernicus, Galileo and others as blasphemers, false witnesses against God for having faith in what they knew to be true. Now the same men in different clothing will tell you that there is no life outside of our planet for the same vanity, the vanity of man, when there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. God could walk openly amongst all peoples of all worlds if he chose to do so, but he would not choose to do so, and would instead always do things exactly the same way. This is very important to accept. God is not defined based on what we believe to be

right and wrong in this day, or in any day. God has always been as he is, and he will still be as he is long after we are gone. He wasn't one way at one point and different in character 1300 or 3300 years later. It is the way we understand him that changes, and it is a mistake for us to assume that our understanding of God necessarily becomes better because it occurs later in time.

What do we know of miracles? What if God were to appear in a giant red chariot flying across the sky that read, "thou shalt not kill," and then disappeared forever. It may be that we would stop killing each other, but it is impossible to predict what the reactions of men would be. Perhaps many would choose to simply lay down and die so that they could get to heaven faster. Perhaps some who choose to deny God would go on a rampage, with everyone else feeling that they have no choice but to allow it to happen. Perhaps the few willing to kill would enslave the many. Certainly there would be many who would deny that which was seen by all, regardless of how compelling the event. We as men are incapable of predicting others' reactions accurately enough to wish for such things to happen. Certainly the miracle described above could be accomplished by God, because he is indeed all powerful, but we have to accept that God's miracles are as God wills. Often when we pray for miracles that don't happen, we are left having to accept that the terrible consequences of men's actions are what we made them. It is too easy for both believers and nonbelievers in God to presume when God will step in or when he should have. When the potential for a miracle of God exists, we have to accept that his miracles are his will. When we act for his purpose and can make miracles manifest, it is up to us to do what can be done.

But God works miracles every day when his faithful people choose to receive them. How does he do this? One way God can accomplish his will is by changing the things that appear to be random into things that serve his plans. It may be that God would act for a faithful person to win nearly five million dollars by hitting the same number on a roulette wheel three consecutive times after initially placing only a \$100 bet and letting it ride if there was some reason it needed to be so. Yet certainly it is still true that a person might win the same money the same way without God being involved. It would be vanity for a people to think that any certain thing is going to happen simply because they pray for it to happen even if they believe that the outcome is the one that God would choose. We can not, as men, judge these things but in our hearts. God's creation of great things from random things is partly why it is dangerous to study the genetic code. God can make supermen spring up amongst us simply by manipulating random sequences. If we study our genetics to learn and heal, we serve ourselves well, and it pleases God well when we help others as we would help ourselves, but if we start manipulating God's great tool for working miracles, we could start trying to play God and change the genetic code, and it will curse us in the long run. We can never get into a genetic arms race with another civilization lest we destroy ourselves. We must be wary of a time that could come when we start creating our own children by engineering their codes because those we perceive as our enemies are creating supermen and supersoldiers. If you don't believe that the genetic code is a tool for miracles, look only to our virtuosos who completely transcend the greatness of the greatest amongst us in particular ways; people who hit the same particular number three times, or seven times, on the roulette wheel. If we understand God's plan, then it is easy to share in the joy of these miracles. It is within God's physical power to simply appear to all peoples of all worlds, but he will not do so. Most outcomes depend on the choices we make. We must have faith in good

over evil, and we must find it in ourselves, both as individuals and as peoples. God is the God of the entire universe, and all of the worlds and peoples therein. He has always been as he is, and he will always be, but God's true miracles happen, and those who have faith in the good purpose can perceive them for what they are if they choose to do so.

Returning to the Bible, this Godly man Moses realized that his people needed to be free from the Egyptians and that it is within God's power to do this. Without God he never would have had the power to do any such thing, but he washed away his sin with the realization of God's will; dedicate yourself to doing right always and you won't be controlled by your past wrongs. An event that may not have been matched in the history of mankind, he walked back into the city of Ramses where he was forbidden to go on penalty of death and demanded his people's release. You don't need people being swallowed by whales to see the miraculous nature of this, whatever you might believe about Biblical plagues and the like. An all-powerful despot ordered Moses never to return at the penalty of death, and he walked back into the city of Ramses and demanded freedom for his people. It was within the Pharaoh's power to kill Moses, but God put doubt in the Pharaoh's heart. It was the same plot we see played out in many movies, where the bad guy can't bring himself to kill the righteous hero directly. God protected Moses because he was doing what needed to be done and asked for God's protection. And God allowed Moses to truly know that bad things were going to happen in Egypt, and Moses told the Pharaoh this truly, and so they did happen. He walked in and demanded their freedom, and it was given to them. Has there ever been a more successful slave revolt in the history of man? You can deny this miracle, and those who wish can simply choose to believe that the Pharaoh was insane, or that this record was simply made up. God's miracles can not be proven, but they are sometimes laid out plainly for us to see if we choose to do so. Moses freeing the Israelites from the Egyptians is one example of this.

Moses knew that they needed to be done with the Egyptians once and for all, and he knew precisely how they would react, so he planned a clean break. The Bible says that the Israelites went boldly out of Egypt, and so they did, forcefully taking some of what they were owed by the Egyptians for their servitude in the towns they passed. When the Pharaoh heard of the Israelites behavior, he was enraged, just as Moses knew he would be. Moses' timing was impeccable. He led his people through the desert, the one he had memorized like the back of his hand years earlier, and to the Sea of Reeds. They were led by a column of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night to keep their many people together. This was a normal way to lead an army at this point in history. Moses, however, used it as a lure for the Pharaoh's army when they camped on the last night before crossing the sea. Moses maneuvered his people so that it appeared to the Egyptians that they were trapped against the sea and forced to attack as clever placement of the pillar of fire made it appear that the Israelites were coming back out to do battle. The Sea of Reeds is really just a big marsh, and Moses' people were assisted by a wind from the east that made the marsh drier and made their column of fire difficult to see beyond. Perhaps it was a fluke of nature, or perhaps God was assisting his servant. The people quickly slipped away into the swamp exactly as Moses had planned so many years earlier. When the light of day came, only the column of fire remained. The Egyptians were infuriated when they realized that the Israelites had fled. The Egyptian army was comprised mainly of men on chariots wearing heavy armor, and they would have been like tanks fighting against

riflemen if they had met the Israelites on flat, dry ground. The Egyptian army charged directly into the swamp, and when they were fully committed, bogged down in the mud, the Israelites descended on them from ambush filled with righteous vengeance and annihilated them.

Moses took his people near Mount Sinai, a place of limited resources but great security, and he was thankful to God but somewhat confounded. He had done everything God asked of him, and yet his people still behaved wickedly and disrespectfully, both to him and to God. It was at that point that God gave him the Ten Commandments. It is written that God spoke them directly to Moses in such a way that the will of God is manifested in them. I do not doubt this, and I believe that God's simple laws were given to us through Moses. It certainly could be argued that Moses made them up, but God's commandments are true because they remain a proper reflection of truth to people who would seek to understand the difference between good and evil; between doing God's will and making our own laws that serve our own purposes or simply doing as we choose. They can be understood as easily today by a technologically complex people as they were by a wandering people more than 3,000 years ago.

Any of us can say that God spoke to us, and it can never be proven that God did not. Certainly God speaks to many of us through his examples and stories, teaching us right and wrong. But God spoke directly to Moses, and these ten laws given are laws that we are meant to follow. Men, with their prejudices and understanding, or lack thereof, wrote the Bible, and they wrote scores of laws of a questionable moral nature that they believed to be necessary to serve whatever other purposes they may have had that they called "laws of Moses," telling their people that God gave Moses these laws as well. But only short parts of the Bible in terms of text were given to us directly from God, and the Ten Commandments are among these. It is up to us, with the understanding and sense of greater responsibility God has entrusted to us, to understand the complicated and often confusing lessons that the rest of the Bible has set before us.

Much of what is written in the Bible are lessons in evil: the things against God, though the people who wrote them often tried to justify them differently. It will never be God's will that we slaughter every person of a race or a people to remove their way of thinking from this Earth, the way Joshua did, the way Hitler attempted to do to the Jewish people and others, so we should be exceedingly judicious when claiming that other things from the Bible or other texts are God's law. I have heard priests trumpet the destruction of Jericho as if it were a miracle of God rather than the slaughtering of an entire tribe, killing little girls and everyone else who didn't secretly plot against their own people. They said, "God made us do it, so it is good." Moses could not find a way to honor his initial promise to deliver Canaan to the Israelites, so he kept them in constant study and preparation in the Sinai and other parts adjacent. The conditions were likely difficult ones, and the people became very tough and very clever. When Moses died, Joshua took over, and Joshua's solution was not God's solution, although they recorded it as such. Joshua contended that it is God's will that we destroy all of those in our path when it is convenient for us to do so, and he claimed God told him these things. When the Israelites later encountered a fierce Canaanite tribe that they feared to fight, the Gibeonites, an especially large and warlike people, they simply joined forces with the Gibeonites against the other tribes and then continued killing the other tribes until their genocide was complete.

It is important for men always to be vigilant as power changes hands, as from Moses to Joshua. It is very easy for us to fall in love with an idea that is good in its nature, like acknowledging that the one true God loves us, but we can not in so doing allow ourselves to believe that all actions taken in his name are good per se. It is up to us to shape our actions to his will, and our leaders must be such men that will create this vision for others, because their examples are followed. If they act with evil intent, if they encourage us to sin, then they lead the people away from God and toward our own destruction. The Israelites acknowledged God and his love for them, and it can be argued that they were his chosen people, but they turned from him in part by putting their own laws over God's, and they have endured much hardship.

The book of Exodus is a great testimony to a people overcoming hardship against all odds, glorifying God in so doing. There are man's laws in Exodus, but it doesn't change the overall impact of the events recorded. The book of Leviticus is very different. God tells Moses, "Thou shalt not kill," and the book of Leviticus records law after law where people, the people of Israel as well as others, should be killed for the most minor of transgressions. These things are recorded as the laws of Moses, and they tell the Israelites that they should sacrifice their own for things like wearing certain types of cloth and eating certain types of food. God would never have us severely mistreat a woman for not recognizing her own "uncleanliness". God would never tell a man what laws permit him to sell his daughter into slavery, or prostitution. What kind of man would seek to sell his own child into slavery? Only an evil or decidedly ignorant man would do so, and these other "laws of God" were written by evil men who sought justifications for their evil. God rewarded Moses and his people with his Commandments, and yet they still made laws in opposition to the Commandments of God in order to make their own will manifest.

God is good and God is truth. There is no lie in God. If anything promoted as God's law encourages you to act deceitfully or to do evil or otherwise act in violation of God's Commandments, then you must rethink your position as deeply as the situation permits. God wants us to succeed, both as individuals and as peoples. God wants us to survive. Perhaps it will be our destiny as men with our knowledge of God and other things to move throughout the entirety of his creation. If God wanted an apocalypse, he could destroy us at any time, but he has left it to us to keep from destroying ourselves with his guidance. We in this world today put our own laws above God's in his name, taking from others for our own profit and doing evil to one another in the name of greed. God will preserve the good that we do, but God will punish us for rejecting his will, as he punished the people of Israel, if we do not repent for the wrongs we have done and start acting again with a good purpose.

CHAPTER 4 - The Commandments

We should examine each of the Ten Commandments, simple guidelines to understanding right and wrong. Understand that by accepting these laws of God, we more openly subject ourselves to judgment by him when we break them. It is a common theme in the Bible that those who hear the will of God and understand it but act to the contrary are more culpable than those who never have the opportunity to hear it. Good men will avoid judging others wrongly or harshly, and they will be charitable in so doing, but when men break these commandments and harm others, perhaps there are times when righteous men must step in to see that God's will is done. When we do murder in God's name, those of us who follow God must rise up to stop it. God forbids us to judge people on other things, but most things that we can define as right or wrong will be covered within these laws.

I Thou shalt have no other Gods before me. This is the most important of the Ten Commandments. Nothing is above God and nothing is before God. If a person lives or says that it is another way, then this person is not living according to God's will. The one God is above all things, all ideas, all icons. Nothing is God but the one God. No one is God but God. Different peoples and religions have created mythologies to make their idea of God the God of only them, and of like believers, encouraging others to believe so, but God has made it clear in the First Commandment that so believing is a sin. All who worship the one God, the God that is good and that is the God of all, worship him, regardless of the name that they give him. While I write, and believe, "nothing is God but the one God," it is fair to say for people that don't believe in a deity that acknowledging God as such is not a necessary component of this commandment. Simply believing in a higher good, the perfect right in "right and wrong," and not setting anything above that, is enough.

II Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto the thousands that love me, and keep my commandments. This commands that you should never worship material things in this world no matter how good or heavenly they appear to be. It also warns here that sinning against God will hurt the people you love in the long run, and the repercussions of such actions can continue to harm those that follow you even after you are dead. It does not say to blame your father for the wrongs in your life, but be warned that if you do evil, you will be harming your children, your loved ones, in ways that you can not predict for time to come. It also says, well before the birth of Christ, that God will show mercy to those who love him and keep his commandments. People fashion beautiful crosses and other symbols to their idea of God, but this commandment makes it clear that when we start worshiping such symbols, even to the likeness of things that are in heaven, when we start putting our love of symbols above our love for one another, we break God's commandment and we sin against God.

III Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain. Many people that I love say the name of God as an interjection, and their lack of acknowledgment of the power of his name can be ugly. While it is our responsibility to keep our ugliness from appearing ugly to other people when we can do so, this commandment specifically instructs us never to do evil in his name. If we act for our own purposes, it must never be in his name, for the evil we do in his name, even by accident, becomes our sinful reflection of God to others. The leaders of our nation and others, the careless destroyers of peoples, have done this very thing, and they are leading those who follow down the path to hell with them, claiming that our wars are holy wars, God's wars. These are the times when we are intended to take action to see that God's word is not abused by our people in a way that keeps us enslaved or encourages us to do evil. When we say that we attack another people and kill innocents because God instructed us to do so, we do evil in God's name. God never tells us to do acts of evil or to break his commandments carelessly. If it is God's will, then it is always good. We must not declare our own choices to be God's will and thus affirm that our actions are good, for it is then that we lose the ability to repent for our errors of judgment, and our lack of repentance makes us arrogant and evil. We the people must take responsibility for our own actions for which we will be judged. Our leaders encouraged people to persist in believing that God is the reason our children were sent to Iraq to kill their children, like the crusades. We used a false mask of God's will to hide the evil intent of sending those children to kill and die for the profit and vanity of a very few. We can not allow such things to happen on our watch when we have learned better.

If a person claims that God has told him to do something, it is incumbent upon us to consider the rightness of what the person is saying, unless we ourselves claim to have heard the voice of God. We who choose to follow such people share in their sins if they are sinful. If we empower a leader who does evil, then the sins of his acts in God's name are our sins. Do unto others always as you would have them do unto you. If a voice comes from your mother, or your lover, or the very sun itself and tells you to behave sinfully or break God's commandments, then that voice could NEVER be the voice of God. Read also that this commandment, given long, long ago, necessarily implies that people may be held guiltless, yet priests in the days of Jesus and before and still to this day have persisted in making the people believe that their lives were hopeless and without salvation.

IV Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. This one is a little more complicated to understand than the others, but God requires us to take one day in seven to rest and contemplate and enjoy ourselves and to appreciate him and his work. It doesn't command us to work, but it does demand that we take time from working, no less than one free day in seven, and we must give the people beneath us in our lives the same opportunity. This understanding necessarily implies that marking it out in precise seven-day periods is not imperative. Jesus showed us when he did many good works on the sabbath

that there are exceptions that are necessary, doing the Lord's work and making it clear that if a man's livestock fell in a ditch on the sabbath day, that the man should help his livestock, noting that it is more important to help a man. It does not mean that we should feel free to ignore this commandment, because you must continually give your people opportunities to rest and appreciate God's creation and the life we have been given. Even if you imagine it to be to your disadvantage, you must allow yourself the same opportunity, and you must afford it to those who serve you. It could be said that we should give people one day off from work every week, and we should take a day and treat it as the sabbath. The Jewish sabbath at the time Moses was given the commandments was Saturday, and the Gospels acknowledge it as such. Christians changed the sabbath to Sunday because Sunday is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Should it matter to God which day we choose to honor him by following his commandment? Appreciate that you have been given life and can rest and think about life and appreciate God's creation, and allow others the same opportunity. It is certainly more difficult to keep people enslaved if you give them the opportunity to simply rest and plan. Moses was limited by his word choices and human understanding, but he communicated God's Fourth Commandment well enough for us to understand God's will and apply it to our lives.

V Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land that God has given thee. Sometimes we speak of our parents in disrespectful tones because they are human and we blame them for having made mistakes. It doesn't make life better to dwell on the bad things that people have done. If we allow the bad to blind us to the good, then we blind ourselves to the truth, and it is a sad sin. More importantly, if your parents have well taught you right from wrong, and you do wrong because they did wrong, then you bring evil into the world. There are no excuses to do wrong when the right thing to do is clear enough to us. Certainly we do not honor our parents if we celebrate evil customs simply because our parents celebrated them. If we know better, and especially if our parents have taught us better, and still we choose to do wrong because our parents have done wrong, we sin against God. Note that this commandment does not read, "obey thy father and mother." Some may believe that their parents were great people, and others may believe their parents were not good. Some have abused or abandoned their children, and others who are good and loving parents have done great evil. This commandment is not about doing as our parents did or as they would ask of us. By doing good and learning to do better, for ourselves and one another, we honor our father and mother. This is a simple and forward-thinking commandment.

VI Thou shalt not kill. This is very direct, although, as Jesus is translated to say in some of the gospels, it may be read "thou shalt do no murder," and murder is defined as intentional or reckless killing for wrongful reasons. You should never seek to kill another man or woman lest you accidentally kill a righteous person for your own sins. Always you should seek every other alternative. Most peoples in their history have been put into situations where it is necessary to kill to protect the innocent. We as Americans found it necessary to take lives in helping to liberate Europe from the Nazis in World War II, and we feel a sense of satisfaction in understanding that we did what was necessary. Sometimes killing is the only way to prevent the perpetration of evil against God's people. Yet many still feel a sense of guilt for the innocent lives that were lost, despite the future atrocities that were prevented. We always have to embrace the wrongness of our actions when we take the lives of others, even if the consequences are ultimately right for us, so that we know with

certainty that we will avoid killing when we have the opportunity to do so. If someone were going to murder my wife or children, or anyone that I love, then I would kill the would-be murderer quickly and with my full heart if there were no other option, and I would believe that it is God's will that I kill that person. I would never claim that God willed me to do it, however, and I would feel regret in knowing that I was not able to find another way to stop the murderer. I know that I would be judged by God for so killing, but I would pray that he judge my choice to be proper.

VII Thou shalt not commit adultery. When we make covenants before God, with each other and with God, we must honor them. It could have been written to say that we should not fornicate with any person to which we are not married, but instead it says do not make the commitment of marriage before God and break it, and we must honor such commitments made by others. These types of promises are only holy when we honor them, and if we make an oath before God and then break it, it becomes unholy if we cause harm to one another. This commandment does not say that a person should not be homosexual, or that a person should have only one spouse, or that we should not fornicate outside of the bonds of marriage. There is every reason to believe that there were God loving homosexuals amongst the Israelites, and it was certainly within God's power to declare homosexuality a violation of his commandments. God could have told us to judge people over any number of things we personally, or as a group, find to be offensive, but he did not. Men have created a whole myriad of laws to force their morality on others, and yet our people have chosen not to make adultery illegal. This is not to suggest that we should make adultery illegal according to man's law, but rather to say that it is sinful to make other similar things illegal according to "morality" while ignoring this very commandment.

VIII Thou shalt not steal. If you take something that is another person's for your own benefit, you open yourself up to judgment. If a person steals a loaf of bread to feed his starving baby, a Christian man or woman should not judge him harshly if the harm is negligible. If he steals the bread knowing that the baby of another could die of starvation, then his intentional act is sinful. These are simple ideas to understand. But even when the harm is small we must always be mindful of the impact that our wrongful acts could have upon others by example. Sometimes the wrong things we do of necessity can encourage others to take the same wrong action brazenly if we don't openly acknowledge the wrongness of the action that we were forced to take. Sometimes we set bad examples by actions that become necessary for us to take, and we must know that if we are wrong, if we could have avoided depriving another person of any property or any other thing that is rightfully theirs, that we sin against God. We must not let our lack of acknowledgment of the wrongfulness of stealing encourage others to steal and to act sinfully.

IX Thou shalt not bear false witness. This could be treated to mean that someone should never say any thing that is not true, but it does not mean that exactly. Clearly this commandment forbids us to simply make up a lie about someone to that person's detriment or to encourage others to judge that person or allow him to come to harm. All people who serve God or profess to do good should walk in the open light always. While we should never use falsehood to accuse another of wrongdoing or use lies to defraud others, there may be times that we must employ duplicity to protect innocent people from the intentions of evil men, like Moses tricking the Pharaoh's army into

believing that the Israelites were rounding to attack when in fact they were fleeing through the marshes. While Moses knew that the Egyptians were being lured to their doom, it was still their choice to pursue Moses' people with the intention of killing them. But we should never seek to harm another person through speaking untrue evil against them but for the reasons that might be a mitigation to the commandment against killing.

It is too easy for us to bear false witness against those we perceive as our enemies because it profits us, or allows us to feel absolved of our hatreds or wrongful actions. While good people understand that making up a lie to the detriment of another is wrong, there are other more insidious ways to bear false witness. Take a situation where two enemies have a dispute over a piece of land, and each believes he is entitled to that land. The first possesses the land, and the other seeks to take it. An outside observer with no stake in the matter tells the second man that the first is creating weapons that he intends to use to harm all of his enemies. This is a very common example with real world applications repeated through history. If the man who seeks to possess the land of the first presents this accusation to the community without evidence, and he claims to know it is true, he is a false witnesser. If the community acts against him accused of creating the weapons and premeditating murder, killing him and taking his land, and the accusation is false, the community shares in the sin of false witness. When we use false witness to sin against one another, we sin against God. We can not allow our prejudices to encourage us to accuse others of things we don't know to be true.

X Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's. Coveting is seeking to take from another something that we are not otherwise entitled. We should not plot or endeavor to take anything from another person that is not ours by right. When we plot and scheme to take that which is another man's, we pervert our hearts into believing that our actions are justified, regardless of what is right or wrong, and where a heart is so perverted, sinful actions follow. It is acceptable to desire what we do not have, but the moment we cross the line between desiring and seeking to deprive is the point that we begin to covet. One could not commit rape without breaking this commandment, because no woman's body is a man's to take without her consent. One can not make another man his slave without coveting the other man's will, though it is still possible that a man could offer servitude to another. It is very easy to treat the sin of coveting as harmless, but when we covet, we lose our sense of perspective. We forget that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and when we start believing that we are above those others, we sin against God. We should not be discouraged from working hard and wanting to have good and pleasurable things for us and those we love, but when we allow our desires to become covetous, we sin against God, and hurtful and sinful decisions follow.

These are the Ten Commandments given to us from God through Moses. The descriptions and explanations I have provided are not contrivances or a twisting of words. These commandments are as simple and applicable today as they were 3,500 years ago, and we are meant to apply them to our lives. But they were largely ignored by the men claiming to speak for God who followed Moses and who chose to commit murder for gain. Yet they are still here with us today, easily found, easily read, and, as I have attempted to show you, easily understood. We can choose to apply them as ways to

understand God's will for us toward one another, and we can put them above the laws we make to protect our commerce, profits and power.

It is necessary here to skip ahead and note that in all of the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus gives us but two great commandments. An understanding of Jesus and the New Testament will follow, but in terms of understanding God's commandments, we should briefly consider all of them here. Jesus gives us numerous words of wisdom in addition to these commandments, but his only real commandments, in addition to simply following him, we will call commandments XI and XII, and they read as follows:

XI Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

XII And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments lay all the law and the prophets.

While it would be an incomplete interpretation, one could take the Eleventh Commandment to simply mean, "Love that which is good and that which is truth above your own being and your own person and above those persons you love." In a sense it sums up and simplifies the first three, arguably four, commandments. A person could certainly counter that this commandment can not be obeyed without believing in God, and that it specifically applies to that belief and the intensity of it. But as I have endeavored to show you in this letter and will continue to do, loving God is ultimately about the choices we make and the people we affect. Choosing to put good over our own selfishness and fear is loving God. If one man genuinely professes his love for God and hates his fellow man because they don't love God enough, causing them great grievance, and another man doesn't understand the spiritual Father but chooses to do good always, helping and loving others in ways that encourage them to do likewise, which of the two men best follows this commandment? I would say that the first man's view of the God he loves is self-serving, leading to self-serving acts, while the second man's acts, while perhaps incomplete in understanding, are much more in the spirit of this law.

To many, the Twelfth Commandment might just seem a matter of common sense, but it is important to understand that it isn't simply common sense, but God's commandment to us all. If we all loved one another as ourselves, the world would be as close to perfect as our physicality would allow. But many of us choose not to do so, and even more of us do not trust others to do so, and it is this unknown area that too often allows the darkness to prevail despite the simplicity of this commandment. One might read me to be saying that these two commandments are essentially the same thing, loving God by loving one another. While that is not entirely accurate, as Jesus says, "the second is like unto it." Loving one another and loving God are certainly acts of similar consequence.

