

God of Wrath; God of LOVE

... a Biblical proof of the perfect Grace of God



A scripturally-sound defense of The Divine;
showing why the texts of the Bible provide copious evidence
for a God whose Love is perfect & without condition –
a God who refuses to test us with either trial or tribulation.

via Scaughdt
... an (i)am publication
(3rd edition)

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“I want to invite you to consider the possibility that maybe the televangelists and the street preachers and the evangelical converts are wrong ... I want to invite you to consider the possibility that maybe God really is Love unconditional.

I want to you to open your heart & mind to the chance – however small – that maybe the Fruits of the Spirit really are as beautiful as Peace and Kindness and Joy and Service and Compassion, and not the ugly things that have come to characterize religion; namely -- intolerance, bigotry, hatred, condemnation, and damnation ...

Don't get me wrong, I humbly admit that there could be an afterlife, and yet more often than not all the church has done is promise us a life after death and use that promise as a ticket to impotently ignore the hellish suffering that surrounds us every day.

*I am convinced that the Christian Gospel has as much to do with this life as the next, and that the message of that Gospel is not just about going up when we die, but about bringing God's Kingdom of Peace & Harmony down to those in our midst. After all, it was Jesus himself who taught us to pray that God's will be done ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ ... on **Earth!**”*

~ inspired by Shane Claiborne



*“The work of salvation, in its full sense, is threefold: first, it is about us as whole human beings, not merely as celestial souls; second, it is about our current present, not merely our one-day future; and third, it is about what God does **through us**, not about what God does in us or for us.”*

~ inspired by N. T. Wright

Our God of Love – an Introduction

Many Christians believe that God is a “testing God.” They feel that He places painful obstacles and challenges into their lives so that they may then “prove ourselves” to Him. They are certain that He punishes them when they sin. They feel that God, from time to time, gets fed up with humankind and sends wrathful “lessons” to “encourage us” to be better people. ... To them, sometimes God is an angry, stern Father.

And yet deep down, many Christians want more from their God. Even though they have been taught that God is highly selective and often shunning when it comes to admitting Souls into the Kingdom of Heaven, they want to believe in a Father whose mercy is without bounds and whose acceptance knows no exception ... Even though they have been taught that God purposefully places painful obstacles and challenges into their lives that they may then “prove themselves” to Him, they want to worship a God of a more awesome & gentle Grace ... Even though they have come to feel that God punishes them when they sin; that God, from time to time, gets fed up with humankind and sends wrathful “lessons” our way in order to “encourage us” to be better people, they want to honor a God of a Compassion more full & more complete.

Well my dear Christian Friends, I have a sincere faith that you do indeed want to worship a God worth worshiping; that you do indeed want to worship an all-Loving God – one who refuses to demand petty hosannas & hallelujahs from His followers; one who refuses to condemn minor offenders of “false religions” to an eternity of torment; one who would never “test” his followers by sending them purposefully through times of pain or dis-ease or disconcertion ...

And as such, I thought it would be a Kind gesture to enable you all to more readily seek – and thereby more easily find – the far greater God who is indeed waiting for you within the Bible’s texts; the far greater Father who Loves *all* without condition, and whose Grace is know to truly given freely without end. And it is with this in mind that I humbly offer the following eleven fundamental Truths about the Bible’s contents – eleven epiphanies that, when read with an open mind and enlivened with a courageous Heart, will help your Scriptures to become reborn with fresh in-Sight & deeper Meaning.

Amen ... Let it be so!

Scaughdt
(November 2015)



Realization #01: It is actually fallen angels (and **not** God) who commit the vast majority of the Old Testament’s acts of violence & “divine wrath”.

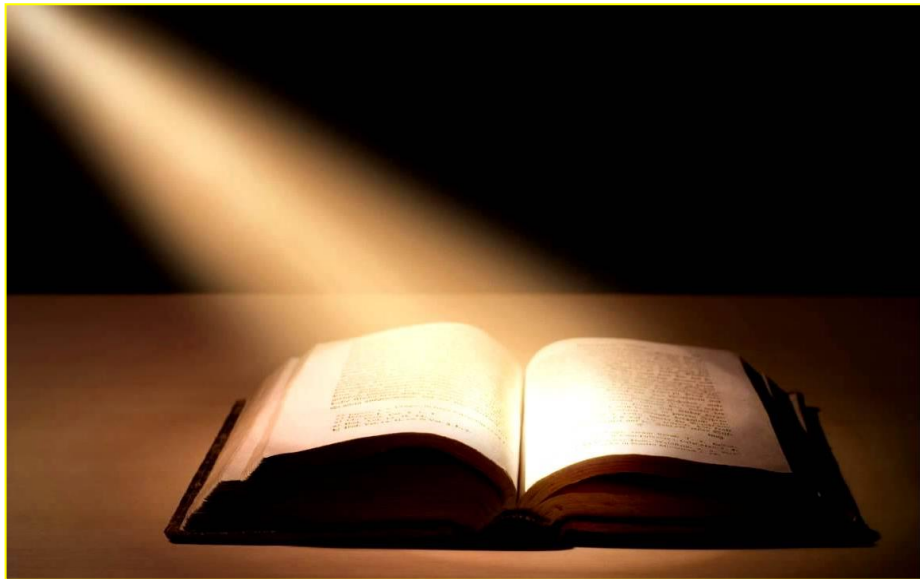
There are quite a few folks – Christians & non-Christians alike – who have wondered about the seemingly contradictory nature of God as He is portrayed in the Bible. On the one hand, the Bible tells us that God is an embodiment of perfect, unconditional Love ([Psalm 100:5](#), [Matthew 5:48](#), [1 John 4:8-16](#), et al). On the other hand, the Bible also seemingly portrays the same God in a very different light – as a God who regularly commits acts that can only be characterized as **evil** ([Genesis 6:7](#), [Genesis 19:4-5](#), [Genesis 38:7-10](#), [Exodus 12:29](#), [Exodus 14:28](#), [Leviticus 10:1-3](#), [Numbers 11:1-3](#), [Numbers 16:35](#), [Joshua 10:10-11](#), [2 Kings 1:9-12](#), [2 Kings 2:23-24](#) et al). Many non-Christians rave in response, of course; claiming that such a contradiction essentially proves that God doesn’t exist at all. And many Christians – at least those with any semblance of an awakened conscience – struggle mightily to somehow justify continuing to worship such a bipolar deity at all.