CHAPTER 5 - The reward of disobeying God

God gave us commandments to live by thousands of years ago, and they have remained a key to understanding God's will in the world to this day. They will continue to be so in the future if we continue to believe that we choose to serve God. But those who serve the darkness will continue to try to turn people away from God's law. The leaders of the very people given God's law sought to minimize it in short order, creating a myriad of man's laws that cast God's law into the shadows. What meaning does, "Thou shalt not kill", have when rulers create so many other laws where people can be stoned to death for the most minor of transgressions? If the leaders of a people can say that people must not eat certain foods and wear certain types of textiles, in the name of God, ensuring the well being of a few who profit from the selling of such wares, then they sacrifice right and wrong for the profit of a few. What are God's laws when men can say that priests can commune with God, and all other men must go through them and their sometimes faulty beliefs for God to hear us or to love God properly? What do God's laws mean when some people are treated differently than others under the law? How can we say we love others as ourselves when a law permits a man to sell his daughter into slavery, and a man who challenges it, a man that loves the daughter, can be put to death? When we put our laws, our faults, our fears, our prejudices, our desires for profit, above the laws of God, then we are acting without faith in God, and we sin against God and against one another. The Israelites are just one recorded example of this.

We the United States are now putting the laws of man above the laws of God that serve to protect our freedom, and many of us are claiming our actions in his name. The nation of the Israelites was destroyed in so doing, their people scattered abroad, and times of isolation, pain and persecution followed, where they were murdered often for no more than their race and their tradition. Other nations have been destroyed acting much as the Israelites did, and dark ages followed them as well. If we do not change the course we have embraced, our nation will be destroyed, and a darkness will follow that will cover the Earth. We can repent unto the last day, we can change our hearts and choose to do unto others as we would have done unto us, but we will pay for our sins if we do not meaningfully choose repentance. We must repent now, before it is too late to change our course. A nation is created from its people, and in a democracy where the leaders are chosen by the people, those who understand the difference between good and evil must rise up to make the wrong things right. When we become too vain, too sinful, too greedy, too belligerent to see our mistakes for what they are, our nation will be unable to change its course, and God will allow us to destroy ourselves. Those who survive us will have the opportunity to carry on the good things that we have learned and taught. We must remember the things we did and why we did them so that we may have the opportunity to rectify them or at least give ourselves the opportunity not to repeat such mistakes again and again. But if we can prevent future catastrophe and preserve for our children the freedom to choose that we have enjoyed, then it is incumbent upon us to try.

An important concept to understand is that we must keep our history holy, as God would have it. The Israelites were God's people, and they kept their history very well. They made mistakes, and they worked evil against other peoples for their own gain, and they often tried to assuage their consciences by saying that they acted in the service of God. They annihilated entire tribes of other

peoples, acting with the purpose of genocide, while claiming a divine purpose. I touched earlier on the Battle of Jericho, where the Israelites were led by Joshua, a cunning, ruthless and remorseless leader, who said that God commanded them to kill every man, woman and child of a city state that did nothing against them but exist on land that the Israelites believed to be their own by divine right. They surrounded the city of Jericho, a walled city, they broke through the walls, and they killed everyone inside except those who plotted with the Israelites against their own people. Men were forced to stab little girls and babies to death in the name of God, so soon after God had commanded them that they should not kill, because they allowed a ruthless and charismatic leader come to power who would kill any who disobeyed his order. God's ethics are not situational, and God never commands us to do evil. These are the things of men. The irony should be lost on no one that Adolf Hitler was too largely successful in doing to the Jews what they did to other peoples. But the Israelites kept their history holy, and God has sustained them. Their leaders told them that they were acting in the name of God, and I wonder if Joshua has yet repented for taking the Lord's name in vain, and for coveting what was not theirs, and for the murder of so many innocents, but the truth of what they did is known. They kept their history holy. Never did they turn around and rewrite their testament, or try to revise their history, and it could be argued that they learned from their mistakes. They suffered many things, but they kept their history holy, and God has sustained them through dark times.

We know through historical record that the Israelites were taken up by the Romans and scattered into foreign lands for nearly two-thousand years, with their temple destroyed and having no homeland of their own. They were similarly scattered and their temple destroyed more than 400 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. The Bible records it as punishment for rejecting or disobeying God. Whether or not we choose to believe that this was the reason, it did happen. The Bible records a number of other instances where God acts through nature to destroy entire populations of wicked peoples. One example of this are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the people were so wicked that crowds of men demanded to have sexual intercourse with strangers who enter their city. In the story in Genesis the strangers were angels, and the best man among the inhabitants of Sodom, Lot, offers his two daughters to the crowd in the place of the men the crowd sought to rape. The story is told from the point of view of Abraham, who contends with God that the city should be spared if only 10 righteous people can be found. In the end Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by fire from the sky, and only Lot and his daughters are spared.

The most famous and complete story of worldwide destruction by God is the story of Noah, who was believed by those who wrote the story to be a direct descendant of Adam. According to the story the common people lived their lives wickedly, without respect to God's will. God commands Noah to build an ark, once thought to be a large boat as we would conceive of it, but now more widely believed to be a large, airtight box, and he has Noah bring a male and female of each animal aboard, along with his family, so that they can eventually repopulate the world. When they are safe aboard the ark, God causes it to rain for 40 days and 40 nights, and all save the inhabitants of the ark are destroyed. The story of Noah has roots that trace to other cultures and their theologies, where the peoples of whole worlds are destroyed by floods save for a chosen righteous few that survive, but the record of natural history has since revealed that the entire world has never been destroyed by a

flood. This story can still be taken as a warning. While it is primarily about righteousness and being faithful to God, it can be read as a story of being prepared to survive. Noah takes the animals into the ark so that all species will survive, to preserve the world God had made. In that sense it can be read that being faithful to God and protecting the species of life in the world are interrelated concepts. While God has not destroyed the world with a flood, the survival of man may yet depend on ensuring the survival of other life in the world; what we have come to understand as bio-diversity.

There have been times when entire tribes or peoples have been lost to nature, which people can choose to believe is God's wrath or no, but I finish this section with a story that combines historical clues with legend where an entire civilization ended suddenly from a natural event. As most students of history will remember, there were a people believed to center their culture on the Mediterranean island of Crete called the Minoans, which was the greatest civilization of its time. The Minoans were a seafaring people whose culture spread across the Mediterranean. The remains of their civilization on Crete reveals that they worshiped bulls as Gods. The early Greeks were terrified of them, confirmed by the legend of the Minotaur, where the Minoan king had built a labyrinth for a half-man, half-bull monster, and the Greeks were forced every nine years to send seven young men and seven virgin girls to be feasted upon by the Minotaur. We know that a half-bull monster can not have existed, but a priest wearing a bull-head mask is possible. Egyptian records have also been found that describe a great people of the sea existing contemporary to the pre-Moses Egyptians, and their great city was made of concentric canals cut across their island home. And then the Minoans simply vanished. A parallel story from the Greek world, later recounted by Plato, tells of a great people of Atlantis who were technologically superior to the rest of the world whose island civilization simply disappeared beneath the sea. Archaeologists have since discovered remnants of such a civilization east of Crete, which was destroyed by one of the greatest volcanic eruptions in human history that produced tidal waves that destroyed their world in a single day. The island capital of their world was literally blasted out of existence. One day they were arguably the greatest civilization in the world, and the next day they were gone.

We can draw parallels between these stories if we choose, but we have only pieces of evidence. We have no way of knowing whether the Minoans were a technologically superior people that conducted ritual human sacrifice as witnessed by Greek legend. Greek legend also casts the Atlantians as building their empire on the backs of slaves. We can choose to believe that the most blessed of the world's people was destroyed by an act of God for doing evil, but we have little basis for believing so. But the Minoan people were largely destroyed by a single volcanic eruption, and their history was destroyed along with them. Aside from the evidence of the Thera volcano and the ruins of Crete, we have only the records of their enemies and contemporaries to go by. We only know that such a civilization was destroyed, which suggests that if we have warning signs that signify our civilization could be similarly destroyed, we should choose to take those signs seriously. When we eliminate the bio-diversity that we might rely on for our food supply, over-fish our oceans beyond the point of sustainability, cut down our forests, and greatly increase our output of hydrocarbons and toxic chemicals, we can witness the very real atmosphere-changing effects of that our actions are having, and we can foresee a very real catastrophe in our future.

If we ignore the effects of this abuse, the cataclysms that come will be our own doing. In this context we can treat stories from the Bible and others, stories from our historical and theological understanding, as warnings. The solution certainly is not to lash out at one another over the petty issues that we perceive to be part of our morality or religion. The solution is not to find ways to enable the strong or the many to control or even enslave the weak for the purpose of profit or power. If we are to survive or even prevent the disaster we are creating, the solution will be in learning to love one another as we would love ourselves and, in so doing, finding ways to agree to curb our behaviors and trends that ultimately affect the world as we know it. If we fail, it will not be because God has not provided us ample guidance. And I write this because it is still possible that we can still make a good difference, or “turn a potential” worldwide “Chernobyl into a mere Three Mile Island.”

CHAPTER 6 - Understanding the existence of God

Many who believe in the difference between right and wrong would make a contention that should be addressed here. These would say, "There is no God. We are the ultimate arbiters of the right and wrong of the decisions we make." It is certainly possible for a person who simply believes in right and wrong, who does not believe in God at all, to serve God by loving his fellow man and obeying God's commandments, even if that person doesn't believe God has given us commandments. But the vast majority of people are not capable of understanding the difference between right and wrong without some guidance as to what is good and what is evil. If we lack a higher understanding of the difference between good and evil, most of us will simply choose to do what is good for us and those we love in the moment. Right and wrong too often become a matter of expedience, or pleasure over pain, or self preservation.

Imagine a good man who does good his whole life, who is self sacrificing in the proper situations and who serves the good of his fellow man his whole life. At the end of his life, another man, whose heart is not as good as the first, seeks his guidance. The man seeking the good man's wisdom says to him, "sir, you have done good things for people. How can I do the same?" What can the good, but faithless, man tell the seeker? "I did good and put the needs of other people before my own. Love others as yourself. Do as I have done." Without an understanding of God, without any way to define right and wrong, what can the person seeking guidance do to change his life? Clearly the seeking man wants to do good, but he doesn't understand how. He may walk away concluding that he simply can not do good as the first man did or that he did not have the same advantages as the first man, and his conclusion may bring him a kind of despair or hopelessness that ultimately brings negative consequences in his life and his actions that affect others. The good man might instead tell him that he should do as good as he can. While this is good advice, it ultimately leads most of us to conclude that there is no onus upon us to do better, or to stand for anything that is not easy. So many of us who knew better have simply stood by and watched while other people were herded away to be murdered, and we concluded that there was nothing we could do.

Many who claim to hold atheism, faithlessness in God, as a virtue cite voluminous examples of the evils done by those claiming to serve God. The evils done by men claiming to be in the service of God by our reckoning are uncountable. Examples of this have already been written in this letter, but the evil acts of men hiding behind the guise of faith could fill the books in a library, and that would only be those recorded and remembered. I would be tempted to say that they are uncountable if I did not already know that God remembers them all. But the fact that many of those who claim to serve God are evil and full of deceit does not a whit change the fact that God is, and that God is good. Many more who claim to be God's followers are as he would choose us to be. But inaction by good men sometimes creates a void that is filled by evil.

We are conditioned to believe that the servants of darkness control people by telling them to do evil. It is much more common for them to tell their followers that evil acts are actually good or ultimately serve the greater good. Examples of these are stoning a prostitute to death, lynching a man accused of rape without a trial, beating a couple to death who are affectionate in public, or bombing a village

because suspected insurgents are hiding there. When so many of these acts are committed or defended by people espousing God or citing scriptures, and many more who appear to be like them say nothing, it makes it easier for those who speak against God to buy into the idea that those who serve God don't care about the difference between good and evil. It makes it easier for them to defend the notion that God is not reasonable, that God is not logical in our understanding of the word, and that the common sense that God has given us has no place in the understanding of God.

But the greater reality is that good people who would never condone such evil acts who assert God's existence also fail to promote or defend or explain the reality of God with logic that is supported by our basic human understanding of good and evil. Good people of faith, when trying to explain their faith to a faithless person, or a person with a different understanding, all too often throw their hands up and say, "I cannot help this person." Their failure to change the heart of the faithless is often because of the choice not to undertake the burden of applying logic or reason to their understanding of God, because they themselves choose to believe that God is not logical within their ability to understand. They choose instead to espouse more a kind of faith in faith itself, or blind faith, because they desire to hold onto unreasonable beliefs that many good-hearted and responsible people find offensive. They accept their ignorance, and they drive their would-be followers who will not embrace this ignorance away from them. For an example, if you were the only speaker for God to ever preach to a good but non-spiritual person, and you told her that God finds the open display of the beauty of women offensive, and that women must cover their faces in public, then she might perceive that God's perception is offensive, and illogical, and she would be more likely to reject God. Choosing to serve God, you would have instead served darkness by pushing people away from God with your broken belief. So many people do this in more subtle ways, telling people that this is evil and that is evil, when the examples they cite cause no real harm to anyone, and yet the punishments they claim God requires cause eternal harm to the so-called offenders. They tell people that God would abandon those who disagree to an eternity of suffering for simply being as they are. In this day people openly rejecting God because of arguments like these made by people who claim to be God's servants are much more common than only decades ago. And those espousing to be the servants of God do so more loudly, and others reject God more loudly. In the last twenty years, the percentage of Americans who claim to be Evangelical Christians and those claiming to be atheists have both increased considerably. The simple idea of right and wrong, of serving God by doing actual good for one another, and following basic laws of right and wrong, is getting lost in the din.

A faithful woman once told me that there was no point in she and I debating the purpose of God, or what is right and wrong by God, because that is left to Biblical scholars, as if the perceptions of those not part of the existing establishment mean little to nothing. There is no reason that a true understanding of God has to be limited to priests or to scholars. When we accept some basic truths, simple concepts that we know to be true and that even the simple among us can understand and define, and when we limit our assertions to that which springs from these truths, then God becomes easy to understand and to communicate to rational people of different mind sets. The different religions, churches and accepted schools of thought that have kept people separated, often intentionally, become less significant barriers to understanding.

Simple truths. God is good. We may not be able to define good in a way that we can agree upon, but those who choose to put good over evil can agree on what action is good in most situations. Good is not situational, but we can begin to define it with simple examples. If we randomly encounter a drowning child at the edge of a pool, and we know that our only options are to pull the child from the water, walk by without stopping, or kick the child in the face because there will be no repercussion to us, we all know which is the most good and which is the most evil. Certainly life is not often as simple as that example, but we have the ability to discern right and wrong in given situations. So for us to throw up our hands and say that we don't understand right and wrong generally amounts to one of three things. It is a degree of cowardice on our part that we don't stand up for what is good, we feign ignorance because we choose to do evil or simply not to resist it, or we lack the conviction to really care about the difference. Usually it is a combination of these things. God, being good always, would never command us to do evil, or even to avoid doing good when we have the opportunity to do so. This is simple logic and well within our human understanding. God is truth, and there is no lie in God. This is equally simple. God is purposeful. In some respects it really is as simple as these three truths. This does not take into account, of course, the darkness of ignorance and confusion acknowledged earlier in this letter, but when the difference between right and wrong is clear, there is a right and wrong, or good and evil, and God is good.

Perhaps this could be considered an aside, but many who argue that there is no God say that they have never seen evidence of him, and since no one can provide evidence of having seen him, they conclude that there must be no God. To many of these who would choose to rely on evidence one might ask if there is life in the universe outside of this Earth, and they would tend to answer, based upon our simple understanding of physics and biology, that there certainly must be. I have without a doubt never witnessed life outside of this planet of which I am aware, and yet I know with great certainty, given what we know about the composition of the universe, our understanding of mathematics, physics, biology, and the barely conceivably vast number of stars and planets in the universe, with only a minuscule fraction of them within the range of our best telescopes, that there must certainly be life throughout the universe. A counter argument similar to the one made against the existence of God is that there is not life outside of our planet because we have never seen it. When hard evidence or eyewitness accounts of extraterrestrial life visiting this world are offered that can be examined conclusively, they generally seem to turn out to be false in as much as the evidence can be examined. This demonstrates how it is illogical to conclude that what must be is not simply because we have not seen it and evidence offered is questionable. Of course there is life beyond our own world. Our planet is younger than most, and we are at the outer reaches of a vast universe. Certainly many think they can conceive of the vastness of the universe, but it is much easier to imagine that one can conceive of the vastness of a thing than to actually conceive of it. We are in a far-flung solar system in a small galaxy on the edge of physical reality. So too is it difficult to truly conceive of God. Life outside of our planet is because it must be, even though others will say with a certainty that it is not because there is no hard evidence of it and that there is nothing to be gained by believing it in any event. God is because God must be.

An argument supporting this is that God is necessary for material to have existed in this universe at all. We have all heard of and in some cases studied the "big bang" theory, that there was a time

when nothing existed but matter and energy, and our universe simply exploded into existence. In order for there to have been matter at the beginning of time, it must have been created somehow. The sciences of physics and chemistry enable us to understand how the physical forces of the universe exist and interact, and by studying these we find remarkably consistent properties that enable our understanding to become more and more definite over time, ultimately explaining things that were once considered impossible or unknowable. Nothing in the laws of physical existence has explained how the matter that comprised the whole universe sprung into being. Matter can not simply appear nor will itself into existence. While the laws of nature apply to all creation, and creation is a physical thing, matter and antimatter, light and energy, movement over time and space, the laws of nature, those laws do not apply to the existence of God. An all-powerful God can, in fact, will himself into existence, and an all-powerful God can will the existence of all the matter in the physical universe. Again, God is because God must be. If the question is answered, God is, because God must be, then the real questions become not whether God is, but what God is and why God is, and, more relevant to our lives, how do we apply this understanding to our lives on this Earth and the choices we make as individuals?

Many who don't seek a greater responsibility choose instead to disprove God because of what they perceive to be his failures. If God knows all, they ask, then why does he not seem to know in advance the mistakes that we make so that he can protect the innocent? The simple answer is that while God is all powerful, and God is all knowing in the sense that he knows everything that ever was and the good and evil of every situation, God does not know all that will happen because we have been empowered with free will. We have the power to do, and the things we do can affect our reality and the reality of others. This is a scary concept to those who do not believe in the darkness, or those who choose to clothe themselves in the darkness for their own purposes, but the things we do, the decisions we make, do in fact matter to both God and to our fate. A great number of us, some atheists and the Calvinist Christians, for two examples, choose to believe that there is ultimately no free will, which allows us to be relieved of responsibility for the consequences of our actions. Those types of Christians in particular, servants of darkness, believe that God is all knowing and therefore everything we do is predestined, so why try to do better? Whether you will see God's heaven or not was known long before you were conceived, so they teach. Why beat ourselves up over our mistakes? Many of the atheists, on the other hand, believe that we will ultimately all die and rot and become nothing, and so will the entirety of the earth, so nothing really has a purpose. In the end it will all be gone, and no one will be left to remember what was. Sometimes things which are polar opposites really amount to the same thing. If you can convince yourself of either position, then really nothing you do matters, other than what serves your pleasure and that which causes you pain. By this thinking, if we help a person, we are only doing it to make ourselves feel better, and if we hurt a person, we are only doing it to make ourselves feel better. Good and evil lose all meaning. This is such a shamefully sad dodge of responsibility. What a terrible way to relieve oneself of the burden of guilt, or the burden of love. I saw a sign in front of a church that read, "God can never fail." From our perspective, this is simply not true. God can fail if we fail him, because we have free will. The Earth is one of many drops of God's love, of sentient life, in a vastly cold universe, and if we fail God, as he has commanded us to prosper, he also fails. We in theory could have destroyed the

world, at least the part of it we would call civilization, with our nuclear weapons, but so far we have not. This is to our credit. But, while God is here to guide us, we need to acknowledge that the burden of our success is on us and on our ability to make the right decisions. God knows everything that is and everything that ever was. If there is a meteor flung by an exploding star 1000 years ago, yet millions of miles away, that is on a path to strike and destroy all life on this planet 1000 years from now, God knows it already. But God only knows what is likely to happen, because we might find a way to save ourselves between now and then, as God would have it. He will guide us if we allow him to do so, but it is incumbent upon us to act. The necessity of “doing” is our responsibility.

The first morality story in the Bible speaks directly to free will. Most of us are familiar with the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis. In this story Adam and Eve are the first man and woman made by God on the sixth day of creation. God gives them dominion over the garden and puts them over the animals. At the beginning of the story Adam and Eve are as children, innocent and unaware of their human condition, and God gives them but one commandment, which is never to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for if they eat of the tree, they will surely die. A serpent, representing the devil, tempts Eve to eat of the tree, telling her that she will not die but rather she will have an understanding like God’s, and after eating she then tempts Adam to do the same. After eating the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve lose their innocence, realizing their nakedness and clothing themselves, and God soon learns of their disobedience and expels them from the garden. From that point Adam is cursed with the burden of hard labor, and Eve is cursed with the pain of childbirth.

There are those who believe that this story is true in a literal sense, but there are many others, including myself, who believe that this story has deep symbolic meaning. I have heard at least one interpretation that the eating of the fruit was the point that mankind learned the art of agriculture, moving from a pastoral life of herding animals and gathering what the Earth provides to a life of tilling the ground and bringing forth the food that we choose. While the agricultural revolution is widely considered the birth of civilization, it was also the moment that lead directly to the human population explosion and war as we know it. The increased production of food leads to the birthing of more people, a bad harvest leads to famine, and we then seek to control more land for further cultivation, which leads to mass conflict between large groups of people and eventually to increased food production and even more people to feed. For better or worse, the world in which we live today is the result. But the more important point of the story is that at some point in history mankind developed the propensity to understand the difference between good and evil far above that of other animals, and with that understanding comes a burden. We have the capacity to love and the capacity to kill for pleasure or out of hatred. We can shape our environment for good purposes, and we can destroy it. While we lack a perfect understanding, God has made it possible for us to know the difference between right and wrong, but it is up to us to exercise our free will for good or for evil. Some who claim to speak for God say that we must instead abandon our understanding of right and wrong and just have blind faith in God, but the first chapter of the Bible tells us otherwise. God can show us the way if we seek his guidance, but the choice is ultimately ours to make.

I would ask you here to consider in a more speculative way the notion of free will from what we can imagine to be God's point of view. The question is, why would an all-powerful and all-knowing God create free-willed beings that have the potential to destroy his creation? An atheist challenge I have heard to the existence of God is that it is illogical that such a being would create people simply to worship him, and they call the notion that God created us simply to please him, "mental masturbation." This is relevant to the preceding example that we err when we try to help people understand God by using illogical and immoral examples that we ourselves don't understand. The Judeo-Christian example of God has often been one that rewards those who obey him and angrily destroys those who do not. The doubtful critics of this notion ask why God would be so self-involved and insensitive that he would create followers with the intention of tormenting some of them simply for not obeying him as he must know that they will not? The Israelites, after all, killed and burned animals so their burning flesh would provide, "a sweet savor to the Lord." How could a good and all-powerful God have such a fragile ego and an arguably cruel disposition?

In answering this question, I ask you to put aside the cruel or otherwise illogical notions of God that people claiming to follow him have given you in the past, as these are borne of a human lack of understanding. Instead use your simple understanding of right and wrong to consider a good and logical God the Father that loves his creation and loves us as his children. Though difficult, try to put yourself in the place of a singular all-powerful being that simply exists in an infinite void, and the only rule is that you can not destroy yourself, thus ending all existence. You can create anything, so you create a universe of mighty works that are beautiful to you. Everything is perfect and moves like clockwork, but after eons of witnessing it you become bored. It is merely static. So you create beings that live and think on their own that serve your will. Like the universe you've created, they are beautiful and perfect, offering conversation and admiring your many worlds. Every creator, every artist, creates that which is beautiful to him, but given enough time you become bored even with that. If you create only beings that will ultimately serve you, then they are no different than objects, even though they otherwise feel and adore you and think individual thoughts. While you can simply destroy your creation at your whim, you could instead choose to create beings that ultimately hate what you have made. You make these in particular so that they hate what you have made, and they destroy it, and ultimately they are no different than your creations that were made to love you. They are simply doing your will. So you make both to exist simultaneously, some destroying and some creating, some loving and some hating, and given enough time you come to realize that everything is still static. No matter how many times you repeat the experiment, you watch the results that you know will transpire as they happen. Whether your creation is made more beautiful or destroyed is still ultimately within your control. If you give sway to the destroyers, your creation will be destroyed. If you instead will that your servants who preserve your creation prevail, it will simply go on forever, and it will ultimately remain static.

So you realize that your only alternative is to create a universe that will develop as you will, but that within which will develop beings that have a spark of your own life, that will have the capacity to create or destroy as they will. You know in advance that by giving them free will you will be able to witness their successes, their failures, their progress, pain and pleasure. They will become as children to you. Rather than creating them to love you, you give them the ability to choose to love

you. In doing so, you know that some of them will choose to hate you. Some of them will love one another, and some of them will hate their fellow beings. But because they are your children, you love all of them. It pleases you when your children choose to act in a way that you would choose for them. It saddens you when your children hurt themselves and hurt one another, but you have to allow them the choice to do so in order to appreciate the good choices they make. You give them the opportunity to know the consequences of evil and destructive choices, and the destruction they bring upon themselves can serve as a correcting mechanism, but you ultimately give them the choice to make. And it is greatly satisfying to you when they learn to choose better over time, ultimately serving you better, loving you better, and better loving one another. Ultimately you provide for them an alternate state of being where they can be with you, their accomplishments remembered forever.

While this likely comes up well short of understanding God's relationship to us, it is simply provided as a way to see God's love for us akin to the way we love our own children. This may be easier to understand for those of us who have children. We love our children, even when they disappoint us and hurt one another. Most of us would have our children love one another, but we give them leave to make their own choices. When they err and discover the error of their ways and come back to us, we love them even more. We love watching them grow and change, and we get great satisfaction from their simplest accomplishments. When your child first learns to speak, when they begin to learn independently of our guidance, when they discover new understanding of love, we treasure these things, even though we might be utterly unimpressed by the same accomplishments by another adult. If we are fortunate, we can learn to love these things in other people's children as well. God loves us in this way, as an especially good parent who loves all his children. It isn't mental masturbation. God didn't create us simply to hear us say, "I love you, God."

Getting back to our understanding of God, while this is an oversimplification, it could be understood that there are three basic types who claim not to believe in God. The general term used that can basically describe all is nonbelievers. The simplest type of nonbeliever is one who feels no strong impetus to believe anything that has not been proven or simply shown or demonstrated to them. Nonbelievers are typically assumed to include agnostics, which is accurate to the extent that agnostics may or may not believe in God, or gods, as defined by the notion of a conscious deity, but believe they lack enough definitive ideas about God to say that they subscribe to any particular belief or set of beliefs that attempt to define him. Many agnostics refrain from belief in general. Other agnostics, sometimes called spiritual agnostics, believe very much in God, but they will not say what he or it is. If you speak with them, they will tell you things that they believe are true, or might be true, or must be true concerning God, but there is not enough consistency among those who consider themselves agnostics to really provide a definition. The number of professed nonbelievers in the United States is in the tens of millions at the time of this writing.

Atheists, by contrast, believe that there is no God. They believe that our Earth, our universe, is a fortunate coincidence that can be explained, or could eventually be explained, entirely by scientific endeavors, and if it can not, it really is not a concern to them. Atheists affirmatively believe that there is no God and there can not be. They reject God. They say that there is no God, and many of them affirm that those who believe that God is are simply delusional. They perceive those who believe in God to be like cattle, opening themselves up to the abuse of others to fill the gap of

misunderstanding within themselves. They believe themselves to be smarter than those who seek to fill the void with an understanding of God. They say that there is no void or darkness that can be explained by God. The number of confirmed atheists in the United States at the time of this writing, while significantly higher than only a decade prior, is only a few million, which is around one percent of the United States population. For such a small number of individuals, they certainly manage to voice their position so that it seems more a voice of the people's consciousness than it is. They do tend to defend their position, however, with examples of Christians and Muslims and Jews and others that set a bad example for everyone else, nonbelievers and believers alike. Nonbelievers and atheists may seem similar to the point that their differences are insignificant, but a comparative example could be made with two different groups of people who don't believe in extraterrestrial life. "I don't believe that there is intelligent life beyond our own on this Earth." "There is no intelligent life beyond our own on this Earth." Those two statements are similar, but it is very different to say that one does not believe in something and for another to say affirmatively that something is not.

The paragraph above begins by saying that there are three basic types of nonbelievers, and yet there are only two defined, albeit clumsily. The third type comes from both those who say there is no God and those who simply say that they don't believe in God. Many people of faith can likely recall a conversation with a nonbeliever or an atheist where the person of faith is trying to communicate to the other a different kind of understanding. I have had and witnessed many such discussions, and the atheists' position usually employs a closed-ended but appreciably consistent kind of logic. "There is no proof of God. Just because so many want God to be doesn't mean that he is. Everything can be explained by natural phenomena, by physics and biology and the like." It can be hard to reach people who believe they already have everything figured out. There is, however, a tender-hearted type of nonbeliever, more common than I would have once believed, that believes that God has failed them. They don't believe in God, they often vehemently affirm that God does not exist, because if he does, then he is not good because he has failed to prevent the suffering of the innocent. They are angry with God. They have typically lost people in their lives that they loved, and they blame God for it. Often they lost loved ones when they were young, having no understanding of God. Not believing that they can see their loved ones again, they feel powerless and hopeless. Sometimes they blame God for things that have been done to strangers. These are nonbelievers, usually atheists, often full of love for their fellow man, but without faith, without hope in something beyond that which can be physically demonstrated. They feel hopeless, and their message to do good, to love your fellow man, is filled with that hopelessness. They ultimately believe Jesus' second commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself, but not the first. They don't love God and are quite upset with him if he does exist, because they think that if they were acting in God's place, they would do better. They choose to say that they are as other nonbelievers, but when they speak of God, when you ask them the right questions, their hearts fill with anger and their voices tremble. This letter is written to all of God's children, but to those who have found reason to believe God has failed us, I ask you in particular to consider the alternative understanding and hope provided in this letter.

Similar to being all knowing, it is said that God is all powerful. This is true. If God is all powerful, what, then, is the limit of God's power? I have asked many this question, and a good answer is that

the person does not know. The wrong answer is that there is no limit to God's power. The most correct answer that we can conceive of is that the limit to God's power is all. All that can be done, God can do, and no more. Anything we can possibly conceive of and more can be done by God. A young man, filled with anger, who claims to be an atheist but who is in fact angry with the God he believes does not exist, once told me not long after the terrible tsunami in the Indian Ocean which killed multiple tens of thousands that if God were good that he would have made the world so that there are no tsunamis. I asked how, given that there are fault lines beneath the Earth's surface separating the plates of land mass that have made the Earth what it is, that God could have made the world with no tsunamis? He answered that God could have made the cliffs high enough that no one would have drowned. When I mentioned the environmental impact of a world with all cliffs, he said that God could have made it instead that all people could breathe underwater. The debate descended into silliness because he was trying to make a point that was illogical and in fact could not be made. We can not define God as all-powerful with our limited understanding, and when we try, we find fault with God.

If all-powerful, or omnipotent, meant that there were no limit to what God can do, then God could simply snap his fingers and instantly make this vast universe 100 times as large as it is, or a billion times. Some of us think that we can conceive of God doing such a thing. We think we can picture the universe, and then we imagine ourselves picturing it 100 times larger by pretending to step back from it in our minds and watching it grow, but we're only imagining it. Assuming that God could simply do anything is one of those insulting ideas that a well-intentioned person might use to accidentally push people away from God. "If God could simply do anything, then why did he let my dad die in Iraq?" "Why do so many babies die in the Ethiopian desert?" "Why did I give my husband a lifetime of love so God could let him leave me for his secretary?" We have some understanding of good and evil, and none of these examples are good, so when we tell ourselves that God's power is unlimited, that the world should be without suffering for the innocent, we find fault with God. We choose to believe that God is not good. We blame him for our pain, and for our tragedy, and for the tragedy of others, imagining that we could have done his job better. But when we accept that God, though all-powerful, has made the world and the universe as well as it could be, we can accept that the limits to God's power are the limits of our own understanding. God has done it as well as it could have been done. God has given us the best world that he could have given us. We must exist now in this world of physical limitations, and our lives, and the lives of one another, are affected by the choices we make, but God helps all of us to do good, to love and enjoy life, and to appreciate his creation as much as we can. He helps us as much as he can, but it is for us to help each other as much as it is given to us to do so. The limitations of our physical world, death, scarcity, natural disaster, are necessary, but it is within our power to make life better.

Someone might argue that just because it is logical for God to exist does not mean that he does exist. The answer requires us to consider whether it matters if we choose good or evil when it has absolutely no consequence in the physical world in which we exist. The following is an example demonstrating that good and evil matter if God is, and without God good and evil become meaningless but for the consequences that we can perceive. In one scenario there are two men on a raft in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean where there is no life, outside of any shipping lanes, and

they are starving and very unlikely to be rescued. Both men agree that their lives are inviolable and that since they could by some miracle be rescued any next minute, they will not harm one another. They both starve to death, the raft sinks, and no one on this Earth knows what happened to them. In the second scenario one of the two men decides that since his small chance of being rescued will increase, and since there is no reason that both of them should die, that he should murder the other man in his sleep, and he does murder him. He eats the body of his murdered neighbor, lives one additional week, and then dies, the raft sinks, and no one on this Earth ever knows what happened to them.

Does it matter which scenario actually transpires? Given that there is no actual consequence to anyone on this Earth whether murder was done or whether it was not, does it matter whether one man murdered the other man in his sleep? Is there any purpose in it? If this were an actual situation, and it has been time and time again, does it matter whether one man put his right to survival over another's equal right to survival? Imagine a situation where two men and their families, a wife and two children each, share a parcel of land, and both men hate one another because of a grievance. If one man kills the other man as a precaution to protect his own wife and children, when the second man has taken no action to harm him or his family, and the murder victim's wife and children will starve to death, does it matter if no one remembers it or holds him accountable? If a man kills his brother's wife, and makes it look as though his brother was the murderer, and all knowing the brother go to their graves hating the innocent brother for killing his wife, does it matter what actually transpired? What you decide here in your heart in these assessments determines whether you choose to believe that there is a difference between right and wrong, between good and evil, or whether you believe that right and wrong are determined simply by what has the best consequences for those whom you perceive to be like yourself.

To any person who believes in the difference between good and evil, the difference between the decisions made by these men is of great importance. Many of us know in our hearts, like we know that someone in New York City must be named John, even if we do not know of a person in New York City who is named John, we know in our hearts that it absolutely matters whether or not one man chose to murder the other. If the raft in the first example sinks in either event, and no one on this Earth ever knows of the murder, then why does it matter what transpired in any particular situation? The reason, consistent with what we understand of logic and consequence, is that God is, and that God is good, and that God sees all, and, from the purpose of our perspective of understanding, all things done will be remembered always by God. If God does not exist, then our actions are ultimately pointless other than the consequences that serve us.

There is a purpose to this understanding. When faced with a choice such as the one above, will we believe that there is a purpose that is greater than ourselves, or will we choose to commit murder? The answer to this question matters greatly. Much of life for us is a test. It is not a vain test, but one that determines whether we can act with a good purpose greater than our own. And if we choose to accept that we will commit murder and do what is best for us when we believe there will be no earthly consequences, then we will allow others to commit murder when we presume ourselves to

be like them. The example above is a simple one, but a simple example best demonstrates the true choice being made when we eliminate the factors that are cloaked in the darkness.

For a counter example, a man tells a story of a world ravaged by a lethal plague, and it is a plague that can not be detected in an individual until its symptoms become manifest. When the symptoms manifest, all who breathe the air in the vicinity of the plague victim will become infected, and all will die. In this story, a people who have not been infected have secured themselves in a city with an impenetrable wall upon an island. At the gate of this city is a man entrusted to keep out any person, as any person could be infected, and if one infected person enters the city, all will die. The man protecting the city sees a child, a girl, rowing a raft toward the gates of the city. At a distance the girl begs to be let in. If she is allowed to enter, and she is not infected, she will live. If she is not permitted to enter the city, she will die. If she is permitted to enter, and she is infected, all dwelling in the city, including the child, will die. What then, should the man guarding the city do? Should he let the innocent child enter the city, knowing that all of those entrusted to his protection might be killed as a result of his decision, or should the man instead effectively take responsibility for killing the innocent child? This story is provided as a counterpoint to the example of the men in the raft, because, as is often the situation in life, there is no right answer. But it can be an argument that is made to persuade people to believe that there are no right answers, and that there is no right and wrong. A similar example made is that of a loose train car rushing downhill, and the turnstile at the next intersection in its current position will send the car to the right, certainly killing ten children. A man who happens to be standing at the turnstile has a split second opportunity to switch it to the left, but there is one child on the tracks to the left that would certainly be killed by the train car if the turnstile is switched. Is it proper for the man to turn the turnstile to the left, taking the life of one innocent child, but saving ten others?

We can only best do unto others as we would have them do unto us. For those who are faithful, for those who believe, "Thou shalt not kill," among other things, what is the right action to take in these scenarios? The answer is that when every alternative is wrong, we can only do what is right to the best of our ability to understand it. If you love God, if you love other people, if you love the difference between right and wrong, do you believe that God would judge the man harshly who decided to take the life of one innocent child to save many, given that he had no other alternatives? Do you believe that God would judge the man harshly who could not bring himself to take the life of a single child to save many? Does it matter if the man is deeply hurt and emotionally changed by whichever decision he makes? What if his own child was alone on the tracks, and he allows ten other children to be taken to save his one? While it does not answer all of our questions, as we all walk in darkness, we can only do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This is why it is imperative that we must put good over evil when the consequences of our actions, when the differences between right and wrong, are clear. The difference between right and wrong in the raft example is clear to any who care about this difference. The difference between right and wrong in the story of the plague and the island, or the story of the runaway train car, are much less clear. We can not let those who espouse that there is no difference between good and evil use examples shrouded in darkness to shape our perception in ways that can have dire consequences for others.

Whether you believe in God or no, if we do not act for good when we know the difference between good and evil, the evil we do to others, or let befall others, will come back to us.

Some would still choose to justify their actions by saying that good and evil are always situational, so each man should be allowed to do good, or not do good, according to his own conscience and simply believe that it is what it is. God, however, has always been as he is, and right and wrong do not change over time. If we do not have a higher set of laws to guide us, then we are always shaped by our whim and the things we perceive to serve the greater good at whatever moment in time that we exist. If we do not have laws from God, or, as the non-faithful might be more comfortable to understand, a finite, comprehensible and translatable understanding of basic tenets of right and wrong, we will always be held at the mercy of evil men who leverage their wealth and their power to accumulate more wealth and power over others for themselves and their own. If we do not believe that there are basic tenets of good, the servants of darkness will guide us to do evil for their benefit, using the illusion that their benefit is our own, whether we serve them out of fear, vanity, greed or otherwise.

I contend that such simple laws were provided to us thousands of years ago. The Ten Commandments, and the commandments of Jesus Christ, give us a basis for what we need to know and understand. They are as valid today as they were in ages that were vastly different than the one in which we live, and they will continue to be so for the many years to come. It is given to us to abide by them and not put our own laws above them. The Israelites, once the people of God, made their laws above these, and they have endured many persecutions and dark ages. Jesus Christ warned them of their transgressions against the Lord, but they put their laws and their will above God and they were torn apart. They have survived because their faith in God has survived. The United States of America, a people of God, the leaders of the free world, have put our own laws above God's, saying that God commands us to murder, and to steal, and to covet, and all in the vain taking of his name. Will we have the faith to endure the dark age that we have brought upon ourselves? Or, so much the better, can we repent our past wrongs and get back on the path that we set for ourselves only hundreds of years ago? Can we again truly believe that all men were created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Have we gone beyond the place where we have faith, faith in the good God or simply faith in a good purpose that promotes the freedom of all men, and gone irrevocably down the road of desolation and destruction for our own profit and vanity?

We have taken many steps off of the right path, imprisoning many of our brothers for pettiness, killing the innocent in nonsensical wars to acquire wealth and power, or to make ourselves feel safer at the expense of others, and allowing thieves and murderers to parade themselves among us. But we can still act now to make the wrong things right, because we have free will. If we fill our grain fields with asphalt and fill our lakes with feces, we can not expect to bring a good harvest by simply again declaring ourselves to be farmers, but we can always repent and begin to correct our past mistakes. We can always repent, and God will forgive us to the last. The United States of America is still a free country. While the task seems monumental, and it is so, it is within our power to put good people into the positions of governance over us. Great people, people like George Washington,

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, to name only a few, were among our forefathers. This is not to suggest that these men weren't flawed in the eyes of God, or that they didn't make mistakes. We all walk in darkness and most of us are flawed. But there are men such as these, regardless of their descent, who have the ability and the strength of character born amongst us to lead us away from the path of destruction and greed, and back to the path of righteousness. Franklin D. Roosevelt, at the outset of the Second World War, said, "I don't want to see a single war millionaire created in the United States as a result of this world disaster." Not a single millionaire created from tragedy. Sentimental, truly, but have we as a people moved beyond such sentiments? Have we moved past the point of believing in simple right and wrong? If you believe in God, the God that is good and that is truth, or if you simply believe in the difference between right and wrong, then you should continually pray or simply hope that we have not moved so far beyond this point.

CHAPTER 7 - The truths of Jesus Christ

As a warning to those who do not believe in God, or who are not interested in the truth of God, the writing in this chapter is more Biblical in nature, with much taken from the Gospels of Jesus Christ. Of course it is my intention that you continue reading, but you should know in advance that I am a follower of Jesus, so some may have a preconceived notion of what will follow from this point. Your preconceptions might be true, but perhaps not in the way that you perceive them. Please read on and judge what is written here based on the teaching and wisdom that I am able to convey. It does not stray from the message presented to you thus far. It only gives us another way to understand this message, as God would have us understand if we were capable of understanding God in this way. We are all God's children, whether we choose to be or no. I speak directly to all of God's children, as he would have us do. While it has been made necessary for me to speak directly to the American people in particular in this writing, as that is the perspective with which I am most familiar, we could all be Americans, and we could all be Jews, or Christians, or Muslims, or Hindus, or animists, or non-believers because the history of one people can affect the history of all. Jesus' first commandment is, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.** Given that there is one God, those of us who are faithful to a greater, higher power all worship the same God, even though the ways we choose to worship him may be wrong to varying degrees. Jew and Muslim, Christian, Hindu and follower of the Great Spirit worship the same God at different altars. Any message from God is a message to all of us. Believe this, for it is so, no matter what the servants of darkness might tell you otherwise.

There are four canonized gospels of Jesus Christ. They are the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which appear in that order in the Bible. I always encourage all people to read these books, which number only 148 pages in the King James Bible. These are the writings that provide us the teachings of Jesus. These books were written roughly twenty to seventy years after Jesus was crucified. It has come to be understood that the book of Mark was written before Matthew, so the order of the books of the Bible in general is not chronological, but the order in which they appear is significant in terms of historical perspective. Given the recurrence of certain stories and phrases, it is believed that Mark, the simplest of the four, was written approximately twenty years after Jesus' crucifixion. It is widely believed that there was another gospel, referred to as the Gospel of Q, German for "quelle", or source, that was also written around the same time, although this gospel seems to have been lost. It is believed that Matthew came directly from both Mark and the Gospel of Q, and that Luke, possibly written by a contemporary of Paul, came from Mark and Matthew. Even discounting the Gospel of Q, and assuming that it did not exist, there is a clear progression in the four existing gospels. Matthew was written approximately ten years after Mark and contains much more in terms of Jesus' preaching regarding doing good to one another and serving God in so doing. Luke was written perhaps a few years after Matthew, and it adds a great deal of back story regarding Jesus' birth and childhood that is not found in the first two. In fact, only Matthew and Luke tell us Jesus was born of a virgin, and the Qur'an presents it in great detail, but whether or not Jesus was born of a virgin is a matter for debate that settles nothing. In Luke, much more than the first two gospels, it refers to Jesus as "Lord", and says that men can not know the Father but through

the Son, although it in no way calls Jesus God, but the Savior, the chosen one of God. Despite the differences, and the new parables of Jesus that spring up after the writing of Mark to the time of the writing of Luke, the first three gospels are remarkably similar in both content and tone.

A noteworthy difference in the first three gospels is the story of Jesus' resurrection. The variations on Jesus' resurrection illustrate the different conclusions drawn at the end by different people, or groups of people, who are widely believed by many to have witnessed Jesus' life and teaching, who give otherwise remarkably similar accounts. They all independently describe the same events the same way and then conclude very differently. In Mark, Mary Magdalene and two other women go to anoint Jesus' body with spices, and upon arriving they find the heavy stone blocking the entrance to the tomb rolled away and inside find a young man in white clothing who tells them that Jesus is risen and to meet him in Galilee. Jesus then appears to Mary Magdalene, and she tells the disciples of this amidst their mourning, and they don't believe her. He next appears to two others who tell the disciples, but they still do not believe. Finally he appears to the other eleven of his disciples, upbraiding them for their disbelief, and he sends them forth with the power to heal and do miraculous things before he is taken into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. In the Matthew resurrection, an angel from heaven descends before Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary and rolls away the stone. The guards of the tomb are frozen with fear "as dead men." It is noteworthy here that this gospel relates how the priests bribed the guards of the tomb with great sums of money to say that these things did not happen. The angels tell the women to run and tell the disciples, and they do so with great joy. Jesus appears to them on their way, and they worship him, holding him by the feet. Jesus sends them to the disciples who go to see him in Galilee. Jesus meets them there and tells them that he has been given all power in heaven and earth, and to go and teach all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things Jesus has commanded. Luke tells this story with much more detail. Mary and the other women go to the tomb and, finding the stone rolled away, subsequently encounter two men in shining garments. The men, to be understood as angels, say that Jesus was delivered into the hands of sinful men and rose again on the third day, as he said. They go and tell the rest of the disciples, but the other disciples do not believe. Later two disciples are walking along a road when Jesus appearing as a man joins them and asks them why they are sad. The men recount Jesus' crucifixion and how certain women went to the tomb and found it empty. Jesus then asks them why he should not have suffered all of these things, and he recounts to them the Old Testament stories of the prophets and how they concern him. The men ask him to stay with them, and when they recognize him upon his breaking and blessing the bread, he vanishes. He later appears to the eleven apostles in Jerusalem, and they are terrified, thinking him to be a ghost. Jesus invites them to touch him, including his hands and feet, to see that he is indeed a living man, and he eats a meal with them. He then explains to them how he must fulfill the scriptures of the Old Testament, the things written in the laws of Moses and the Psalms, and he opens their understanding concerning these things. He tells them how it was necessary for him to suffer and to rise again from the dead, and that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name among all nations, and that they should wait until this power is given to them from God. He walks with them for awhile and then lifts his hands and blesses them and is taken up to heaven, and they return to Jerusalem with great joy, praising him always.

The first three gospels witness similar events in a similar tone, and while the stories regarding Jesus' resurrection become more and more elaborate over time, giving radically different details of an event that must have been finite, they all leave the reader with a similar conclusion. Jesus rose from the dead and was taken into heaven. Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and the miracles that he did upon the earth, miracles not refuted by any within the gospels nor repudiated by history, were a testament to this. The simple inconsistencies of these three relations of his resurrection should invite skepticism, but they don't change the facts related by the consistent texts preceding them that he was, that he taught and did many marvelous things, that he presented a kind of wisdom and understanding in parable that has taught people even to this day, and that he was crucified brutally and publicly for simply loving and serving God, his Father and our Father, in such a way that ensured that people would not stop loving him, loving his word, and teaching the things that he taught. The details of his resurrection change from book to book, but his basic message and the details of his teaching change very little. The details of his crucifixion, witnessed by many in that day, are exceedingly consistent.

The Gospel of John presents a very different picture. The Gospel of John, written a full sixty years after Jesus' death, when Jesus' living followers were gone or very old, presents many new stories and new ideas. John teaches without much room for interpretation that Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only way to see and know God. Unlike the first three gospels, the Gospel of John includes the teachings of Paul, who wrote most of the rest of the New Testament, and those like minded. While many of the stories and teachings are mostly the same, a great number of the stories in the Gospel of John, compared to the first three gospels, are often very different in content and very different in their conclusion. This isn't to suggest that they are necessarily bad. One of them is to me personally the most touching in the Bible, and while you have likely heard it, I will quote the King James version here because it is beautiful and perhaps more vivid than you may remember or have heard in retelling. Bear in mind that it was added to the stories of the other gospels long after the other three were written, which should make us especially skeptical as to its veracity, but I choose to believe it for myself because it is powerful and wise, and the conclusion is strikingly logical. This is from the eighth chapter of John:

“And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none other but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

Go, and sin no more. But the teachings of Jesus written in John, generations after Jesus was crucified, mainly preach a much different message. They draw the reader to the conclusion that Jesus was not only the Son of God, that he was not only the Messiah, God's chosen one, but that Jesus is, in fact, God himself on Earth. You have likely heard many times John Chapter 3 Verse 16, which reads, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Less popular is Chapter 3 Verse 18, which reads, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." This says, without room for interpretation, that if you believe in Jesus, you are saved, but if you don't believe in his name, you are condemned already. It says right and wrong, good and evil as we understand them, mean nothing, but as the name of Jesus Christ defines them. It says that there is no salvation but through believing in Jesus Christ; not following him and following his commandments, but simply believing that he is salvation. This Gospel repeats the same sentiment multiple times in varying constructions. This Gospel, written sixty years after Jesus was crucified, makes the reader conclude that Jesus' commandments are more or less without meaning, that Jesus' parables about serving God are without meaning, that most of what he taught in the Sermon on the Mount is without meaning. It teaches that serving God by doing is meaningless. This can not be.

Jesus taught in Matthew, verse after verse in succession, "Blessed are those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." What do these things mean if believing in Jesus is the only way to get into heaven and all others are condemned? It means that Jesus said them, but that they are meaningless, unless the person Jesus described in the lines cited above also believes that Jesus is the one almighty God, or that loving him is the only way to love God. Mahatma Gandhi said, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Gandhi was certainly a peacemaker, and there are Christians who would say he could be called a child of God. But he never professed to believe that Christ was the Messiah, or even the Son of God, and the teachings of Gandhi in no way conclude that the key to salvation revolves around a belief that Jesus Christ was God himself in this world. While there are some Christians who would revere Gandhi, there are many more Christians who would say with the tone of certainty that Gandhi is burning forever in hellfire, or at the very least eternally cast into the outer darkness, where there is great weeping and gnashing of teeth. Perhaps there are even some that both revere Gandhi and believe that he is suffering for eternity. It can not be so, because it is not good that it be so. It is not logical that it be so. How many thousands of examples such as the one of Gandhi are there, spiritual people who served God in some way described by Jesus who many if not most American Christians would say are suffering eternal torment. I have met such people in my own life. It can not be that our heavenly Father would make those who do his work suffer eternal torment for something as little as a gap in understanding.

Even the Bible prior to John refutes this notion. The first page of the Gospel of Luke, the Sixth Verse of the First Chapter, describing a time before the birth of Jesus, reads as follows: "There was

in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” So many people who call themselves Christians support the idea proposed in John, that Jesus is the only salvation, because, as they espouse, all people are evil. “Oh yes you and even me.” What a sad excuse to do evil and then to say, “don’t look at me, EVERYONE is evil.” It sounds like the argument made in prisons by murderers. “Everyone is a murderer, or would be if they had the same circumstances in life that I had.” It is core to the argument that the choices we make don’t matter, or that we shouldn’t be responsible for their consequences. I certainly can not claim to not have done evil, too many who know me know better in any case, but if Zacharias and Elisabeth could be blameless, then certainly there must be many others who are. Many of these people who say it is otherwise would have you believe that nothing you do matters, except for taking Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, because they choose to continue to do evil, to act against God even though Jesus told them repeatedly not to do so, and they believe that Jesus redeems their continued choice, and therefore everyone is evil as they are and must seek the same redemption that they have sought. It is the argument that our understanding of right and wrong does not matter, because right and wrong are defined by the name of Jesus. A counter argument is made at least as far back as the Third Commandment. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” Certainly before Jesus it was understood that the things we say and do are the measure of salvation for men, and even then people could be held guiltless by God. Our good and merciful God, who knows everything that is and that has ever happened, knows what we are and understands our suffering through our words, our pain and our prayers. He knows if we repent the evil we have done and are prepared to accept him, because we make it clear with our words and our deeds. As Jesus taught us, God loves all of his children, from his only begotten Son to the rest of us. He didn’t need the death of his Son to understand our suffering. It is the opposite. We required the death of his Son to see that God understands our suffering.

As previously written in this letter, the Bible is holy not because every word of it is true, but because it gives us the opportunity to see and understand truths of God. Those who wrote the New Testament didn’t invalidate or diminish Jesus’ words any more than the Ten Commandments were invalidated by numerous laws in the Old Testament that gave a myriad of reasons that people could be put to death for minor transgressions against the laws of man. There is a simple and obvious progression in the New Testament gospels through the other books. The ideas in the Gospel of John contrary to the other Gospels spring directly from the Apostle Paul. Paul, who was a Jewish born Roman citizen who persecuted Christians, declared that Jesus had appeared to him personally and instructed him to teach in his name, saying that he was not less than the most important of the apostles. He spent the remainder of his life teaching and writing in Jesus’ name, saying primarily that Jesus was God on Earth and that he, Paul, was his appointed messenger, changing or ignoring Jesus’ teaching. Of Jesus’ words he said, “let us put aside dead doctrines,” and continued with his own word, issuing his own commandments in Jesus’ name. The Gospel of John, written no less than decades after the first Gospels and Paul’s letters, fused the two concepts, and it remains today by

Christians the most quoted and revered book in the Bible. [See letter “The New Testament” which follows this letter.]

Jesus came into the world, taught many people, performed miracles, and was crucified. Those who followed Jesus made it their life’s work to teach of him continually, and as his word spread, many other people called themselves Christians. Mark was written twenty years following his crucifixion, and Matthew and Luke were written soon thereafter. In each retelling the story was expanded as they attempted to reach more people, to make them understand. But it still was not enough for the new Christians, so it morphed into the ideas taught by Paul, that Jesus was not just the Son of God, not just the Messiah, but God himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ. They had to find a way to make people follow them and yet still make room for the laws of man, so they taught people that no matter what you do, if you have Jesus, you have God, and if you do not have Jesus, you can not have God. Jesus’ teaching is hardly revisited throughout these later books, and the purpose his instruction has come to have is only a secondary purpose that serves those who preach Jesus as God, which is mainly to confuse people regarding what they say is Jesus’ primary message. To any who doubt this order of events and believe that Jesus is God, they should ask themselves why it wasn’t the core of Jesus’ message in Matthew, Mark and Luke? If Jesus suggested to people that he was God himself on Earth, or an equal part of a triune Godhead, why didn’t he simply say this when he realized such a thing? Why would Jesus’ followers who knew him in life not simply proclaim it when Matthew and Mark were first written, and yet his followers who wrote John 60 years later proclaim it so boldly? It simply doesn’t make sense, but many Christians will tell you that Jesus only makes sense when you surrender your senses. Don’t try to make sense of Jesus, or even God, in terms of right and wrong they say, because God doesn’t make sense that way. But as I have endeavored to teach you, God makes perfect sense, and Jesus also make sense if you can pick out what he taught from the laws that man has created in his name. The Son of God is exactly that, the only begotten Son of God. He is the Messiah, the chosen one of God. But he is not before God, he is not above God, and he is not God. “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.” It is the First Commandment.

I would relate to you a story from the Gospel of Matthew. Many people who espouse the “Jesus is God” philosophy say that Jesus as the Son of God had a perfect understanding of all things. While I would not argue that Jesus was not perfect, there is a story in Matthew Chapter 15 where Jesus thought one way, and a woman taught him to think differently. The woman, a Caananite, comes to Jesus begging that he heal her daughter. The disciples seek to send her away, but Jesus, explaining to her that he has not come for her, says, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” When she continues to worship him and beg for his help, he says, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs.” And she responds, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered and said unto her, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Jesus first tells her that his teaching is only for the children of Israel, but she, in an instant, teaches him that his teaching is for all who follow him. He was wrong initially, but he learns better from a foreign woman. It may be fair here to say that perfection is not being right all the time, but in having the capacity to learn better when we are taught better. Even Jesus could be wrong and could learn a better understanding from a common person.

The story of Jesus' resurrection from the first three gospels was presented in brief. The following is the resurrection related in John presented for point of comparison, and while it is presented equally briefly, it is well over twice the length of any of the earlier renditions. There are a number of events and details that were somehow omitted by the authors of the first three gospels who were likely to have lived in the time of Jesus' resurrection. Mary arrives at the sepulcher where Jesus was laid to find the stone rolled away. She runs to find Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, unknown but believed by some to be John, and tells them that his body has been taken away and that she knows not where. Peter and the other disciple run to the tomb and find the linen burial clothes, and the cloth that was wrapped around Jesus' head some distance away. The two of them return home, but Mary waits there, weeping. She looks in again and sees two angels, one each at the head and feet where Jesus' body was lain. They ask her why she weeps, and she says that it is because her Lord is taken away and she knows not where. She turns back to see a man whom she supposes to be the gardener who also asks her why she weeps, and she asks again where Jesus has been lain. He calls her Mary, and she realizing he is Jesus calls him Master, but he tells her not to touch him as he has not yet ascended to the Father. Mary then returns to tell the disciples what had transpired. That same day Jesus appears to the disciples who are hiding for fear of the Jews and wishes them peace. He shows them his hands and his side, showing them where he was pierced by the Romans, and he breathes into them the Holy Ghost, instructing them that they now have the power to remit or retain sins. Thomas, who was not there when Jesus appears to them, later comes, and they tell him that they have seen the Lord. He responds that unless he can put his fingers into Jesus' wounds, he will not believe them. Jesus appears amidst them again in the same place eight days later even though the doors are closed, suggesting that he simply appeared there, and he invites Thomas to reach into his wounds being not faithless but believing. Thomas says to him, "My Lord and my God." Jesus tells him that he has believed upon seeing, but blessed are they who have seen not but still believe. It goes on to say that he does many other signs in the presence of his disciples not written in this book. Later Jesus' disciples follow Peter to the Sea of Tiberias to fish. They catch nothing the first night, but they see Jesus on the shore the next morning and he asks them if they have any meat. When they say no, he instructs them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, and they catch so many fish that they can't draw in the net. The disciple whom Jesus loved recognizes him, and upon hearing it Peter dives into the water to see him. The other disciples come to shore in a small boat pulling the net full of fish. They proceed to cook the 153 fish they have caught and have a feast with Jesus. Jesus then asks Peter three times if he loves him. Peter replies the first two times that Jesus knows he does, but he grieves that Jesus asks him a third time before he answers that Jesus knows all things and knows also that he, Peter, loves him, and Jesus commands him each time, "Feed my sheep." Jesus tells him that when he was young he clothed himself and went where he chose, but when he is old he will stretch forth his hands and another will clothe him and take him where he chooses not to go, signifying the death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he tells Peter to follow him. Peter then sees the disciple whom Jesus loved, who also laid his head on Jesus' chest at the last supper, and this disciple asks Jesus who was the disciple who betrayed him? Peter then adds to the question, and what will this man do? Jesus responds to them, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." The disciples then believe Jesus is saying the betrayer should not die, but the author of John notes that this is simply their interpretation. It closes with,

“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books which should be written. Amen.”

As with the previous three versions of the Resurrection, I intentionally left out interpretation and explanation of this story. For instance, when Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, in the Greek in which it was written it uses three different Greek words for love, intentionally demonstrating Peter’s ignorance of Jesus’ whole meaning. But I left out any personal interpretation so that the readers of my letter can see the differences between the texts in the Bible, which are extreme in content. They also lead one to draw different conclusions that support the idea that Peter, and those who followed him to spread Jesus’ teaching, basically missed the main point of Jesus’ teaching, which, according to Paul and his followers, is that Jesus was always God and that believing he is so is the only salvation. The book of John takes the story of Jesus’ teaching, crucifixion and Resurrection and synergizes the basic story with the teaching of Paul.

Beginning with the Book of Acts in the New Testament, almost every book in the New Testament was credited to, or written by, Paul himself, who says multiple times that he is no less than the chiefest of the apostles. While he never met Jesus, he claimed Jesus appeared to him in a vision and instructed him to teach in his name. While Paul teaches the ultimate faith in Christ, that Jesus is God and that believing so is salvation, with Paul being the first after Jesus, one of his primary lines of teaching is to say that Jesus’ teaching was rendered null by his Resurrection, and that serving God is otherwise of no matter. It is best summed up in Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews where he says, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” Paul then gives his own austere commandments very different from Jesus’ teaching of loving your neighbor, simple faith, obedience to God’s commandments, forgiveness and repentance.

After Jesus was crucified, his disciples and other followers preached his great and wise teachings in the years to follow. His teaching and understanding was so great that it would eventually pervade the understanding and consciousness of many in that immediate future. As is well known, the Roman Empire, ultimately responsible for the decision to crucify Jesus, was in control of the entirety of the Jewish world and other parts of the world where Jesus’ teachings would spread. For hundreds of years following Jesus the Romans tortured and killed Christians, often having them eaten by lions and other beasts as a public spectacle. They, living by man’s law that permitted them to murder and steal and mistreat others, were threatened by the pervasive notions taught by Jesus Christ, that serving the one God was above all of their laws and all of their beliefs.

Over time, however, as the number of Christians continued to multiply despite the ruthless Roman persecution, many of the murderous and politically-minded Romans learned the advantage of espousing the teachings of Jesus, and many of them began to believe Paul’s version of it. And it followed that priests and others of high accord began to preach of Jesus’ divinity according to Paul. They didn’t change their hateful and murderous ways. They simply used the version of Jesus taught

by Paul and such followers of Jesus to justify their ways, the laws of man. There were many other followers of Jesus who held different beliefs regarding Jesus' teaching and his divinity, and they were labeled as heretics by the Romans and other follower of Paul's teaching. They were herded together and put to death. From that point the Romans hunted down and killed, by clan and by village, those they labeled as heretics and those that opposed Jesus alike. They weren't hamstrung by ideas such as the Ten Commandments or the idea of loving your neighbor as yourself, because, according to Paul, these notions were "dead works." The Roman Christians were free to ignore the part where Jesus told a young man, "do not kill," as a part of the commandments. The commandments they followed were those of their law, or man's law, that simply enabled them to govern expediently.

Amidst these events, the Council of Nicaea, a group of priests and leaders from the Roman world, met in 325 and declared the Nicene creed, the foundation of the Christian church which declares that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three parts of a unified "Godhead". Jesus did not teach this or even use the word "Godhead". Men sought a way to justify their varying beliefs, and they simply found a way to declare that Jesus is the almighty God himself, putting their own law over and above the laws of God. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me loses all meaning if the purveyors of the laws of man can construct a way to say that Jesus is God, and they did so. One could then argue to a person who chooses to serve God but who does not believe that Jesus is God, "because you have not declared Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, you cannot serve God. It doesn't matter if you are a peacemaker, pure of heart or thirsty for righteousness. You haven't accepted Jesus Christ, and you will be put to death as our law requires." And during this time they declared what writings, the gospels and letters, mostly those of Paul, would be accepted as holy, canonized, and they destroyed all others along with those that preached them.

And they did murder those who did not make the declaration of Christ as their savior. It has been said by some historians that 325 was the beginning of the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages were a time of plagues, open murder, enslavement and misery. It was a time when the advances of man in the Christian part of the world nearly ground to a halt. Advances such as running water and central heating were lost. Of course it is well known that the collapse of the Roman culture was underway well before 325, but their proclamation of Jesus as God gave the privileged of those days a veil under which to conceal their evil. When a non-civilized tribe was conquered, they were put to the sword. Confess the name of Jesus Christ or die. Many confessed, many others were murdered. It was easy for the Roman Christians when they could justify that the savages who didn't know Jesus would eventually have simply perished to burn in eternal hellfire, so if they murdered 1000 to save 2000, they, in their minds, were doing God's work. "Thou shalt not kill does not apply to us here. Love thy neighbor as thyself does not apply to us here, but if it does, then we have loved our neighbors by bringing them knowledge of Jesus Christ. Their enslavement, the rape of their women and their lands, the taking of their goods, the collateral loss of 1000 lives, these are small prices to pay for the knowledge of salvation." They were doing evil much as they had done prior to their conversion, but they were now justifying it as serving the one God in the name of Jesus Christ. And so-called Christian nations that followed the Romans continued to do so for better than a thousand years. Since the beginning of the Dark Ages, there has been more murder committed in the name of Jesus

Christ by different groups of people than in the name of any other individual entity. Jesus came preaching peace, and those who have controlled us have motivated us to do murder in his name time and time again. Catastrophe often follows those who do so.

To attempt to enumerate the conflicts, the murder rampages for the profit of those sponsoring them, conducted in the name of Jesus Christ would be overwhelming for most readers, and it would still come up well short of the atrocities that have been done in his name. Certainly God remembers them all. But, as with many concepts in this letter, a single most egregious example can be made with the Crusades. The people of Europe and the near world, the Christian world, were greatly offended by the spread of Muslim culture and its influence. The leaders of Europe, by this time a dark and sinister place, where open-minded people lived in fear of being declared heretics to be tortured or burned to death, determined that it was their mission inspired by God, and his Son Jesus Christ, their God on Earth, to recapture by force, by war, what they deemed to be the Holy Land. What defines a crusade is that it is fought in the name of Jesus Christ, to spread his influence. There was one successful crusade into the Holy Land, the first, where Jerusalem was captured in 1099. The Muslims and Jews, who were living in peace at the time, fought together to defend it against the Christian invaders, and when the city was defeated, all of the Jewish and Muslim civilians, women, children and the like, were massacred. There would be a number of crusades to follow. Jerusalem was recaptured by Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt, who promised to spare the lives of the Christian and Jewish inhabitants of the city in 1187. He did keep his word and spared them and their churches. This prompted the Third Crusade where Richard I, a.k.a. Richard the Lion Hearted, was first poised to invade the city of Acre on the Island of Cyprus. Richard promised the inhabitants of the city that their lives would be spared if they surrendered the city. However, when they surrendered, he massacred all inhabitants, reasoning, "an oath made to a non-Christian is no oath at all." While they did have other victories, they returned to Europe failing to capture Jerusalem. While the Crusades did not return the Holy Land to Christian interests, they did manage to bring about death and additional misery to hundreds of thousands, many unarmed civilians and many others crusader soldiers, in the name of Christ. How many other such cases of mass murder have been committed in the name of Christ? How many schisms within the church that resulted in poor Christian peasants killing other poor Christian peasants in the name of God so rich men could increase their wealth and their lands? There is a painting in the Hermitage museum of an elderly peasant woman being drug away on a sled to be executed defiantly making the Sign of the Cross with three fingers. Her captors were executing her because they made the Sign of the Cross with two fingers and therefore considered her a blasphemer. These atrocities can probably be counted, but the effort and space it would require far exceeds that which should be allotted here. The important point to understand is that these who murdered and pillaged and stole so devoutly clearly were not students of Christ's message, and they were not followers of Christ. Indeed they were servants of darkness, of ignorance, hate and fear. They in their rebellion supported the things that oppose God, and it would not be unfair to call them servants of the devil.

It is not reasonable to hold Christianity as we know it or Christians today accountable for terrible things done in Christ's name in the past. That is not the point of this chapter. But people have not evolved much either physically or mentally. Our evolution is mainly in what we have learned, what

we have written, and what we can teach future generations about ourselves, our past and our future. We need to remember terrible things done, because we need to remember what we are capable of doing, particularly in the name of Christ and anything we liken to God, when we believe we are spiritually absolved of wrongdoing. The things in the prior paragraph and some others in this letter are not written to cast Christians in a bad light or to say that Christians are evil, but these things done in the name of Christ were evil things. Christians, like all of God's followers, need to acknowledge that nothing evil done in the name of Christ, or in the name of God, serves God. Declaring an evil act to be in God's name doesn't make it good, but openly in opposition to God. By declaring that only those who profess the name of Christ go to heaven, many Christians have given themselves an opportunity to do evil, and to lead others to do evil, in the name of Jesus. Only by doing good do we serve God. If a voice tells you to do evil, or encourages you to promote others to do evil, it can never be the voice of God, whether it comes from your priest, or your elected leader, or the very air around you. Whatever encourages you to go on a murderous jihad, whatever religion you profess or none at all, murder is always evil.

CHAPTER 8 - Limiting the freedoms and actions of others, and ourselves

Going back to a simple understanding of Jesus as he taught, regardless of the terrible things that were done in his name, Jesus was, and he was crucified for nothing more than telling people the truth of God. Serve God. Love God. There is one God, and you should love him with all your heart and with all your mind and with all of your soul. Love your neighbor as yourself. Forgive your brother, even if he sins against you five-hundred times and five-hundred times seeks your forgiveness. Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Jesus served God, and he allowed himself to be tortured and gave his very life to serve God's purpose. Jesus taught that he was the Son of man and the Messiah, the chosen one of God, and he performed many miracles, and I choose to believe these things are true. "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The truth of Jesus' teaching, in serving God by doing, is a simple truth. Serving God, loving your neighbor as yourself, as Jesus did, is the way to the salvation that Jesus promises, the salvation that many of us, believers or no, feel in our hearts is waiting beyond death. Jesus tells us to do to others as we would have them do to us.

Many of us want this world to be like God's heaven, because we love one another and want to share this love with all who would have it. The question then is not so much what do we believe, but rather what do we do? What can we do to try to make this world like God's heaven? What can we do to have eternal life? How can we find a way to agree to trust one another, to love one another, so that we can prevent destroying ourselves and ruining this small piece of creation God has given us? When people are free to believe as we choose, two of every three of us believe that there is a benevolent God, the God who created us and who made the whole of the known universe, who is in some way guiding us toward him. We may not share the same religion, or agree with those who claim to believe as we do, or even believe in a religion at all, but we believe there is something, some spiritual purpose to our lives at least to a degree beyond our understanding, to do good for others and make some small positive contribution to life. Given that the majority of us believe this if given the opportunity, how do we find a way to work together to realize a better world for all? It is not a belief shared by everyone, that we have a better world, and some of us may never get past our own selfishness. Some of us can't conceive of even the idea of loving our neighbor's children as our own. For those of us who do care to make the world better for our brothers and our neighbors, foreign as well as domestic, for the world's children and our children's great grandchildren, is there a way that we can agree to make this world the best paradise it can be without sacrificing the freedom to believe and to decide and to be as we are? I tell you that there is.

To the highly educated, or erudite, this next idea might seem overly simplistic or childish, but it is these very qualities that make it accessible to all of us. It can be understood by simple as well as complex thinkers. We should refrain from doing evil where we can, and we must take it upon ourselves to prevent others from doing so when they unduly harm or disadvantage their neighbors. The first question the skeptic asks is how do we define what is evil? Granted, we have to accept that we don't always know what is good and evil in many circumstances, but good people who love one another do share generalized notions of good and evil that are universal, and we also share simple concepts of times when there are exceptions. It is evil to kill a man for profit, or to satisfy a simple

lust for revenge when the man we choose to kill is not the man who has caused the harm redressed, but we also accept that it is necessary to kill a man who would do murder for these reasons to protect an innocent victim if killing that man is necessary. If we can agree on simple concepts, and if we can agree to restrict our laws, man's laws, by these concepts, then we have a basis, a language, upon which all laws can be limited. The Jews were given the Ten Commandments through Moses, and it is explained earlier in this letter that these are good laws not only because they were given to man directly from God, but because acknowledging them as God's law creates a limitation against putting our own laws above them. The same people who were given the Ten Commandments ignored this limitation, coming up with numerous subsequent laws that direct men to kill one another for violating, despite the fact that "Thou shalt not kill," was one of the commandments. God couldn't possibly believe that eating shellfish is an abomination, as these people claimed. Similarly, traditional Jews and Muslims say it is a sin to eat pork, and Hindus claim it is a like sin to eat beef. People should be free to believe as they choose when their beliefs harm no one else. These are matters for debate. But clearly, the violation of God's law to enforce a simple ordinance can not be permitted. The commandments of God should be a limitation or a justification of man's laws. We should not feel compelled to enforce these laws if no substantial harm is done by those who break them, but we can not allow ourselves to break or even minimize these to enforce other laws of our own creation. Jesus preached this very notion very boldly. There will never be a people on this Earth so great that its laws can exceed the simple laws of God. If we choose to love our neighbors as ourselves, we must limit our laws to those which we would gladly submit ourselves and our own children, considered through the perspective of each of our neighbors when applying such laws to them, and we should expect our neighbors to accept the same limitations.

Not seeking evil, we must still attempt to define it so that we can avoid doing it. There is a simple kind of evil. Breaking the Ten Commandments and doing harm to others is evil. While great evils are easy to understand, an example of much more minor significance is provided here. If a man tells his friend that he can't get tickets to a game when, in fact, he has tickets and instead invites a third person, this is evil if the person who trusted his word was hurt, even though the harm may be small. He has born a false witness to his neighbor's disadvantage, and yet we should not hope for any legal entity to get involved with such a personal harm. In addition to harming his friend through insult, the man with tickets tells the third person through his actions, "I think it's OK to lie to my friends. You should not trust me or people who seem like me, and the good things that I do with my life should serve as evidence that people who pass themselves off as good should not be trusted." When his friend who was excluded finds out about the slight, he may feel that there is something wrong with himself that he is not deserving of honesty, and this hurt could have unseen future consequences. The person may choose not to help the liar in some future circumstance that might result in additional hurt for them both, and his distrust may encourage him to treat an honest person in the future as a liar. Yes, this example is intentionally minor, but it provides a simple understanding that one should not lie in a way that unfairly disadvantages anyone. Love your neighbor as yourself. But it also demonstrates that breaking God's commandment is not necessarily a situation with which a governing body should concern itself. The redress of such a small harm through dishonesty is merely the concern of those involved, but if we who are good set good examples in such circumstances, then we can hope that people will see the value of simply being

honest with one another. We would not want to feel that we were misled if the situation were reversed, but we also do not want to let our personal hurt burden the people as a whole with every minor redress of such small personal harms.

A distinction that should be made here is that breaking these Commandments is sinful only if we cause harm in so doing. If a man attests that his elected leader does the Lord's work by killing innocent people who are different than himself, it could be a terrible sin, but if he attests it only to a passing flock of geese, then no harm is caused. If he attests this to a person whose opinion is shaped by it, who ultimately harms others as a result, whatever harm is caused in the long run is also on the hands of the man who encouraged the evil. Given that it would be nearly impossible to say what that harm could be, we should avoid speaking recklessly and causing harm that we may not be able to undo. It is very easy for us to judge other people for doing things that cause no harm, including breaking the Commandments. I hear people take the Lord's name in vain every single day, and perhaps with my disapproving expression and occasional words I let them know that I would have them speak otherwise, but there is no purpose to making people feel bad about their conduct if no good can come of doing so. A good man swearing the name of God in anger may mistakenly communicate to people that he has no respect for another person's reverence, but no harm is done to ears that are not tender. To put it more simply, evil is only done when others are harmed by it, and it can be that the only victim is the one doing evil to himself, but we shouldn't spend too much energy punishing the actions and words of a person who harms absolutely no one else. Truly evil thoughts, desires and even acts and words can be meaningless, and to attempt to ascribe meaning to evil things which have none can have no good consequence. That which is harmless should be left so.

And the things we do knowingly to harm others, or with intentional disregard of the fact that others will be harmed, should be recognized as such. Most of us will say that murder is always wrong, that it is always evil. Yet so many who claim to believe that will twist reality, make up some facts and denying others, to justify killing others so we can say that it is not murder. Throughout history man has engaged in needless and unnecessary wars, where we take the lives of the innocent who have caused us no harm, because we seek to take what they have. As I wrote in describing the Sixth Commandment, there are times when war is necessary. Taking the life of someone who is attempting to murder your family, when there are no other alternatives, is rightly justified. God understands that we can only do the best we can. Making war against a people who are trying to murder your people is similarly justified. But when we allow leaders to manipulate us to make war against a people who has caused us no harm, taking the lives of the innocent in the process, we commit murder. When we allow our leaders to lie about the justification for war so that they and their wealthy benefactors can increase their wealth and power, we are responsible for allowing murder to be committed by our fellows. When we go along with murder because we covet the things which our neighbors possess, because we fear that our resources are lacking or we feel that we are entitled because we are stronger, more entitled or love God better, we are culpable, and we share in the responsibility for the harm caused. Murder is always wrong. Coveting that which others have is always wrong. Stealing from others for our own gain is always wrong. Doing any of the above

in the name of God, taking the Lord's name in vain, is always wrong. While real understanding is often concealed by the darkness, and those who serve it, certainly when we knowingly break God's commandments and cause harm, we should recognize it as such.

There are other ideas, concepts and behaviors that we have branded as inherently evil of a more personal nature that are not necessarily harmful. Among the concepts long held by the Christian church in particular to be inherently evil are homosexuality, drunkenness, recreational drug use, fornication outside of the bonds of marriage, and the pursuit of pleasure in general for the sake thereof. These types of behaviors are harder to limit on the part of the doer by Jesus' general commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," because we are engaging in behaviors that feel natural to us. If we apply "Love thy neighbor" to a decision to commit murder, we would have to invariably conclude that we do not want to be murdered if in our neighbor's shoes. If we apply it to engaging in a consensual homosexual relationship, we would generally conclude that we want to be left alone to decide the kinds of consensual relationships in which we choose to engage, and we, loving our neighbors as ourselves, want them to have the same opportunity, free of interference from others. As written previously, none of these behaviors of personal preference are specifically forbidden in God's commandments or the commandments of Jesus Christ, yet these very "sins" receive as much attention from the Christian church as any of the commandments. Governments have long made laws against such behaviors to regulate morality, and the church has pushed the government to do it, but they are man's laws and not the laws of God.

Governments of men, which too often exist to serve the profit of men, turn people from God by telling them that the laws of men define evil. The United States government uses money taken from citizens by force and coercion to pay wealthy advertisers and television executives to tell everyone that smoking marijuana is an immoral act. They have put otherwise innocent people into prisons for the rest of their lives with rapists and murderers for growing this drug, and among the strongest proponents of such heavy punishments are those who believe it is God's will. Many of the punishers, if they had their way, would have these people put to death. These same people who claim to speak God's will call the exorbitant tax on alcohol the "sin tax." Murdering and stealing might be sins, but we're going to minimize these acts declared to be evil by God by declaring peoples' choices to be sins. Yet the Bible generally does not read as they say. The Bible clearly says that priests should not be given to too much wine. Even the priests in Biblical times were sanctioned to drink alcohol provided that they didn't get drunk and set a bad example with bad behavior. Jesus turned the water into wine, the best wine at the wedding feast, and the gospels say he drank wine on a regular basis. Jesus bemoaned, "The Son of man comes both eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber." As a young child of maybe six years I saw a priest stand up and tell a hundred people that drinking alcohol at all is a sin. He bore false witness and said that Jesus turned the water into non-alcoholic wine, and that everyone had to drink wine because the water of that day was putrid. He made up what he wanted, because he wants to make his law equal to God's law. He may have believed that his reasons were good. He may have had an alcoholic father that caused he and his family pain, and instead of blaming his father for committing adultery or abusing them, he blamed the drink. Certainly I can not know his reasons, but his declaring those

who drink alcohol to be sinners was wrong. There are times that we can not sit by and watch people speaking in the name of God use their words to shape people for unrighteous vengeance.

If we declare that the pleasures of man are sins because we don't feel those pleasures or choose not to partake in them, and we make people afraid of committing them even when no harm is caused, actual sin becomes lost in the din of our laws. What is the guy who cheats on his taxes, or the woman who steals from the old person in a rest home who is in her care, or the guy who pushes an unnecessary defense contract through the government so that he can make a million dollars, or the guy who inappropriately touches a child who trusts him, when there are so many other people who get drunk? We fill our prisons with those who seem ugly to us and ignore others who hurt others and do evil, sometimes because it's just easier for us. Other times it is more profitable for us. Still other times we feel, "I have to do something," and when we can not get to the people who are causing harm, we focus our anger on lesser people and vent our hatred upon them. Whatever the case, it makes the idea of right and wrong very confusing. If I wanted to commit a great evil without repercussion, I would first try to convince others that their minor human flaws are great evils, and that our actions are the same in God's eyes.

And yet the ideas in the preceding paragraphs touch some sensitive spots with people who might otherwise agree on two different levels. The first is that they have seen too many times situations where people who are drunk stop caring about right and wrong and harm others. When we allow otherwise harmless behaviors that give us pleasure to be carried to the extreme that we harm others, we cross the line into what we can call wickedness. Related to this, though the harm caused is much less significant and more perceptual, is an idea we can call ugliness, where, much as one man might feel that his behavior is natural and beautiful, another thinks his behavior is unnatural and an abomination. The line of "love thy neighbor as thyself" becomes very thin here. We who would choose to do good would limit our behavior, and our assertion that we have the right to limit the behavior of others, based on what causes actual harm. But the concepts of ugliness and wickedness have the potential to pervert men's hearts and minds, and we feign ignorance if we ignore the damage that they do. This should not suggest that it is acceptable to punish others for such things when the actual harm caused in a given circumstance is none. When a man is put into prison, or declared a pervert or a miscreant, for doing something that is natural to his being and yet causes no harm to others, those seeking to harm the offender bring evil into the world. But we still, to a degree, should acknowledge the sensitivity of others on these types of issues. It is incumbent upon us to defend our right to be as we are, and to defend the rights of others to be as they are, but we ignore the limitations of our humanity when we flaunt our behaviors that we know are ugly to others or ignore the harm that can be caused when we let our harmless behaviors become wicked.

Doctors prescribe drugs every day to battle illnesses, and they prescribe marijuana to combat pain. If one guy discovers that smoking marijuana has the impact of curing his illness, and if continuing to do so makes him a better person, then who would perpetrate the evil of taking from him that which makes him better? Whose place is it to judge this thing that he does, lest he has committed or is substantially likely to commit some other crime that will harm others? Groups claiming to speak for God lead the fight against it, but God has not sanctioned us to judge each other on this

issue. Other people may similarly choose to smoke marijuana to relax or reduce tension. They may find that smoking marijuana periodically, or drinking alcohol or caffeine or using nicotine, helps them to be happier people. While some would abuse others under the influence of any of these drugs, others actually find that aspects of their lives become easier. They are happier this way, and they ultimately treat those in their lives better as a result. No one should believe they have a right, and certainly not a God-given right, to take that from them. Yet the people who choose this lifestyle should still understand and accept that their drug use will still be ugly to some people. Some people will simply hate it as an abomination, and others know that this behavior, which seems ugly to them, can lead to wickedness, which by the definition of wickedness leads to sin. Another person who starts smoking marijuana, because it makes him feel better, may start smoking crack cocaine, just to see if he can get more out of it. The guy who starts smoking crack becomes addicted and starts stealing to support his habit. He ends up losing his job and, in a crack-induced haze, assaults his neighbors across the street and ends up in prison. This man lets his drug use become a wicked evil that leads to actual harm, and his actions hurt not only him but his family and his neighbors as well.

We should take the steps we can take to keep our ugliness from appearing ugly to other people, because we do not want to set bad examples for others with our lives. It puts good people in a difficult position, because how does a person argue on behalf of something that is good for him that can lead other people to harming themselves or others? But we should keep our harmless pleasures or lifestyles to ourselves when possible if there is a chance that making them known could harm the perceptions of others. Similarly we must tolerate each other's ugliness, but we must also protect our innocent people from wicked evil. It can be difficult to do God's will and to know what God would have, but it is incumbent upon us to try. We must act on God's will when we can do so in a way that makes life better for our people. It is not intended that we judge other people for their ugliness. We are imperfect. But we can't let our tolerance for the ugliness of others to allow people to engage in wicked evil against one another.

And the question of tolerance is relevant, because the conclusion of our fears is often zero tolerance, and our solutions are too often harsh punishments. Children are expelled from school, causing them grievous harm in the long run, for actions that are utterly harmless. A girl is kicked out of school for having aspirin in her purse because of a zero-tolerance drug policy. A seven-year old boy is expelled from school for pointing his finger like a gun at another child and saying, "bang, bang." A girl has headaches and a boy is acting like a boy, and the rule enforcers absurdly cause grievous harm to children for utterly harmless acts and then throw up their hands and say, "we have no choice, our policy is zero tolerance." The Women's Christian Temperance Union proudly took responsibility for Prohibition in America, where millions lost their freedom and often their livelihoods over alcohol consumption. Their idea of temperance was zero tolerance, in the name of God, and the result was disaster. The anti-smoking groups today want nothing less than zero tolerance for smoking, whether it be on the street, in a person's home, or anywhere else. The anti-drunk driving people don't want dangerously drunk people off the road. They want zero tolerance, and if a person who has a few drinks and drives and gets randomly pulled over at a police checkpoint goes to jail, so much the better to them. The anti-gay-marriage activists would enforce nothing less than zero tolerance of homosexuality if they could have their way. The "War on Drugs" is about

zero tolerance, no matter how costly and destructive the toll, and they paid wealthy ad executives to tell America that smoking marijuana is supporting terrorism. We have women all over the world, including in America, who are being kidnaped and sold into sexual slavery, who have their freedom, dignity, and their very lives taken from them so others can make a profit, and yet we focus our resources on taking from people who harm no one their right to choose how they would live their lives.

These issues are personal to me. I have at times felt attacked or judged by society for enjoying pleasures that harm no one. Like Jesus, Sir Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and others who were effective in their lives, I have long enjoyed pleasure, and a kind of comfort, from drinking alcohol, and I have learned to do so in a way that is not ugly to me. There is no one who has the right to judge me for living as I choose.

But I had a friend at work many years ago who had always abstained from alcohol because he knew on some level that it was wrong for him. Many of us who worked this particular job would meet after work one night each week to relax and party for a couple of hours, and I tried many times to convince my friend to join us. Instead of simply saying that he could come and enjoy the company, I told him that drinking alcohol is not like many others had said, which was true for me. So one night he came to this party and drank six beers. It saddens me to say that this night was the beginning of his battle with alcoholism, and he had told me previously that he didn't drink because his dad was an alcoholic. It was not uncommon afterward that I would see this friend riding his bike early in the day drunk with a 40-ounce malt liquor. Trying to help my friend have a good time, I encouraged him to hurt himself, because, like the people I had seen chide others for drinking alcohol, I chose only to see one side, the side that was good for me. I did not acknowledge the ugly side that I knew to exist from the experiences that others had related to me. I failed to acknowledge the sinful impact that it could have on other people. Since that day, I do not openly encourage other people to drink alcohol. If someone asks, I will tell them the truth of what I know. With such things other people have to decide what is good for them. This is not to suggest that laws over things that other people see as ugly, things that can lead to wickedness, should or should not be enforced, but that such laws should be strictly limited to punishing people for such acts that actually harm others, or such actions that have a substantial likelihood of leading to such harm. The harm caused by enforcing our laws should never exceed the harm caused by the ugly acts they seek to punish. But neither should the harm by acts seen as ugly to some that can lead to wickedness be ignored.

As written above, some of us engage in certain behaviors that others don't because things that don't seem natural to others are natural to us. We are born the way we are. We make choices as to what we do, but the way we feel is often not by choice. Some critics would fault me for likening drinking alcohol to being homosexual, as they would say one is a choice and another a state of being. But in defense I would say that drinking alcohol is natural for some and not for others. This applies to pretty much any behavior that some people find ugly. Some people naturally find comfort in things that repulse others. One guy might smoke a few cigarettes and become sick, and to him, cigarettes are disgusting, and even the odor of smoke on another person is disgusting. Another similar person

might smoke an entire pack of cigarettes on his first night trying them, and to him their odor is pleasant. While the cigarette example may seem exaggerated now, bear in mind that not forty years ago there were ashtrays in the aisles at grocery stores. It's good that we've learned not to subject people to cigarette smoke when they go to buy their groceries, but the point of the example is that for some, we perceive things the way we're told to.

But the fact remains that some are born different than others, and with complicated issues such as human sexuality, people should not have to apologize for the way they feel. Ignoring or denying the way they feel can leave them missing a core part of their humanity, and there are those who would force that upon them. Many of our leaders and our priests preach to us, often with great anger and conviction, that no one is born homosexual. They say that it is a perversion, and God would never create a person that was inherently perverse in this way. They insist that anyone who engages in such behavior must be doing so out of a wicked desire for pleasure. They say the Bible calls it an abomination. As previously written, the Bible also calls eating shellfish an abomination. My personal belief is that few would choose to be different in this way if given a choice, and the idea of a man not being able to love a woman in the way men typically can is a sad idea to me, but that is simply my belief.

Whatever my feeling on this, some people are born homosexual. I have seen it with my own eyes. Do I need some other misinterpretation of words from ministers of government to redefine what God has shown me? I once knew a woman who was a friend of mine that was inherently reviled by the idea of engaging in sexual relations with a man. She didn't choose to be a lesbian. She wanted to feel that she was "normal". She seemed to hate herself for it on some level, which is sad because she didn't deserve self hatred, but she was what she was. As noted earlier, God's Commandments could have easily included, "thou shalt not be homosexual", but they do not. God and Moses are wiser than hateful men who seek to enforce their laws on others. Truly the Bible does say that man should not lay with man, but, as has been explained above, in the Bible are written many other laws of men outside of God's commandments that are punishable by death. Such relationships between consenting adults are not ours to judge. Maybe others are born with an inclination toward homosexuality and that is the choice they make. Like the man who finds it natural, even comforting, to drink alcohol, or the man who chooses to smoke marijuana, they should still acknowledge that what they do can be ugly to others. They should not blindly seek to encourage another person to engage in such a lifestyle when such encouragement might cause the other person pain and confusion in the long run. While there are many who are born homosexual, there are others who have chosen such a lifestyle because they were sexually abused by adults when they were children, and many of them are hurt and tortured their whole lives because of it. These are extreme but all too common cases, but clearly they are examples of how people can not be allowed to let their embrace of a certain lifestyle, even if natural to them, wickedly harm others. Doing unto others means that we have to allow people be as they are while preventing the innocent from being harmed.

There are other people who are born with unusual traits that can not be permitted to exercise them, no matter how natural they might feel. Some people have a sexual attraction to children that seems natural to them. However natural that attraction may or may not be, we can never let adults harm

children in this way. There are some gray areas, like when an eighteen year old man and a fifteen year old girl love each other, and we can't let our desire to punish offenders numb our common sense, but parents still have a right to protect their children. We can not let sexual predators harm children because it feels natural to the predator to do so. There are far too many examples of Catholic priests, for instance, who engage in sexual misconduct with children, and there are far too many cases of their followers blaming the victims for speaking out. This is wickedness at its most vile, and we as people who follow God can not allow innocent children to be harmed in this way.

There is a final class of law that peoples have a propensity to levy on one another, which are regulations that typically go beyond the concept of morality or sin. It is similar to the laws regarding ugliness and wickedness where men seek to impose their will upon others, but lacking the component of morality on the part of the offender. These laws have two functions, which are both the way we choose to regulate one another's behavior, and the way such concepts concern the master/servant relationship. For example, a simple concept regarding regulation is the idea of speed limits, which are enforced to regulate how fast people can drive their vehicles in a given circumstance. We make laws that generically regulate how fast people can drive. Because there is no morality element involved, we typically punish the crime somewhat proportionally to the harm done, and we all generally share in the costs on both sides of the line, so there is much less an emotional component where one class of people seeks to find fault with another. The consequence of speeding is typically the harm caused by those who are driving too fast including loss of life. Offsetting these costs are economic arguments and widely enjoyed benefits in terms of time saved. It costs much less to all consumers if a truck can drive 60 miles per hour and deliver its goods in ten hours than if the same truck drives 30 miles per hour and delivers its goods in 20 hours. This is a simple concept. It also affects all in terms of time saved. If a family has eight days, roughly 200 hours, of vacation time, and they must drive a total of 1500 miles, they will have to spend 50 hours driving on the road if the speed limit is an average of 30 miles per hour. If the speed limit is 60 miles per hour, they will only have to spend 25 hours on the road, which gives them a full day longer to enjoy their vacation and one less day spent riding in the car. Yet if the speed limit is only 30 miles per hour, and people are uniformly willing to abide by such a limit, fewer fatalities will occur. So the typical person is willing to accept the fact that more road fatalities will occur if people are allowed to drive faster, because the majority of people will benefit by such a comparison. Yet we are also willing to accept that there should be a some limit, because a danger limit can be breached where the majority no longer benefits from allowing excessive speeds to be driven. Despite the fact that lives can be and are often lost, excessive speeds are typically punished only by monetary damages and a particular limit on personal freedom related to the right to drive. Rarely are people imprisoned for such an offense in the United States, and they are never put to death for it. There are a number of such regulations regarding a myriad of aspects of life that fall into this basic concept, and they can mostly be explained by this model. When we reach a point where the punishments cause more harm than the crimes, then we have let our morality create a problem that we must address, but in a free country driven by economic gain, rarely do we reach such a point.

Given the philosophical nature of this writing thus far, a person reading this might ask why it is necessary to include an analysis of simple regulations lacking a morality component on the part of

the offender. Where we do reach that problem point regarding these laws, the point where such regulations unnecessarily trammel personal freedom, is when some groups realize economic benefits by regulating others to the extent that they wrongfully limit those others' freedom. When we reach this point, we begin mistreating others for our own ends, and we act against God by taking away the rights of individuals to make their own choices and to live as free men. There are a number of freedoms we enjoy that entail personal risk that have little to no measurable economic benefit. If we are going to live in a free country, the kind of country that the United States was for a number of years, if we are going to live in a free world, we must be permitted to engage in behaviors that entail a personal risk while providing no economic benefit. One example is riding a motorcycle. Motorcycle riding is seen by many as synonymous with the American spirit. Yet it is an inherently dangerous activity. If a person is riding a motorcycle and is involved in the type of minor accident that occur on highways every day, the person on the motorcycle is more often killed or severely injured than a person driving a car in similar circumstances. But people riding motorcycles rarely kill others. They are taking their lives in their own hands. They do it because they enjoy the freedom, the exhilaration, of traveling at high speeds with the wind blowing without being enclosed in a metal box, harnessed by a seat belt. They know they are in danger, and they put their pleasure over their own safety. There are regulations for motorcycles that address some of the safety concerns, but the risk of riding one remains much greater than riding in an automobile. Most of us accept that it is the right of a free person to engage in this risk. In the United States, motorcycles are a symbol of freedom.

A similar example is skydiving. People jump out of airplanes and free-fall for thousands of feet before opening a parachute to slow their descents to the ground. There is no economic gain to it. There is no tangible benefit. No skydiver walks away from a jump a richer man in terms of wealth. In fact, if you compare the number of hours of simple pleasure skydivers get from jumping out of airplanes in one lifetime, and compare it to the number of hours a cigarette or cigar smoker spends getting pleasure from smoking in a lifetime, there is practically no comparison. Skydiving is much more dangerous. In fact, the pleasure from skydiving, the exhilaration, is partly realized from the idea that they are risking death every time. For point of comparison, a person who smokes a pack of cigarettes a day, twenty cigarettes, can spend nearly four hundred hours every year engaged in the act of smoking, for years at a time, and it is relatively rare that they suddenly die at a young age for the time they are engaged in the activity.

We allow things like riding motorcycles and skydiving to occur because we believe in freedom. We believe that people have the right to put their own lives at risk for a mere exhilaration. We believe in freedom. There are many who would do away with such freedoms if they were given the opportunity simply for the idea that they know better, and that they are saving lives. These are things that they don't do, and if their own freedoms aren't restricted, then they proceed boldly forward with their decision to save other people's lives at the sacrifice of those people's freedoms. Some people derive satisfaction from the notion that they can control what other people do. It is often called the big-brother instinct. But we who believe in freedom know that if we cherish our own freedom, we can't restrict the freedoms of others on the simple statistical basis of lives that will be saved. We

who are with God should understand that the restrictions we place on others can not be made simply on what we believe to be best for ourselves.

These types of regulations do become subject to questions of morality when individuals or classes of individuals realize a monetary gain from restricting these types of personal freedoms. This is where the master/servant relationship becomes relevant. Living in a free country we have come to accept that there are qualified limitations that an employer can place upon our freedom when we are at work, or functioning in employment type circumstances. When we're at work, employers can tell us how to dress, how to act, how we can cut our hair and similar restrictions. In these situations, the employer is the master, and the employee is the servant, and the law recognizes this relationship as such by name. This relationship ends when the employee punches the time clock to go home or otherwise leaves the premises of the employer. Employment can still be contingent upon the employee obeying the law outside of work, but the employer does not otherwise control the employee's private time. In a free country, the employee can live his life as he chooses. But this notion is being challenged in the current age.

Sports organizations, for instance, are saying that the employee can not engage in riding a motorcycle or skydiving on his own time. They now write into employment contracts that engaging in these activities can lead to termination. They argue that an employment contract is entered into under free will, and that the employee can choose to work elsewhere, but the fact is that all of the teams in the sports organization are in collusion with one another. The members of the organization, in this case team owners, all agree upon the rules by which their contracts will be written. If a particular business within this organization permitted personal freedoms that other such businesses are allowed by law to restrict, they are disadvantaged, so all similar businesses within the organization will ultimately pursue the course that allows them to make the most money at the cost of the employees' personal freedoms. If the employee chooses to skydive, there is no comparable employment to be had. Outside observers of the situation, who can see no further than the money of the contract, deride the free-willed athlete, saying, "if I could get paid five-million dollars, I'd gladly avoid riding a motorcycle." But they miss the point that the United States was built on freedom, and freedom is a part of our great heritage. The fact is, employers in more pedestrian industries are following suit, also saying what lawful activities their employees can and can not engage in. While they compete against each other on some levels, on other levels, the question for them as a collective is simply, "how can we make as much money as possible." The owner class can still typically engage in the freedoms that their employees can not. The rights of free men, their employees, take on a minor significance. As with the sports organizations, they argue that the employee can find another job if he doesn't like the terms, but in fact he will find it difficult to find such a job and often he will have a more difficult time providing for himself or his family if he doesn't conform to the normalization standards set by the companies. That is not freedom. That is tyranny created by putting the profit of a few over the free will of many. These may not seem like egregious examples, but if companies are permitted to dictate what extracurricular activities an employee can engage in, then they take away freedom in the name of their profit, and it opens the door for the employers to dictate what their employees can eat, what they can say, and even what they choose to believe. This crosses the line into regulations that are evil, and it is the duty of government, and the duty of the people who

believe in right and wrong that empower that government, to protect the freedom of its citizens from the will of greedy men.

A complicating factor is that of the insurance industry. As most people know, there are private companies that pay individuals sums of money, based mainly on what the insured individuals have paid to the insurance companies, in unexpected times of tragedy. They typically make a profit, what many would consider to be a handsome profit, in so doing. If the insurance company can limit the lawful behavior of the insured in a way that gives increased profits to insurance companies, they have shown an increased propensity to do so. In a free country, the government exists in part to protect the freedoms of its citizens. But the insurance companies take a portion of their vast profits and give it to government officials, not to make the world a better place, but so they can make more money for themselves. A number of laws have been put into place in the last few decades that put otherwise innocent citizens in disadvantaged situations so that insurance companies can make more money. For instance, there was a law passed some years ago, state by state, that required all drivers to have liability insurance so that if they get into an accident, other people involved in the accident can be assured of receiving compensation. It is a law that can serve a good purpose, but it came about by private companies putting money into the coffers of lawmakers so that those lawmakers would coerce all citizens into purchasing the insurance companies' product. About fifteen years ago they took it a step further by having lawmakers pass a law to have government agencies send letters to private citizens requiring those citizens to prove that all of their vehicles are insured. If a man has a classic car that he never drives, or drives only in parades, or a retired person has a car that is broken down and can not be driven for a long period of time, but that they choose not to sell, they must have that car insured the same as a car regularly driven. Worse, there are hundreds of thousands of cases where drivers fail to receive or respond to the letter demanding proof of insurance who are insured. When they fail to respond, regardless of the circumstance, a warrant is issued for their arrest, and they end up paying a heavy fine or going to jail, ultimately so insurance companies can make more money.

Insurers are now telling companies that if they want to insure their employees, they must require that their employees stop smoking, and they do drug tests to enforce it. "If you want to work here, you can not smoke." Insurance companies ten years ago, as an industry, were making money hand over fist, but now they are paying lawmakers in campaign contributions to change the rules again so they can make even more money. This money they make isn't growing in a magical money pool, but is instead taken directly from the pockets of individuals. If we acquiesce as a nation, and generally believe that insurance companies have the right to make such demands, how different will it be when insurance companies require that the companies they insure prevent their employees from drinking alcohol? Or when they require that the companies they insure monitor employees diets to keep their cholesterol down and keep them from eating fatty foods. That isn't a free country, that's tyranny. The insurance companies make money, the elected leaders who are supposed to be serving the electorate make money, and the rights of the free man suffer. If all freedoms can be bought, there is no freedom. Freedom is no longer a God-given right but instead an economic convenience that can be permitted by one class of men to another.

The unfortunate reality is that only people who need to receive a paycheck will lose their freedom. The people who's wealth make them immune to such realities will still have the opportunity to live as free men. They will still have the opportunity to drink and smoke and ride motorcycles and pilot small airplanes as they choose. They will still have the opportunity to jump out of airplanes with parachutes. An inevitable double standard, a continued increase in the gap of rights between the privileged man and the common man, necessarily ensues. These are not the principles upon which the United States was founded. A free country does not simply exist. It exists by the demand of the people to have such freedom, or it exists because the law recognizes their right to it. When we let profit interests pervert the system so that the privileged are further promoted in the name of health or safety, we do evil. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself. If we love God, if we serve God, rich and poor alike, we can not allow such a future to become, no matter how well we perceive that it profits us individually. We have to control our own big-brother instincts and let people live as they choose. When we allow a few to control others simply for profit, we condition ourselves to abide by much worse tyrannies.

CHAPTER 9 - Serving God by doing

This letter has provided a great deal of consideration on what not to do as well as limiting our laws that we would enforce on one another. Do not ever love evil over good, which is God, in any circumstance. Do not kill. Do not steal. Don't bear false witness against your neighbor. Don't worship anything over God in any circumstance, nor any graven image that you liken to the status of God, and do not take the name of God idly for whatever purposes may serve you. Give your servants, all those beneath you, and yourself time to rest and appreciate your lives and to appreciate God's creation, no less than one full day in seven. Do not desire to take from others that which is not yours to take. Do not commit adultery, or otherwise break any promise you have made as a covenant before God. Honor your father and your mother, the creator and the Earth that has given to you of her own being, and honor them by doing good and learning to do better. Honor our history, a simple understanding and respect for that which has come before you, because these are the things and the people that have made you what you are. Love good. And love your neighbor as yourself. Most of the pages of this letter to you are devoted to explaining these concepts. These are the things God has endeavored that we understand for his purposes, for his good and for our own. These are the warning signs that keep us on the path to righteousness. The more difficult question is what should we do? If the nature of our humanity allowed it, the physical nature of our need to consume physical things to survive, the only necessary commandment would be "do good." But for most, simply saying to do good is not enough.

So how do we do good? Certainly loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves are commandments of doing. Do good, love good, want for your neighbor as you would want for yourself if you were in his place. But if we have the capacity to both love God and look forward in a physical world, we must move what we have learned forward beyond our own lives. We must try to prepare our children for events beyond what we have experienced. We must endeavor to prepare our great grandchildren to survive the dark times that may lay ahead working with other men whom we once perceived to be our enemies without sacrificing the good ideals that have made us great, and we must prepare them to prosper. We cannot allow ourselves to forget the limits that God has placed upon us, or to stand idly by while evil men seek to destroy others or simply suck away portions of their lives, their wealth and their freedom like parasites because of notions which allow us to perceive these takings to be our gain, or simply because we are afraid to take a stand against evil. When it becomes necessary those who are able must be willing to sacrifice our own lives to protect the innocent, and to protect that which is good, and others must be prepared to do the mending. We must recognize that there are evil men and women in our presence and yet keep working to create an Earth, a heavenly Earth, in which we all can prosper working together. More of us will serve the good than not if given the opportunity to do so, when the darkness of confusion, ignorance and fear is cleared away. It is not what many have called "the greater good", in which the few in opposition have been too many times sacrificed for the many, but simply the good. For those of us who choose to see it this way, it is God, the God of Moses, the Father to whom Jesus speaks and of whom he teaches, and the God of every religion that honors a good and purposeful creator. He is. But to those who do not believe in God, we must serve the good.

The first thing we must do is prepare ourselves to survive here on this Earth. There is otherwise no road map but to do that which is good and to prepare ourselves for what may come. These things we have learned through our painful and complicated history must be remembered. The beauty of our sacrifices, our bravery, our selflessness, our willingness to endure pain and suffering for our fellow man must be remembered. The evil that we have done, our willingness to kill the innocent for our own gain, our petty indulgences at the expense of others, our acting blindly upon our fears must be remembered. We must keep our history holy, and we must move bravely into the future. We must preserve the beauty of this Earth, its life giving bounty, its very nature, to the best of our ability. We must survive. Humanity must survive. We must be willing to fight evil men who would take these things from us if it is absolutely necessary to fight them, whether we perceive these enemies to come from within or without. We must be strong and endure the hardships that give us strength. We must be ready to allow men to be men, and women to be women, to be as we are, though our natures may often seem to be vulgar to us. We must be prepared to give freedom to all. There will be times where we will let evil overcome us, and dark ages will follow, and we must be prepared to survive them with our understanding intact. We must be prepared to survive, not just our bodies, which are certainly temporary on this Earth, but also our understanding.

And the second thing we must do is find a way to leave this Earth and move throughout God's creation, taking with us the things that we have learned, the accomplishments in which we have pride, and the knowledge of the shameful things we have done. The universe is vast beyond our reckoning. There is intelligent life beyond our world. There are life-sustaining worlds in great clusters in the older parts of the universe, and our simple understanding of science, biology, chemistry, physics and the like, show us that intelligent life beyond our own must be. It is a certainty. The responsibility for dealing with this is an awesome one, and one that overwhelms many who desire that God's creation be small and manageable, finite. People such as these who demanded that the Earth is at the center of the known universe, and that the heavens revolve around us, persecuted Copernicus and murdered others like him for saying what must be, and they would murder others today to protect their closed view of God's creation. We can not allow such anger to keep us from fulfilling the potential destiny that God has made available to us. When we have learned to respect and fear our own humanity, and to respect our tiny existence in God's universe, we will be prepared to deal with what may come that lies beyond the sphere of our Earth. It might seem silly to many of us to try and imagine that which could be, but we must accept a singular idea, that we can live beyond our Earth, and that it is what God would have for us, even if that idea might not be made manifest for hundreds of years. It is known that the Earth will, in time, be destroyed, no less than billions of years before the end of creation. It does not have to be so for humanity, but it is incumbent upon us to survive. We must find a way to leave this Earth and move throughout the creation. Before it can happen, we will have to find a degree of peace with one another, and we must demonstrate that we have the self-control to preserve life on the world that has been given to us.

We should not seek a singularity of thought. We should not seek a singularity of the governments of men. We must be able to continue to prosper as separate peoples, separate states, with unifying goals. It is good that our varying cultures enable different peoples to meet these goals proceeding along different paths. There are two consensuses that separate peoples must work toward and desire

to reach. One is that we work toward guaranteeing basic human rights for all people. Thomas Jefferson wrote, “We find these truths to be self evident that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” We must not minimize this basic notion in our pursuit of profits for many, or for few, or for our desire to be more competitive in world markets. Many in our time pursue a global economy, and we have begun sacrificing our values to compete with economies that treat their common people as a source of slave labor. We can not continue in this vein. It is our right as a people to limit trade with other nations when those nations fail to grant basic human rights to their people. It is a component of loving our neighbors as we would have them love us.

The second consensus we must work toward is finding a way to agree to limit what we take from the Earth, especially when we discover that such limitations have become necessary for our survival. It can result in a double standard when comparing the past of one people to the present of another. For example, the people of the United States cut down many of our forests to make room for other pursuits, such as creating space to live and grow crops, but the environment of all mankind will suffer if all peoples cut down their forests. We must preserve the environment, the ecosystems, and the simple production of oxygen and reduction of heat that these forests provide to us. We must find a way to work together to protect the survival of our environment, because our survival will depend upon it. Many of us have learned to accept the damage we have caused due to the overproduction of hydrocarbons in our atmosphere, and we have begun taking steps to deal with this problem. We have to continue in this vein, and we have to take these problems seriously. We can not allow our greed and our hubris to encourage us to conclude that our profits and our short-term prosperity renders what we have learned meaningless. There will be other world-affecting crises of the physical environment that we may have only begun to consider, and we must be prepared to address these crises before they are manifest when God has given us the wisdom to know the difference.

CHAPTER 10 - The hope of salvation

I have endeavored to show you how embracing the ideas of good and purpose can lead to a better world for all. These are concepts to motivate peoples and the individuals that comprise those peoples, the macro-reality of our existence. But what is there for our personal lives? What of we who may die tomorrow? What is there for us reading these words? Is there only destruction, only decay and rot of the bodies and minds we have loved, both our own and the many others we have learned to love? Certainly it is not so. Many of us know that God's eternal heaven is real. We have always known it in our hearts. We were born knowing it, but often we allow this understanding to be taken from us by hurt and angry people who have chosen not to accept the burden of hope. We can find salvation because it must be that salvation is. We can be with those we have loved truly. We can be reconciled with those we loved and have hurt, and those we loved that have hurt us. There are many who insist, often with great anger in their voices, that there is no life after death. To them, death is a rotting finality. To them I would ask, if you could see those you loved again who are gone from your life, often gone forever, if you could see them and tell them how much you loved them, would you choose to do so? If those who hurt you could tell you how much they loved you, how much they regret having hurt you, if they could truly want your forgiveness, would you want the opportunity to forgive them and to make the wrong things right? If you can not answer yes to these questions, then you must search your heart to understand why you would not. If you can not answer yes to these questions, then you have to consider the possibility that you don't believe in heaven because you don't want it to be.

A woman once told me that the people who can not find God's heaven do not want to be there. She is right to an extent. Those who deny heaven often claim that the people who believe it are deluding themselves. They say that heaven can not be because it can not be proven. They say that heaven is not, because it is not logical that it be so. Often these people might be heard to utter a favorite phrase of humankind in general, "life isn't fair." But it is often easier to believe that life isn't fair. It is often easier to believe that there is no hope. This is the true delusion, because it relieves us of the burden of hope. It excuses us to hold onto our anger, the refusal to forgive and to learn better, the refusal to allow others to learn better and be reconciled with us. It is the delusion that the only consequences are those which are physical, which can be understood with the five senses. It is the delusion that enables us to ignore a possibility that to many seems unbearable: life is fair. God's eternal heaven is because it must be. There is a purpose to our spirit, our love, our sacrifice, because it must be so. It is logical that it be so.

So what should we do as individuals? How do we do good? This letter explains in detail God's commandments to us. Do them and you will serve God well, whether you acknowledge him or not. There are other simple ideas intrinsic to doing good that we should consider. The first is recognizing that the things we do matter when they have consequences for others. God has given us free will, and all that we choose to do is remembered. When we acknowledge this, that our choices affect others, the decisions that we make take on a new meaning. Life is not predetermined. This is not to suggest that God doesn't have a plan for us, but the realization of that plan necessarily entails that we will our actions to be so. When we choose to act otherwise, God's plan for us changes. God's

plan for us always is that we do good, that we serve him, that we follow his commandments. Consider an example where a man has two children. God has a plan for him and for each of those children. It certainly is not God's plan that he murder his children by drowning them in the bathtub, but the man, in the exercise of his free will, can do so. If he chooses to murder those children, God's plan for him changes, and God's plan for each of those children changes. Yet from that moment, God's plan is that the man does good, that he serves him, and that he follows his commandments. It is always so. It is never God's will, it is never God's plan, that we do murder, and yet we do, because God has given us free will. God did not will that the man murder his children. The man chose to do it. His choice will have consequences, and they will likely be terrible for him, but we have to be prepared for the consequences of the choices we make. When we do evil, when we act against God's will and hurt one another, there will always be consequences. God knows our hearts from our words and our actions. God understands our pain. God has always understood it. Whatever we have done, we must always go forward, and when we choose to serve God, to do good, to love one another as we would have them love us, to follow God's commandments, then God's best plan for us can be realized.

Continuing with the example above of the man who murders his children, the other concept is that of repentance and forgiveness. We must repent the evil we have done. If we would see heaven, we must know that we would choose not to harm others if given the opportunity to act again in a certain circumstance. We must know that if given an opportunity to do things again, we would choose to do good. We would choose to do things God's way. The man who murdered his children must know that he would not take their lives if given another opportunity to choose differently. This realization might be a great torment to him, for many of us torment beyond imagining, but if he knows that he would choose to do differently if given the opportunity, and he truly repents the terrible thing he has done, God will forgive him. God will forgive us of any sin if we truly repent the evil we have done and know we will make it right if given another opportunity to do so. Similarly, we must forgive one another for trespasses done against us when such forgiveness is sought. Jesus in his teaching explains this to us in great detail. Peter asks Jesus the following: if his brother sins against him, and the brother comes back and asks for his forgiveness, how many times should he forgive his brother? Up to seven times? Jesus says to Peter, "until seventy times seven," meaning as many times as he can imagine. We must forgive others when they truly seek our forgiveness. The people who hurt us are imperfect, and sometimes it can seem absurd to us how ignorant or stupid others can be, but from God's point of view we are all ignorant. If we can not forgive others for their trespasses against us, we are not prepared for God to forgive our trespasses against him and against our neighbors. If we are to receive God, we must be prepared to forgive others when they seek it. Jesus goes on to say that if you seek him, but you hold anything in your heart against your brother, he can not receive you. He also teaches that if you seek God, and you hold anything against your brother, God can not receive you. "First go and be reconciled of thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." But God will receive us unto the last. God will forgive us, no matter how often we fail him. "Many who are last shall be first." Some who have made the worst mistakes are the most penitent toward God in the end. But we must be truly repentant, and we must forgive one another to see God at the end of our lives.

What do we know of heaven? It is good beyond our understanding, which necessarily makes it impossible to explain fully. I have written in this letter things I have been shown of God. These things are true things. These things are the truth of what God would have of us. I have written other things that must be true based upon this understanding, but my understanding is imperfect, so the explanations are also imperfect. If God chose to give us a perfect understanding of all things in this physical world he would do so, but, as we have free will, he has left it to us to choose to understand his will based upon what he has shown us. I share my understanding of heaven to give the hope to others that I have been given, but God's eternal heaven is beyond my ability to explain in words. When we are truly able to supplicate ourselves to God, when we can simply choose to do the best with what God has given us, when we truly desire to forgive others for the pain they have caused us and seek the forgiveness of others for the pain we have caused them, when we are able to open ourselves completely to God's love and his forgiveness, then we are ready to enter his heaven and to be saved. It is not necessary that we be perfect. Though we are created in God's image, and we must try to live up to that image, he knows that we are physical beings with limitations. He made us this way.

When we are prepared to be as God would have us, we are prepared to be saved, to live eternally in our perfect life without sin, without anger, without disgust, without the perception of ugliness, without fear. There are many descriptions of heaven that fall short of the true understanding of God's eternal reward for us. Buddhists say that heaven is Nirvana, the perfect state of nonbeing. According to this doctrine, when a life is fully lived, over multiple physical lifetimes, the soul is freed from the physical world. It reenters the state of perfect being and ceases to exist as an individual entity. To many, such a state could be simply described as spiritual death. It is like a statue that is ground down into gravel that perfectly and peacefully co-exists with the rest of the gravel. Such a soul is simply gone because it has found peace and no longer cares to exist. Hinduism concludes similarly. The very concept is that all things of this life become meaningless, but it can not be, because the things of this life are not meaningless. The things we do matter, and their consequences matter. Life is not about forgetting, but forgiving, and loving eternally. I have heard similar explanations that attempt to describe Christian concepts of heaven. In one, the streets of heaven are paved with gold, and people simply walk the golden streets praising God forever. In another, people stand in the presence of God and sing "Amazing Grace" for all eternity. The best case scenario is that it's another version of the Buddhist Nirvana, where we cease to exist and no longer care about anything. It is simply permanent death. Otherwise it sounds to me more like a version of hell, repeating the same chorus forever. Muslims believe in the alternative that heaven is the eternal reward of pleasures denied in this life. This doctrine teaches, for instance, that Allah will grant the martyrs seventy-two virgins. It sounds pleasurable, but seems rather arbitrary, and sexist, since it seems entirely articulated toward the desires of men. Are the virgins women who actually existed, or are they simply manifestations created at the whim of God? Are they angels? These are concepts of heaven that have persisted for thousands of years. This is the hope that people who serve God have been given.

So while my understanding is imperfect, I must endeavor to impart to you the hope of heaven that has been given to me. Heaven is God's gift to us to live eternally in our perfect life without sin,

without anger, without disgust, without ugliness, without fear. We can be with the people we love, forever, sharing in their laughter, the joys of their lives, and showing them the joys of our lives. All of our loved ones will be there. All of our brothers and sisters will be there. We can watch our children grow and become strong, again and again. All of the best things we've conceived of in life will be there for us, and we will never grow tired of them, because heaven is without unrest, without fear or sin. It will be at least as good as each of us can imagine. It will be a grand adventure. My heaven will not be the same as yours, but if we have cared about one another, if we have touched each others' lives, then our heavens will intersect. We are saved, forever. God may yet have purposes for us in heaven, beyond this world, beyond this creation, and we may have opportunities to serve him beyond imagining. But the least we can hope for is that we will be saved, the best that we would have been, eternally living our best stories, for all eternity. Perhaps if we are so, we will have the opportunity to help guide those we love from afar so that they can also get there. I don't know that I will be saved at the end of this lifetime. The sins of my heart go beyond the things I have done. I have long held anger and rage in my heart. I have a covetous nature. But I do try to repent my sins the best I can, and I have sought forgiveness from people I've hurt when I've realized it. I have learned to forgive in ways that were not possible for me before. There was a time when I did not much concern myself with what God would have of me, but I have tried for four years now to serve God as well as I can. I ask God often that he save me in his heaven, and to let me serve him forever, but whether he will do so is among the things that are beyond my ability to know. If you are saved in God's heaven, and you love me, look for me there. If I am there, we will embrace as children, again and again, or perhaps simply enjoy a firm handshake, loving it anew as though each time were the first in a great while.

Of course you likely understand through inference that many people who might choose to see God die with sin in their soul. Good people die without forgiveness inside them for those that have hurt them in some way. They hurt one another and die without the realization that they would choose to do differently if given another opportunity. And not all people seek to do good. A person who has committed murder might wish nothing more than the opportunity to commit murder again. A thief or liar might wish nothing more than a better opportunity to conceal his wrongdoings. If we are not prepared for heaven, if we can not be there because we don't want to be there, or we aren't ready to be there, what of us? The simple answer is that we are born into a new life, where we will have other opportunities to love others and seek God's love and forgiveness. We will have other opportunities to serve God's plan for us.

There have long been people who believe that this life, this life of physical desires and physical needs, this life that is often filled with pain as well as pleasure, is purgatory. I believe that it is. This should serve as both hope and a warning. If you fail to serve God and to do good to your fellow man, you will have other opportunities to do so, but if you do evil and die without forgiveness, the pain you have caused others will come back to you. There are millions of children who are born into painful environments that suffer and die year after year never knowing what a better purpose for their lives might have been. You may yet be one of them. This world can be like heaven, and if we make it so for others, we make it so for ourselves. This world can also be hell. There is much suffering here. Certainly there have been ages when love and goodness reign and other times where suffering

was the way of the day. It is one more reason that we must do to our neighbors as we would have them do to us. It is not a thing to consider lightly. We can endeavor to feed the starving children of the world, but we may find after twenty years of so doing that the number of starving children has doubled while the amount of food remains the same. Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you is not about blind generosity, but a willingness to see peoples' suffering through their perspective, to want for them what we would want for ourselves if in their position. It is not a mandate, but simply maintaining a state of awareness, empathy, as we act. We can not help everyone. But we should be prepared to act on another's behalf when the opportunity is revealed to us. Replace the previous example of the drowning child with a starving child encountered alone on the road, and the person encountering the child has plenty of food to share. There are millions of starving children in the world, so why should the person feel compelled to help this particular one? It illustrates that when the differences between right and wrong are clear, there is a reason we should feel compelled to do that which is right, and that reason is because it is how God would have us be. Right and wrong often aren't clear, often the truth is obscured in the darkness, but when right and wrong are clear we should act, and when we do not, when we do not love our neighbors as we would have them love us, there may be consequences that affect our own lives, now and into a future that we can not see. Life is fair. What we do, or do not do, to help one another will come back to us. But if we serve God well, and one another, and we are truly repentant and forgiving, we will be forgiven for our sins, and we will be saved, forever, experiencing eternal happiness beyond my ability to describe and beyond your ability to imagine.

Some might ask if there are people who can not get to heaven? I have been told that there are priests who preach that everyone will get to heaven eventually. They say that Jesus communicated this to some of his disciples in other writings, other gospels. Certainly the gospels in the Bible do not teach us this. Perhaps some would consider this a warning, but Jesus taught of people being cast into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. I know that God would seek to forgive any one of us to the end of time as we know it, and I teach this boldly, but it may be that there are people so twisted and angry that they will never seek God's forgiveness. Perhaps there are those whose sins are so great and so heavy that they can never acknowledge them. Others stalwartly deny God, and perhaps they will never see heaven. If some of God's children never wish to see God or to return to him, if they seek to simply no longer exist, would it be right for us to find fault with God for this? I say the answer is no, that God's opportunity for salvation is unending, and if we, in the exercise of our free will, choose to avoid it, or deny it, then that is our choice to make. I truly do not know the answer to this question, but I think it a mistake to assume that we will all be reconciled with God eventually. We all can be, but the choice is ours to make, and acknowledging the consequences of our decisions can be difficult.

CHAPTER 11 - Why this, why now?

There are people who take great offense at the assertion of God, or the suggestion that we should honor God in our lives, or follow his commandments. There are others who take great offense at a man who would write that we can choose to serve God without declaring the Son of God to be our personal Lord and Savior, and that such people can be saved in God's heaven along with those who believe that only they and like believers will be saved exclusively. They would say that I oppose their Savior by writing such things, and therefore I am an enemy of God, because their Savior is God. They have found a very clever way to put themselves above other men, to violate the core-most of God's original commandments, because when God tells us, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me," they say that the "me" in that sentence is Jesus. They say they are not putting Jesus before God because he is God. It can not be so. God said in the gospels, "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." His beloved Son, not his beloved self, not God simply patting himself on the back. God reigns eternal, with Jesus at his side. God will always be the Father, and Jesus will always be the Son. This is not some rearrangement of words and concepts to trick people. It is simply what is written and what must be. If there is a trick to confuse people it is the Holy Trinity, the idea that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are all equal parts of the one God, and therefore Jesus is God. I follow the Son. I have studied every word he said that I have been able to find, and I follow him. It is not enough for many particular Christians in these troubled times. They falsely suggest that this nation was founded on Christian beliefs, and it is false because the Christian beliefs they espouse is but a single one: Jesus is God, and if you believe it, you will be saved eternally, and if you do not, you are damned to eternal suffering. To hell with any who believe differently. To hell with those who love their neighbors, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, to the pure in heart and to the peacemakers. Join us or suffer forever. It can not be so. They want people to believe that our founding fathers created the United States of America on the basis of such an idea, but it simply is not so, and they know it isn't and they don't care because they put themselves above the truth. Yet our founding fathers did read the Bible, and they did believe in God. "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." They believed in God, they believed that we are created in God's image, and they believed in freedom to worship God as we choose, or not at all. The extremism is not helped by atheists who try to remove the idea of serving God from our government, from our schools, from our pledge of allegiance. They espouse that they have the right to completely insulate themselves and their children from the faith of others. It has become a reality where atheists argue that God should have no place in our morality, and too many Christians ignore right and wrong in God's name believing that atheists embody the only alternative.

Too many extreme people are preaching reasons to ignore the basic tenets of right and wrong. We have to see all of these people for what they are if we are going to have a chance to make the future one which we would have for our children, our children's grandchildren, and ourselves if we are reborn into another life on this Earth or elsewhere. We have to remember that God is good, and that people who would be free to make their own choices and to live as free men must be allowed to do so, to worship God as they choose, if at all. This is an idea that the United States of America was founded upon, and the majority of us still believe this. Those who believe differently must allow us

our beliefs, and they must allow us to believe so in their presence, in our every day lives, in our schools, and in public places, even if they choose to feel that such beliefs are offensive to them.

When I wrote earlier versions of this letter, I was hesitant to burden people with finite visions of the future. There are already enough people who believe that the end times are near, and they point out war, natural disaster and unrest around the globe. Many are simply waiting, hoping, for things to get bad enough that Jesus Christ returns, after a series of horrible world events where no less than hundreds of millions die horribly. I don't know about any of that. Certainly there have been natural disasters, but there have always been. When we have great numbers of people living close together, natural disasters that occur can take many more lives than a similar disaster might have claimed in the past. There is a great deal of conflict across the globe, but we are truly in a time of relative peace. It was only several decades ago that tens of millions were dying as the result of war across the world. There are places where genocide is happening, right now, where one people is trying to exterminate another because of cultural or racial differences, and we should be concerned with them and act when we can make a meaningful difference. But these things have happened before, and for most, life goes on. In general, most of us live in an age of relative peace and harmony.

As an American, I can look and see great human achievements, both socially and technologically. We have abolished slavery as we knew it. We abolished the idea that people of noble birth had a greater right to life and freedom than those that served them. We have cured diseases and enabled people generally to live longer. We have pushed forward the idea that people can have equal rights, regardless of their birth or gender. We've been to the moon and gathered much information about the universe that was not available to us only decades ago. We have used economic prosperity to accomplish great things, like helping to rebuild Europe after the Second World War, and we've been able to use our military to help bring peace to places like the former Yugoslavia. We have led the world in humanitarian efforts when tragedies strike like the earthquake in Haiti. We've been able to step back from the brink of nuclear holocaust. There are more people in the world who enjoy relative freedom than at any other time in human history. We should be proud of these and many, many other accomplishments.

But we are now at a time in history where our decisions will change the future, and the lives of billions hang in the balance. We are very close to tapping out our natural environment, our biosphere. We are very close to the point where mass-starvation will occur. We know that we have ground yet to be tilled that could manage this starvation given population projections in the near future, but we are precariously close to a tipping point. There are in fact many who would greatly profit as we reach this point. Most of America's farmable areas have been bought up by large scale industrial farmers who stand to make billions if our food supply is pushed to the brink, and the same is the case in other parts of the world. We know that we have overfished the oceans nearly beyond the point of sustainability. We know that climate change, global warming, is occurring at rates that exceed what we have predicted. The ice caps are melting. Glaciers are melting. Mountains that were once ever snow capped are no longer so. Huge chunks of Antarctic ice are breaking off and flowing into the oceans. We can easily conceive of ocean levels rising that imperil low-lying islands and coastal areas, but we tell ourselves that only a small number, merely in the hundreds of millions

at most, will be affected. There is evidence that these things have been greatly exacerbated by our burning fossil fuels and putting hydrocarbons into the atmosphere. We know that they are made worse by deforestation, that the oxygen created by trees cools the atmosphere, and yet we continue cutting down trees to create open land for farming and settlement. We know exactly what we are doing, and we continue to do it, in the name of profit, in the name of creating jobs, in the name of feeding the world's hungry, and making space for man to live. We know that we are in the process of destroying the world as we know it.

And we even know that eventually, possibly in the lifetimes of many living in the time I write this, an ice age will follow suddenly that changes everything. Plants and animals holding onto survival in our weakened environment will die suddenly, in a mere space of years, and the world will cry out in starvation. If the world's temperature rises a mere five degrees Fahrenheit and then drops by ten in the next hundred years, the effects will be absolutely catastrophic. And this doesn't take into account the very real possibility of a major volcanic eruption, which history has shown us could happen at any time. None of these things I write are the words of a prophet, but rather simply the reality we've made. And yet there are people spending millions to make us believe that these things will not occur, riling up the "faithful" to protest against "false science."

And we are provided with so many other distractions. We conduct wars on poverty, wars on drugs, wars on crime, and wars on small countries where a few of us stand to gain power and influence. We encourage people to have "zero tolerance" on a wide range of issues. I understand the attraction for many to stand up against the ideas that offend us based on the differing behaviors of our neighbors, but they are mere distractions from the greater issues that affect our lives and the world as a whole. If those who would profit at all costs have their way, there will be cameras watching us at every street corner, and in every office cubicle, for the prevention of crime. Every person will have an identity chip planted in his or her skin for the purpose of preventing crime, preventing terrorism and regulating commerce. And when there isn't enough of the basic necessities to go around, even in this country, we will further escalate our war of intolerance to include people of other races or simple beliefs, all in the name of protecting some people or some ideal. For being an arguably tolerant people, our progress down the road to intolerance is striking. While this should seem petty, you should ask yourself why you would care if the person sitting next to you drinks or smokes or is homosexual or has tattoos or owns a gun or is whatever race you don't feel comfortable with. There are much greater considerations at stake, and your focusing on your neighbor's difference is not part of the solution. We must protect one another. We must love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

CHAPTER 12

When I started writing this letter nearly four years ago, my purpose seemed simple. I had felt a kind of spiritual awakening a couple of months prior, and I was trying to remember God's commandments, so I decided to write them down. I copied all ten from Exodus Chapter 20, the King James Bible, letter for letter, on a single sheet of copy paper. When I looked up the world shimmered, as though everything was bright, bright white while still colorful, and I knew that I had to communicate this to the world, that the key to our survival was in following God's simple laws. I was giddy with excitement and filled with positive energy. The commandments as I understood them came to include the commandments of Jesus, that we should love God above ourselves, and that we should love one another as ourselves. It is as simple as this, but if I wrote nothing else, no one would concern themselves with it. In complete honesty I only partially understood what I was doing, but once motivated, my primary purpose has been to communicate this understanding. It took me more time than I would have liked to get to the point of being able to communicate this understanding, and still my communication is lacking. But there comes a time when we have to stop thinking about how to say things better and how to do things better and to actually start doing them. This understanding must be passed on to others, so this letter is written.

We will not survive without God, which is not to say that each of us has to choose to acknowledge God. As I have attempted to show you with this letter, believing in God is secondary to serving God. Serving God by doing, by loving your neighbor as yourself and limiting the laws we make over one another, enforcing only the ones that need to be enforced, ultimately serves God's will. It is acceptable that we doubt God. The world we live in is full of doubt. We as individuals can only best live and espouse a good life as we understand it. We can only do the best we can do. The best we can do may in fact be much better than we believe we can do, but God knows his children. God will know when we have done our best as we understand it. But if we reject God as a people, if we declare that God has no place in us, we will fail. In a like sense, if we declare our own will to be God's will and instead do evil, we will also fail. We are failing now.

On one hand we claim to embrace a free-market system, and yet we take it to the extreme that the right for one man to profit is necessarily at the expense of others to simply be free to live as they choose. For many the almighty dollar has taken the place of God. Franklin Roosevelt declared regarding the United States entrance into the Second World War, "Not a single war millionaire will be created in this country as a result of the war disaster." Eisenhower expressed similar concerns regarding the military industrial complex. Since the end of World War II, with the exception of the 1990s where the military budget was cut substantially beginning with George H. W. Bush, we've continued to fuel the war machine at greater rates every decade. United States relative military investment in the last decade has far eclipsed any other since the Axis Powers were defeated. The technologies of death that potential enemies steal or copy, new ways to kill people that could eventually be used to kill Americans, were created by America and continue to be developed. We continue to make the world less safe in the name of security. The wealth of the privileged class continues to become more disparate with the average American. We once decided that it would be responsible to set aside land and oil reserves, believing in part that the environments housing those

reserves should be protected, and now in this time many of our people argue angrily that the lands should not be preserved and that we should consume as many of the world's natural resources as we can get our hands on. We seek to further imperil our natural environment primarily so that a few can profit. American oil companies exceeded their own record profits for four straight years in this decade. Oil companies, insurance companies, telecommunications companies and the military industrial complex have made record profits, not for the betterment of mankind or even the lives of Americans in general, but simply to accumulate as much profit as they can. And they take a portion of their money and lobby the government to protect their right to do so, not to protect the free market or create a competitive environment, but to protect their right to accumulate more wealth. And the average American who may have a hard time feeding his family defends tooth and nail their right to do it. We worship a cult of greed.

And we took it a step further by engaging in two costly wars across the globe in the name of defending our interests. We allowed an outrageous act of terrorism perpetrated by servants of darkness to encourage us to believe lies that we claimed justified our right to invade another country, ultimately to enable wealthy companies to become wealthier. We intentionally created a tenuous situation that resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands that we now feel responsible to keep from spinning out of control, and there is no good end in sight. We created a situation where the security of the world is further imperiled, and what has become the mouthpiece for the Christian church in America was an accomplice the entire way. We knowingly fought a holy war that wasn't holy at all, again. Jesus' church in America is not about peacemaking, because it isn't his church. The balance has tipped in favor of Paul. And too many of these Christians want the end to come, because they believe they will be carried into heaven while their adversaries burn. None of this is about loving one's neighbor.

And rather than address the problems at hand, we continue to instead find ways to punish and hate one another for doing things that we don't do, whether or not any actual harm is done. In the last five decades we have put more and more of our people into prisons at greater rates for reasons pettier than the last, including the 1990s, and we continue to make new laws to enforce our ideas of social behavior. Three strikes and you're out, three felonies no matter how petty, and the offender is in prison for the rest of his life in some states. A person who urinates in public risks being branded for life as a sex offender, grouped together with rapists and child molesters. We created mandatory sentencing guidelines for federal crimes, not to create maximum penalties, but to require judges to impose no less than certain terms of years in prison, even if that judge believes the penalty is unjustified. I've never been a proponent of simply legalizing drugs, but we keep making the penalties more severe, often locking up people for life. We put a young man who is a petty drug dealer into prison for years and feign dismay, or simply ignore it, when he comes out worse than he went in. We have random checkpoints to snare drunk driving offenders. It's less and less about people driving safely and more and more about enforcing a law for the sake thereof. We will stand for nothing less than zero tolerance. We don't want a person drinking three beers after work and driving home. We don't want a person smoking anywhere in public because we choose to find it distasteful. Force those types of people into their homes and out of sight of the public. We keep raising the threat level by lowering our tolerance for behaviors we simply do not approve of.

And eventually cameras on every street corner watching our every move will not be enough. The “War on Drugs” is being subsumed into the “War on Terror,” because it makes law enforcement more expedient. They will seek to control people’s behavior by controlling commerce, ensuring that the buying and selling that goes on will be approved by the state, which will ultimately be by the people with all the wealth and power. They will start by abolishing cash transactions, as all transactions can be monitored if made by credit cards, and multiple cards will be unwieldy, so we’ll all use a single card, and our spending behaviors will necessarily conform to the norm. And it ends with every person having an identity chip implanted on their person, so all people can be tracked and identified at all times. We have the ability to do it now, but for the fact that people still currently have the volition to resist it. That volition, the acknowledgment that we have a God-given right to make our own choices, will become less and less by generation, and our generation will be old and beaten down when it happens, and perhaps too distracted to care. The opportunity for dissent will simply cease to exist. We can never let it come to this. This is not freedom, and it is most definitely not loving our neighbors as ourselves. This is simply tyranny in its purest form.

On the other hand we have the natural environment which we know is declining as a result of our abuse. We can already see the impact of our prolonged burning of fossil fuels, and yet we continue to burn more. We know the impact of deforestation, and yet we continue to cut down more trees. We know that our oceans are already being taxed near the limit, and yet we continue consuming more fish while the hydrocarbon levels in the water continues to grow. Species of animals and plants are going extinct faster than we can count them. We are making our resources more scarce while world populations continue to grow at an alarming rate. Yet we encourage our people to disbelieve it, or to simply ignore it, because in a world of scarcity, those who have the wealth and power become even wealthier and more powerful. Those in the privileged class, who ultimately control the world’s military strength and the resources necessary for survival, will be in a stronger position to simply dictate policy to the world. Everyone else will ultimately be a slave to the system. This is not loving our neighbors as ourselves.

But it will not happen the way they believe, because when we stop working for the betterment of mankind, when we have backtracked enough away from a free world and toward one where the many are controlled by the whim of a few, God will let us again come to destruction. It will be a destruction of our own doing. We can see it happening now, and yet we are not motivated to stop it. We allow the darkness to blind us. Many of us can see the light, but we sit on our hands and act without volition. It is much easier to simply feed and consume and distract ourselves. We are not motivated by a love for one another, because we don’t believe in the freedom to simply choose how we will live our lives, and we don’t believe in that freedom for others. We don’t know how to love one another because we are constantly having our enemies pointed out to us, and we simply follow the lead, like cattle, down the path to destruction. We are not motivated by a love for God to make things right because our understanding of God as we have thus far conceived of him has no place in this situation.

So I wrote this letter to help us understand God better. It is a warning most dire, but I hope for many it will serve as a message of hope. We can not fix all of the mistakes we have made, but we can

repent our errors and go forward with a renewed purpose that God intends for men to be free. If we can understand and believe that God wants this for us, we can find the motivation that exists beyond our own lives. We can endeavor to make this world as much like God's heaven as possible. We will have a framework of law that will enable separated peoples to come to an honest agreement. We can bring our environment back into balance, closer to a state of equilibrium, and we will be better prepared to move into the rest of God's creation, understanding the limitations we have learned. The justification of this letter, and the understanding it communicates, is drawn almost entirely from the Bible and our past history. These are not new ideas. But we can understand and remember them better. We can make the opportunity to better understand God's will for us while the world is still green, while we still enjoy a measure of freedom and prosperity. It is difficult to install a sprinkler system when the house is already burning, but the Earth is not burning yet. We have time to prepare. God would have us survive and prosper, but we have been given free will, and the choice is ultimately ours to make.

The best title I could give this letter is "Truths of God." It is not "The Truth of God" or "The Truths of God." While there are points in the letter that are finite, it is by no means a finite understanding. It started with a powerful but simple moment of enlightenment, that God has given us commandments to aid us in our own understanding and survival. I have made a choice that was a commission of a sort that I will never back away from. I send this letter to you because I must. You are not so obliged. If you have found some inspiration in this letter, an understanding, some hope for the betterment of the future of mankind, then I ask you to forward it to those you love and others you believe might have the power to make a good difference. I can only otherwise ask of you that which is obvious. Love your neighbor as yourself. Value the freedom of others as you would best value your own. Try to understand God and the better purpose that your life might serve, which includes protecting this world. Love truth and forsake evil. And otherwise love the life God has given you the best you can. The things that you do will be remembered, and the best stories are of the man who did right in the end. The future is not yet decided for us. Help us to make the days that follow this one as good as they can be. There is great hope for us.

So it is.
Bob Young.

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Bob Young
531 Cliffside Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43202
Bob@TruthsofGod.net
www.TruthsofGod.net
(614) 447-9992

Understanding the New Testament

Written July of 2009

Dear friends and patriots,

I finished reading the Bible recently. Some of you know that I have studied closely the four gospels of Jesus Christ, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and transcribed each of them in detail. There are those who would find fault with the notion that I undertook this endeavor without the guidance of people who have studied these works before me (priests, historians, theologians, etc.) and without the benefit of provided historical context. Others would quibble with the notion that I focused solely on Jesus' words and teaching without having a firm understanding of many other parts of the Bible other than from third hand accounts heard in church or in discussions. I write this paragraph simply to provide a point of perspective rather than a justification. But in retrospect there really may not be a better way to understand Jesus than to just read his words for yourself and attempt to separate what he said from what was said of him.

When I studied the gospels, having started with a firm understanding of the Ten Commandments given through Moses and a general understanding of God's will for us, I anticipated finding blasphemies and contradictions. My expectation should be of no great surprise. Most of us have heard so-called Christians talk of some version of piety where drunkenness is among the greatest of sins and homosexuality is a curse that humanity has brought upon itself through immorality. They've told us that it is God's will that the weak should serve the powerful because each was born so by the will of God, that it is not a sin for a people to murder the weak and helpless of other peoples, as in time of war, and that it is the place of women to serve their husbands and to remain silent in the church. The Calvinists preach predestination, that God knows our fate at the time we were born, and that there is nothing we can do through our free will to change it. Most distressing is the idea, almost universal in Christian churches, that if you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, simply as a heartfelt declaration, that you will be rewarded with an eternal heaven, regardless of the way you live your life or otherwise treat one another, and if you do not profess this acceptance, you are damned to an eternity of suffering. To many of these so-called teachers, you only need acknowledge that Jesus is God, and nothing else is necessary. Though skeptical, it seemed intuitive to me that these ideas must have sprung from Jesus Christ himself. It is called Christianity after all.

But if you go back and read the New Testament with an open mind and an open heart, you may discover that Jesus Christ believed and taught none of these things. If you have been skeptical, you may come to believe that you find no fault with Jesus at all, and that in fact you admire him deeply. You may even find yourself wanting to be more like him and discover that it is possible to be more so. Even if you've never had faith in God, or if instead you've blindly been seeking the rapture your entire life, you may end up wanting to take it upon yourself to help other people better understand what he taught so that they might share in the understanding you have. It is good to have hope in better possibilities for yourself and for others, and if you find such hope you can share it. It is our place to help each other along, and I tell you truly that you can find wisdom in this from the

teachings of Jesus. If you are one who believes there is fault in Jesus, as I expected to find, when you read the New Testament you may instead discover that the fault you believed, the preaching that made you unwilling to hear, came not from Jesus, but from men who followed him, or to put more accurately simply came after him in time, teaching their own very flawed understanding of God in his name.

The next few pages are a very brief synopsis of the New Testament of the Bible.

The Gospels of Jesus Christ are four books that detail his life mainly from the time he was about 30 years old. In these books Jesus more or less appears on the scene of Israel during the Roman occupation around what is now called the year zero CE (Common Era, also called AD). There are many other books written in the same general period that describe Jesus' life and purport to be gospels, but these were never canonized by the Roman Catholic Church nor included in the Bible, so for simplicity's sake we will consider only these four.

In the beginning of these four books is a man called John the Baptist, generally accepted by Christians to be a cousin of Jesus, who lives in the desert and comes out to preach the gospel of repentance for the remission of sin, which simply put is that people need to repent their sins before God, openly admitting their wrongdoings and asking God's forgiveness, and thenceforth living better lives acknowledging God and his will. This is symbolically performed by a follower of God ducking the person in the water beneath the river. Jesus comes to John to be baptized, and John immediately recognizes Jesus as spiritually superior to himself and from there tells people that Jesus is the one of God that John has foretold. During Jesus' baptism, the sky opens, and a light descends upon him like a dove, and a loud voice declares from heaven, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Both before and after his baptism, Jesus finds certain men whom he recruits and later names as apostles who follow him loyally, generally leaving behind their previous lives and occupations. In addition to the apostles are many other disciples who follow and teach Jesus' doctrine and thousands of others who follow him to hear his teaching and to be healed. From beginning to end Jesus exhibits a great understanding in general and particularly the ability to perceive the thoughts and intentions of others.

Throughout these travels Jesus performs many miracles which are mainly manifested in his ability to heal, which ranges from healing infirmities such as blindness and being crippled to raising the recently dead, or nearly dead, and his ability to cast out devils. Generally the only prerequisite to being healed is that the person who requests the healing believes that he can do it, and most praise God for his help and go on to preach his greatness. As to casting out devils, it is noteworthy that the evil spirits recognize him on sight and beg for his mercy. Those from whom devils were cast also praise him and seek to follow him. Jesus performs a number of other miracles and prognostications. Among the most remarkable of these are two episodes where thousands follow him into the wilderness to hear his teaching, and his disciples tell him that they should be sent back as there cannot possibly be enough food to feed them all. Jesus breaks the few loaves and fish that the apostles have brought, commanding them to do likewise, and thousands are fed. There are also two

episodes where the apostles' boat is about to capsize in a storm. In one instance the apostles fearfully wake Jesus, who calms the winds and water with a gesture, and in another he walks out from the shore upon the water to help them, both times to show them that their faith in him is incomplete when they are amazed that he can do these things.

Jesus makes a number of speeches concerning the will of God, particularly at the beginning of his journeys, exhorting those who hear him mainly to seek God, to forgive and seek God's forgiveness, to love peace and to love one another. The "Sermon on the Mount" is the best known of these. He says a great deal about spirituality and being meek before God. He talks about the kingdom of God and how God's rewards are there for them who seek them above the riches of the Earth. He preaches that God will do good for those that truly seek him, and that those who bear good fruit for God will have his eternal reward, and those who do evil will be cast away.

There are three main themes that develop in the gospels. The theme which most concerns the teaching of Jesus is man's relationship to God. In some ways it continues with the Gospel of Repentance for the Remission of Sin that starts with John the Baptist. Jesus always refers to God as his Father, he instructs others to see God as their heavenly Father, and he preaches that they should always seek God in prayer and that they should ask God's forgiveness and ask of him what they desire. He stresses that they should have an open relationship with God, not for a show to other men, but as a form of divine communication. As a point of comparison, he asks people what father would give his child seeking bread instead a stone, and if earthly fathers, being evil, would do as their children ask, how much more will their heavenly Father do for them? He teaches of loving one another as God loves us. As people seek God's forgiveness, he instructs them that they should also forgive one another and seek one another's forgiveness. Jesus gives the example that if a man approaches God's altar and asks that God correct his brother, but the man himself has acted against his brother and seeks not his brother's forgiveness, that his prayer is for nothing. When Peter asks him how much a man should keep forgiving his brother who seeks his forgiveness, "until seven times?" Jesus tells him "until seventy times seven," which comes just short of saying as many times as you can imagine. Jesus also teaches of living a good life and following God's commandments, doing so openly not for a show, but as a good example. He teaches that everyone should serve God always, because they will not know when God will come for them and to therefore always be prepared. When asked what is the greatest of God's commandments, Jesus says there are two: There is one God, and you should love him with your whole heart, and love thy neighbor as thyself. Jesus also preaches often about not loving the riches of this Earth, and that we should instead lay our riches in heaven. Jesus talks in many parables about the kingdom of heaven and its greatness, and he makes it clear that those who are not with God, or who do evil and harm others, will be cast out from heaven and endure much suffering.

The second theme, which ties the other two themes together, is the antagonism between Jesus' teaching and the conflicting teaching of the Old Testament as interpreted by the religious leaders of Israel. Jesus is at odds with the Pharisees almost from the beginning of his journeys. He teaches that it is good to do good work on the sabbath day, which by Jewish law and the Fourth Commandment is Saturday, and the Pharisees see it as Jesus flaunting the law. When he heals a man on the sabbath day, he tells the man that his sins are forgiven, saying that God has also given him the ability to

forgive sins, which further enrages the Pharisees, as they believe that he makes himself as God. When they ridicule Jesus for eating and drinking with sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors and the like, or for letting his disciples eat with unwashed hands, he berates them for putting their own laws, mans laws, over the laws of God, and that in so doing they lead people away from God and toward destruction. And he tells them in parables that their anger with him is as with God's prophets before him, whom they killed, and that their seeking to harm him is not Godly, but ungodly, going as far as to call them not sons of Abraham, but of Satan. They test him repeatedly with riddles, and Jesus consistently demonstrates wisdom beyond their preparation. The Pharisees seek to kill him throughout the gospels, making it clear that Jesus is boldly risking his life with his words.

A particularly good story in this vein is the well known Good Samaritan, where Jesus demonstrates that any man can be your neighbor. Jesus tells a lawyer of the Pharisees of a man who is beaten by robbers and left for dead. A priest happens by, and, seeing the man, he moves to the other side of the street and goes on. Later a higher priest passes by and does likewise. Finally a Samaritan, hated by Israelites, comes along and takes compassion on the man, binding up his wounds and taking him to an inn, going as far as to leave money for the man's stay with the innkeeper and telling the innkeeper that if more is required to put it on his tab. Jesus asks the lawyer which of these was the man's neighbor, and he responds the man who showed mercy on him, and Jesus tells him to go and do likewise, demonstrating both that anyone can be your neighbor and that being a priest or holding a certain belief does not make one so.

The third theme is Jesus' role as the Messiah, the foretold savior of Israel, and the Son of God, which is most dogmatic of the three. At the beginning of his teaching, Jesus is tempted by Satan after fasting forty days in the desert. Satan tells Jesus that if he is the Son of God to simply command the stones to be made of bread, and Jesus responds that man is not fed by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Satan then tells Jesus to throw himself from a high mountain, as it is written that God will send his angels to bear him up, to which Jesus answers, it is also written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Finally Satan tells Jesus that if he will only serve him, that he will give Jesus dominion over all the kingdoms of the Earth, and Jesus orders him away as it is written, "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Throughout the majority of the Gospels Jesus refers to himself as the Son of man, but he makes it clear that he is serving God, and he always addresses God as "Father." His role as Messiah is regularly supported by contextual references provided by the gospel writers to Old Testament prophet predictions of his coming. He makes it clear that his teaching is the will of God, and that those who hear his sayings and do them will find salvation, and those who hear them and do them not will find destruction. He cautions people not to find offense in him, as he preaches the will of God, but in three of the four Jesus does not say that he is God or that believing he is so is the one condition to finding God's kingdom. Of the four Gospels, only the Gospel of John refers to Jesus as God, or the Word that is before the world was. Given that each of the Gospels are written by men, rather than just accepting each as the truth from a different kind of Jesus, we should instead determine why men wrote such blatantly conflicting interpretations of Jesus in John compared to the other three.

Well into his ministry he reveals to his apostles that his teaching will lead them to Jerusalem where he will eventually be taken by evil men and put to death and that he will rise again on the third day and ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. One of his apostles, Judas, betrays him to the priests of Israel, as Jesus knew he would do. His condemnation and subsequent crucifixion happen consistently in all four gospels. The Jews demand his crucifixion and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, claims to find no wrongdoing in him, but he acclimates to the will of the Jews and has Jesus crucified. It is noteworthy that while the Gospel writers portray Pontius Pilate as mostly innocent, the Romans harshly belittle Jesus, with Roman soldiers beating and torturing him before crucifying him in an especially torturous way, putting a crown of thorns on his head and nailing him to the cross rather than simply hanging him up with ropes. The stories of his resurrection are much more varied, but they all end with Jesus rising after three days, appearing to Mary Magdalene and then the disciples, and then rising to heaven after remaining with them and instructing them for some time.

One final element of the gospels are Jesus' predictions of the end times. He tells of Jerusalem's enemies encompassing it round about, and that it will be terrible for all, especially for the weak and for women with children. He teaches of family members turning on one another for his sake, turning each other over to the authorities to be put to death. He instructs those who can flee to do so without looking back and warns that they will be scattered through many lands, that one person will be taken and another like person spared, and that the temple of Israel will be destroyed to its very foundation. He tells them that these things will happen within their lifetimes, and in fact, Israel, along with its temple, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, just as Jesus predicted. It is noteworthy that the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were written around 50 CE, making this one of the few historically verifiable predictions of Jesus. It happened as he said it would. He also warned against false prophets and antichrists who would come in the lifetimes of many who were following him, and who would preach false doctrines in his name, misleading people and leading them away from God, much as the Pharisees were doing in Jesus' lifetime.

That about sums it up concerning Jesus' teaching in the gospels. I have likely omitted, unintentionally, some important or better instructive passages, but what is presented here is a fairly concise report of what is contained therein. So I look back on this and ask what fault should I find in Jesus? Christians have murdered and stolen and coveted the rights and possessions of others in Jesus' name nearly from the time he was crucified. Millions have been killed simply for belief, and generally the justification given is not that they didn't believe in God, but that they believed differently than those committing the murders. But Jesus in no way instructed them to do these things at all. Jesus taught us to be peaceful and to love our neighbors. Jesus taught us to love one another. Jesus resisted bad authority and served God only. Jesus may have been wrong about some things. The gospels clearly record one instance of it, where Jesus believes one thing and a short conversation with a woman teaches him to believe another. But upon reading the Gospels, I found in Matthew, Mark and Luke that Jesus' teaching is good, and he teaches that God is good, and that God loves us as children, and that we should likewise love one another and serve God, showing deference to God's greater understanding.

I believed that I had found fault with Jesus, but I came to realize that it wasn't Jesus who was at fault, but the men and women who claimed to represent or to follow him. It would be easy to

conclude that human nature is simply deeply flawed and that many people are simply evil-spirited, and that is more or less the conclusion that I reached, but the dogmatic preachings of the church that contradict Jesus' teaching suggest a more pointed conclusion. How could so many good people so completely miss Jesus' message?

So after a couple of years of writing and teaching people about God, using the Judeo-Christian perspective as a point of reference, I found it proper in time to study the entirety of the Bible from beginning to end. While the Old Testament is not insignificant in terms of perspective, as it provides great insight into our understanding of God and how it shaped a very persistent people, I would for the purposes of this letter consider specifically the post-Gospel books of the New Testament written mainly by Paul and beginning with the Acts of the Apostles.

The Acts of the Apostles had been described to me as a history of the apostles following the crucifixion of Jesus as well as the history of the early church. There are about fifteen pages at the beginning in this vein, focusing mainly on Peter's leadership and the persecution of the early Christians. Near the middle of this initial segment is a story of a disciple, Stephen, who bravely stands before a hostile crowd and preaches of Jesus before being stoned to death. Among those who sanction the stoning is Saul, a Jewish servant of the Romans. Sometime after the murder of Stephen, Saul is on the Road to Damascus, where they will persecute more Christians, and a light appears to him and he is blinded, and a voice says to him that it is Jesus whom he persecutes. At that point Jesus gives him instructions, and another disciple meets him and heals him of his blindness at Jesus' command, and Saul subsequently changes his name to Paul, declares himself to be one of the apostles, and proceeds to travel mainly the Greek areas of the Roman Empire preaching in Jesus' name until his execution by the Romans in 68 CE.

The Acts provides a close look at the travails of the early Christian church growing in Jerusalem, illustrating how the teaching began in Jerusalem, under the leadership of Peter, and how it continued to grow inward and outward, with the persecution of Christians only creating more and more followers. There are a number of stories of Peter's divinely assisted escapes from Roman and Jewish authorities with Peter healing others among the faithful as he goes. It has a very communistic character, where the Christians are expected to sell all they have and give it to the church, and God will, and does in the Acts, provide for them. One story in this vein that diverges from Jesus' teaching of forgiveness in the Gospels is where a couple sells their property and deceptively gives only half to the church, keeping half for themselves. When Peter questions each of the couple in turn, perceiving their dishonesty, the man and woman in turn both die on the spot, illustrating a very different slant generally in the remainder of the New Testament as no one dies for their sins in Jesus' presence. Another common theme in Acts, and throughout much of the rest of the New Testament, is reconciling Jewish law, such as circumcision, with teaching of faith in Jesus.

While the book is called the Acts of the Apostles, some might be surprised, as I was, to see that about one-third of the way through it, it becomes almost entirely about the travels and teaching of Paul. But it was written by Luke, a follower of Paul, who is believed to have written the Gospel of Luke, so it shouldn't be so surprising to be mostly about Paul's teaching, who declared himself to be an apostle. The next fourteen books are also written by Paul. This one man who bore witness

of everything he did and taught wrote almost the entirety of the New Testament that was written after the teaching of Jesus. Half, arguably much more than half, of the teaching of the Christian church comes from the teaching of this man.

What is equally striking, and unknown to many Christians, is that the Gospel of John, which appears in the Bible before the letters of Paul, is widely believed to have been written around 94 CE, more than 60 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, 40 or so years after the Gospel of Matthew was written, and 25-or-so years after Paul's death in Rome. Not surprising, the first theme of the other three gospels, teaching people to obey God's law, including God's commandments, is mostly omitted or significantly changed by the Gospel of John, and instead it focuses almost entirely on Jesus' divinity. Unlike the other three gospels, Jesus says in no uncertain terms in John that his healing is done to justify that he is of God, that he is like God, and that no man may see the Father but the Son, and those who seek the Son. To paraphrase, Jesus says in John, "You question me about God's law? I AM the law, and I have been so since before the world was created!" But according to the testimony of those who followed him during the times that he was teaching, he said no such thing, but he said instead to love God and to serve and obey God as Jesus himself did. Again, with the exception of the Gospel of John, Jesus says to follow his teaching and to do as he does, and that if peoples' faith is good and pure, God will likewise do for them who ask him, and he will lay up their treasures in heaven, not because they claim faith in the name of Jesus, but because they serve God.

If you have doubt of the truthfulness of what I've written so far, especially to those reading this who are non-believers, I boldly implore you to study the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and, so doing, ask yourself what fault you find in Jesus. You have likely in the past heard Christian witness telling you what you should or must believe. Perhaps you've hardened your heart against so-called Christian statements that seem to you blasphemous, even though you may claim to believe in no God, and on some level you think Jesus must have been wrong, or insane, or simply lying for his own personal fame. But these things that you've heard from so-called witnesses may not be the teaching of Jesus. The things taught by Jesus were good examples. The example Jesus taught with his life was a good example. If you look for yourself you may see it, and if you see it, what bad will you have done to yourself? At worst will you find some greater purpose to do the good things you've always believed and to continue to help and defend and protect those who need protection the way you always have, though you might find some purpose in God for doing so?

Returning to the text of the New Testament, Paul wrote fifteen books, or letters, which form one of the two backbones of the Christian church. Beginning with the Acts, the stories are a mingling of Paul's journeys in the vicinity of the Eastern Mediterranean, between Israel and Rome, and particularly in the lands that are now Greece and Turkey. While the Acts and his second book, Romans, tell much of his journeys, each of Paul's letters is primarily a letter to followers or leaders of his followers instructing them in their teaching and imparting his wisdom upon them. He refers to his teaching as "my gospel," and he repeatedly justifies that he speaks for God, stating at the beginning of the majority of the letters that God has declared him an apostle of Jesus Christ.

His teaching is very consistent and not linear in the sense of progressing from one place or idea to another, so it is generally not instructive to make contextual book references to where he was or his

differentiated purpose at the time that the quote is made. Here are a few examples of Paul's validation: From Romans Chapter 2 Verse 16: "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." First Corinthians 3:10-11, "According to the grace of God which is given to me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." First Corinthians 11:1-2 "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." Second Corinthians 11:5, "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles." (He goes on here to say that those preaching righteousness, as Jesus did, are false apostles.) Second Corinthians 12:11, ". . . for in nothing am I behind the chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." First Timothy 1:11, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." Again, his first line in most of his letters is to tell people that God has declared him an apostle.

A primary theme of Paul is that all men are inherently evil by nature, and because of this, the commandments of God have been made moot by Jesus, and the only salvation from God is by believing in the name of Jesus, as articulated by Paul. Some examples: Romans 3:11-12, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Contrast with Matthew 5:6 and 5:8 "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.") Paul says in Galatians 5:4, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Contrast with Luke 1:5-6, "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." They go on to bear John the Baptist.) This is particularly relevant as the primary argument of most Christians, and fundamentalist Christian churches, is, "You are all evil and consumed by sin. Repent and believe as we teach, or you are condemned by God to eternal damnation."

A second theme of Paul is explaining why God's law is nullified, but still exists, as explained by Paul, but that it is entirely based in Jesus' Resurrection. Romans 7:14-17, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would that I do not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Romans 7:25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." (Paul is saying here that he isn't morally responsible for what his body does because his mind has believed in the holy Resurrection of Jesus.) Philippians 2:5-6, "Let this mind also be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:" (Here Paul says if you accept the grace of Jesus, you are, in some way, equal to God, as he proclaims Jesus to be.) Peter teaches of spiritual milk. First Peter 2:1-3, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be, ye have tasted that the

Lord is gracious.” But Paul says, Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” After writing much about how faith in God had been a great bounty for God’s faithful, he concludes, Hebrews 11:39-40, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” What Paul says here, central to the fundamental Christian church, is that faith toward God may get you on God’s good side, but it will ultimately get you nowhere, as it ultimately got Abraham and Joseph and Moses nowhere, and you will only find heaven through the grace of Jesus Christ.

While he declares that the grace of Jesus has nullified man’s understanding of God’s law, Paul declares his own commandments for men. First Corinthians 5:11, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one do not to eat.” (Jesus intentionally drank and dined with such people. While many Americans would find fictional Sheriff Andy Griffith to be a truly Christian example, Paul would have had Andy Griffith run Otis the drunk out of town.) Galatians 5:18-21, “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance (meaning disagreement, dissension or nonconformity), emulations (meaning contentions), wrath, strife, seditions (encouraging disloyalty to rulers), heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in the time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (The commandment against revelling explains why some Christians consider dancing to be a sin.) First Thessalonians 4:2-3, “For ye know by what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” In First Timothy 4:1-4 Paul teaches that vegetarianism is of the devil. Jesus gives only hope to those who love God and love one another. Paul, with his teaching, creates a kind of hopelessness, a kind of slave mentality, that saps all of the pleasure out of physical existence, that leaves no hope but for blind faith in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s version of God’s differing laws for men and women merits its own paragraph. First Corinthians 11:3-7, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of every woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.” First Timothy 2:11-14, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” First Corinthians 15:4-5, “And that he (Christ) was buried, and that he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures; And that he was seen

of Cephas (Peter), then of the twelve:" The risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first in three of the four Gospel accounts, with an angel of the Lord appearing first to her in Luke. But Paul's version simply cuts her out of the story. He believes himself to have the authority to just tell it how it best suits him, and to Paul, clearly, a woman could not merit such great respect from Christ.

Throughout Paul's teaching are pearls of wisdom, hinted at in some of the earlier verses provided, exhorting mankind to obedience to the men set above us. Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Romans 13:3, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." Romans 13:7, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Those last passages sound like a defense of slavery, where God compels the weak to obey the strong. Philippians 4:22, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." First Timothy 5:19, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." (Kind of makes it easy for priests to molest altar boys.) Titus 3:1, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." While Jesus sidesteps the subject of consecrating leaders, saying to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God that which is God's, Paul instead says, "obey your rulers because God put them over you."

Also worthy of its own paragraph is what could be, and arguably has been, a provocation for Christians to act against those who believe otherwise. Second Corinthians 10:6, "And having in readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." Second Thessalonians 3:6, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." While Paul doesn't specifically command Christians to do violence, his doctrine is the source of Christian violence toward the Saracen, toward the savage, the heathen, and every other people that Christian churches have helped to direct violence against, including other differently-believing Christians.

And throughout the teaching of Paul he presents various declarations that faith in Jesus is the only salvation, or even that Jesus is God, often subsequently affirming that he, Paul, is next in line after Jesus. First Corinthians 16:22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha (which is interpreted, "God's vengeance be upon him.")" Colossians 2:9, "For in him (Jesus) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (A foundation of the Catholic Church is the idea of the Trinity, that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three equal parts of a triune Godhead, and thus Jesus is equal to God.) The Gospel of John (written well after Paul's letters) continues boldly with this idea. When I have been confronted by Pauline Christians, who universally contend that belief in the grace of Jesus is the only salvation, they largely avoid "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and the first three Gospels entirely, making their defense instead the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul.

To conclude this consideration of Paul's doctrine, Second Thessalonians 2:3-4, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called

God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” Second Corinthians 11:13-14, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

When Jesus prophesied the destruction of Israel and the razing of the temple, he spoke of antichrists and false prophets, men who would mislead and speak evil in his name, to turn people against God, who would deceive the very elect. He said that these would be in the lifetimes of those who followed him and were hearing him. People say that Judas was the antichrist, but Judas deceived no one in the long run. Jesus knew, as related in every gospel, that Judas would betray him, and woe unto Judas, for he made an evil choice, but it was as it had to be. The Gospels record him showing great remorse at the end, at the very least. Perhaps instead of casting away the silver and killing himself he should have simply begged God’s forgiveness and gone back to face justice. Jesus was clear that men would set themselves in the place of God in the lifetimes of those who followed him, much as he also said Israel would be destroyed in their lifetimes.

Israel was destroyed, as Jesus said it would be, and yet there is no antichrist identified. But Paul followed with a new doctrine which people have eaten up. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” Paul made up his own doctrines, and those who seek to shun others, to separate others, to cast others as sinners for simply living, love his teaching. The ultimate order seekers love his teaching. It is the gospel of the hurt man, the vengeful man, and Paul records often how he was hurt by the Jews he was trying to teach. Paul’s gospel appeals to our baser natures, not that of our desire to fornicate, but to punish the fornicator, and the drunkard, and the homosexual, and everything that we are not. Jesus taught faith in God, forgiveness and prayer. Paul teaches faith in God only through belief in Jesus, that you can die following God’s law or you can live through Jesus, with no middle ground.

But Paul’s doctrine has no place in Jesus or spirituality or simply seeking God’s forgiveness and faith toward God. Jesus did what he did and taught what he taught, bravely giving his life for God, and it was nothing but good, and he let others bear witness of it, as God chose for him. Paul named himself an apostle, bore witness of himself and his deeds, and dictated the law according to his own mind. Reveling, celebrating, loving life in an exultant way, is a sin. Sex between a man and a woman, or any other kind of sex, simply pleasuring oneself, are all sins but for the purpose of procreation which God has allowed out of necessity. Homosexuality is a sin. Being intoxicated is a sin. Paul declares variance, simple disagreement with the established authority, to be a sin. Does loving your neighbor as yourself mean forcing your neighbor to cease in certain behaviors, not because they cause harm, but simply because you, or Paul, find them distasteful?

There is one statement that perfectly explains the diversities between the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul, between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and the Gospel of John. Paul is the antichrist. Paul’s doctrine has led directly to the murder of millions. Tens of millions. How many millions more to come? It lends itself to being a political doctrine, the strong over the weak. Be not only meek before the Lord, but meekly accept the laws and ordinances of your rulers as your God-

given destiny, even if they amount to theft, rape and murder. The worst people in the world are those who use the power entrusted to them to harm and subjugate the weak for their own personal gain. Jesus teaches civil disobedience and obedience toward God only, and the simple laws he has given. Paul teaches blind obedience. All of those who don't accept Christ are infidels, so serve your wealthy masters and destroy those infidels. Paul teaches people to reject the doctrines of Jesus and instead to follow his own doctrines, telling us that his doctrines are from God. Jesus taught us to love and forgive, seeking forgiveness always. Paul taught us not to follow Jesus, but simply to believe in Jesus' divinity as the key to salvation, and to follow Paul's doctrine on the matter. Paul's teaching is evil wrapped in a cloak of good intentions. He and his like are the wolves in sheep's clothing.

And it certainly appears that Paul believed his intentions to be good. No doubt his commandments are against murder and theft as well, but when everything is a sin, and people are taught to believe that harmless decisions, actions or beliefs keep one from heaven, things that are truly sinful begin to lose meaning. Jesus rails against the priests for making the ordinances of Israel as the law of God, the pharisees seeking to punish others for minor transgressions, often having them beaten to death, while allowing the very commandments of God to be of no effect. Jesus goes as far as to tell them that they're the children of Satan, making men twice the sinners they were and misleading people down the path to hell with them. Paul does the very same thing, with the only difference being that Paul says God has given him this authority directly. "Put aside the teaching of Christ and other dead doctrines and follow me, your wise masterbuilder." And he says this because, as much as Jesus is the Christ, Paul is the antichrist. He didn't simply follow Jesus' teaching, but instead made a new law unto himself. If the antichrist simply declared that people should do evil, what power would he have? His power is inciting evil, ultimate intolerance of the existence of man, and all of man's weaknesses, in the name of God. The strong dominate the weak, and the weak lash out at the weaker, all in the name of God.

When the Romans adopted Paul's version of Christianity, dark ages followed that lasted a thousand years, where the people of that era moved backward. Innovation and invention lost, enlightenment stifled. Plagues and open murder in the name of God, dark ages. Only after the people of Europe began to believe in their own God given rights and abilities did things begin to change significantly for the better. Today's ministers of Paul say that America's founding fathers were all Christians, and there's an argument that they were, but they were certainly not the kind of Christians that these ministers say that they were. Franklin and Jefferson were both spiritual men who believed in God and a greater purpose for mankind, but they didn't believe in the divinity of Christ. Even Washington and John Adams, though both devout Christians, didn't write or say that it was necessary for people to believe in God as they did, and their consensus was that men should be free to believe as they choose, if at all. They didn't take God out of lawmaking, and they acknowledged the burden of God's good. They simply took religion out of it. "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." That's Creator with a capital C. And the pursuit of happiness for most includes things that Paul declares to be sinful. The very idea of resistance to tyranny was an American idea at some point, sparking a chain of revolutions against imperialism, and Paul declares even that to be a sin.

And the history of the United States of America has been at its best when we take religion out of government and allow it to remain private, between God and men by their own consciences. Many Americans didn't want the burden of fighting World War II, but wanted instead to isolate America from the world's problems, but we had a man like Franklin D. Roosevelt to lead us. He looked beyond our desire to remain apart and saw the need for the United States to help protect the world, and ultimately America, by fighting fascism, murder and totalitarian governments. Roosevelt was a well-known drunkard and an adulterer. Winston Churchill was well-known to be a drunkard. By Paul's reckoning we should keep men such as these out of our community, or separated from Christians. Hitler, on the other hand, drank beer sparingly and was believed to uphold high morals, other than the hatred and the murders and secret drug addictions and such. His people had to follow him unquestioningly or face harsh consequences, theft, rape and murder. Hitler was cast much more in the image of Paul than the other two men, and he made himself the savior of his people, protecting them from the evil of Jewry and the laziness of lesser races. And like so many Christians with Paul, many of the German people loved him for it. We want someone to tell us that differently believing peoples are evil. Our baser instincts often aren't about drinking and sex, but vengeance and murder. Millions have been killed in the name of Christ, but it was in no part at the behest of Jesus.

The obvious question here is why would God allow this to happen? The simplest answer is that he gave us free will. We chose for it to happen. God gave us Jesus for an ultimate example, and we turned around and mostly nullified it not twenty years later. For too many of us it's easier to follow the antichrist. The rebellion continues, and sometimes those opposing God hold sway. We want to do what we want, to be angry and find faults with our neighbors. Some of us only have enough love for ourselves. Some of us have enough love for our family, or for our community, or even for our country. Love everyone as ourselves? That's a tall order, but that is, in fact, the order. It's well beyond the capacity of many, but if some will just stand up and show them, there are others who will follow. Epidemics can start with the smallest triggers, but this one can result in a tidal wave of goodwill. God is never going to simply tell us what to do, and while the Bible is a good book, a book of God, it is a book of our understanding of God. The fact that men put books into the Bible doesn't make everything written therein the will of God. The Christian church generally has repudiated much of Paul's doctrine, but Paul's influence continues because we choose to follow it. I've always encouraged those who read my letters to read the Bible and to decide for themselves. It will always be God's will that we choose. If you are already on good footing, then you should be thankful and let your example shine before men. If your life is a good light for others, you certainly don't have to justify your beliefs by my reckoning. But if you are lost and aren't sure where to start, you can always look to Jesus and go from there.

And don't get me wrong and read into this that I'm saying all of those who choose to follow Paul and Paul's doctrines, opposed to those of Jesus, are evil. Certainly some of them are. Paul's teaching has been greatly profitable for many, and they would keep it so even if their neighbors continue to be harmed, even if it results in theft, rape and murder. Most people are simply as innocent sheep, going where the powerful tell them to go. There is a great divide between true faith and blind faith, and blind faith is easier for many. They choose to go with the flow, to punish themselves for wanting differently, and to punish others for what they perceive as their own weaknesses, but this doesn't make them evil, or opposed to God. They truly want to serve God. They are the very elect that has been deceived by the antichrist, which blinds them to the simple faith and obedience to God's will that Jesus taught. It doesn't make them either evil or stupid. Many of

them only need others to show them that they can have better, that they can believe better, that people can be as Jesus taught them to be. They would probably be better off not following the antichrist, but serving God with a good life is the bigger issue. Most of us have been confused by others in our lifetimes into making bad choices, sometimes choices that harm ourselves and others. But it is never too late to change our minds and to live and believe differently. Jesus said many times, many who are last will be first. So it is.

A faithful woman asked me recently what is my purpose in teaching these things. It was a difficult question to answer. I cannot see the future as Jesus did. I can only see potential outcomes. It will never be entirely good or entirely evil. In a world where men have the freedom to choose, some will always choose evil, and it is our duty to protect others from them when we have the understanding and power to do so. Our good faith has brought us relative peace, and yet we now sit on the precipice of war and scarcity. The future can be one of tyranny or commonwealth, slavery or freedom. If I can make the choice, my children will grow up in a world where they are free to do what their own consciences dictate, so long as they are not harming others, and that they can not be enslaved by those who would put their desire for power and profit over the rights of others to do as they will and to be as they choose. God has shown me a few things, but I have written many things. I pray that I have understood well and communicated it well enough. The world is complicated but the truths of God are simple. Love one another. Forgive and be forgiven. God has given us simple laws to help us understand, and we can choose to follow them. God and truth are all the purpose I have. Paul stands as a direct obstacle to God's truth, and, that being the case, it must be said.

Perhaps the right question for a person reading this is what can you do right now? The world is complicated and the difference between right and wrong is not always clear, but taking from others out of greed or subjugating others to our will out of a lust for power is clearly wrong. You can stand against these things when you have the power to do so, and you can just communicate your understanding to others if your power is lacking. We can love one another as we love ourselves, as Jesus taught us. That certainly doesn't mean letting others walk all over us. Loving one another means someone has to stand up to the bullies, and the bullies include Paul and his followers putting man's laws in the place of God's, as well as the Osama Bin Ladens of the world. You can ask God's forgiveness and live a better life, knowing that you would make the wrong things right if you could. You can follow God's simple commandments, the dead doctrines as Paul would say, or you can simply live your life the best you can, putting yourself in your neighbors' shoes and acting accordingly knowing that there is a greater purpose for it even if you don't acknowledge that purpose to be God's will. You can forgive those you can, or have not forgiven, and you can seek forgiveness. Do good, not as Paul taught, but as Jesus did. You can do that. And you can teach these things to others.

So it is.

Bob Young.

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