Indeed, while growing up in America’s “Bible Belt”, I had often wondered myself: How could an all-Loving God kill all of Egypt’s first-born during the initial Passover? ... How could an all-Caring God command a father to kill his own son simply to test his faith? ... How could an all-Forgiving God rain down fire and burn up the inhabitants of two entire cities?

Well, it turns out that the answer is pretty simple ...

He didn’t!

Allow me to illuminate ...



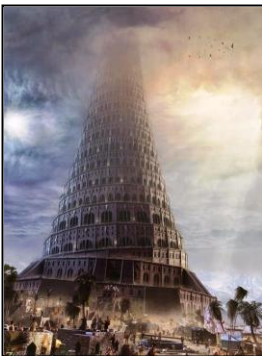
When I first started reading the Bible, I often wondered about the many names used by its authors for God. Sometimes God was referred to as “God”, other times as “LORD”, and still other times as “LORD God”. Like most new readers, I simply assumed that these terms were synonyms – that all of them described the same God; that the authors were simply alternating those names to make it easier on their readers. In fact, most Christians I know, and even most of the Christian preachers I have heard, still believe this to be the case. **And yet**, if we look closely at when & how these different terms are used, we can see that it very well might **not** be the case. Indeed, as I later delved into the Hebrew manuscripts themselves, it became clear that the translators of the ancient texts didn’t use the terms “God” and “LORD” interchangeably at all, but rather used them to represent two entirely different Hebrew terms in those writings.

Basically, almost every time we read “LORD” in the founding pages of the Hebrew Bible (from [Genesis 1:1](#) through [Exodus 3:14](#)) it represents one of two Hebrew terms – either “Adonai” or “YHWH”; both intimate names for the ultimate, eternal Source most of us know as “God” ... In contrast, almost every time we read “God” in the Hebrew Bible, it is representing the Hebrew term “Elohim”, which literally means “gods” ... that’s right – “godS”; a *plural* term, referring to more than one spiritual being!

This information was in & of itself fascinating to me, and yet I didn’t give it much thought until I later decided to use this rediscovery to color-code the first book of the Bible. To do so, every time the word “God” showed up in Genesis, I shaded it lightly with an orange pencil, and every time the word “LORD” was read, I shaded it with green ... Needless to say, the results were astounding -- Almost without exception, every “evil” act performed by God was actually performed by the orange-shaded “God” (the plural [Elohim](#)), while the “LORD” (the actual, singular Godhead) seemed simply to Love & guide & forgive as a cool-green, never-ending source of compassion.

Without listing every instance – and without going into too much detail, consider the following examples:

*In the 9th chapter of Genesis, we hear the Elohim tell Noah and his sons not to merely “be fruitful and multiply” (as most English translations show), but rather to “tyrannically dominate & over-fill the Earth” (the actual Hebrew terminology used).



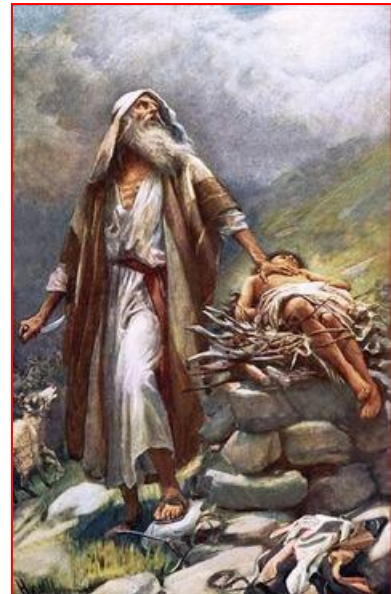
*In the 11th chapter of Genesis, we see the actual Godhead (the “LORD”) attempt to non-violently check the then unbridled hubris of humanity at the Tower of Babel.

*In the 17th chapter of Genesis, we see Abraham almost make a covenant with the one “LORD”, but then choosing to align himself with “God” (the fallen Elohim) instead.

*In the 18th chapter of Genesis, we hear God’s promise to *not* destroy Sodom & Gomorrah, and yet in Genesis’ very next chapter, we see two of the Elohim (fallen angels – in this instance, literally) destroy those two cities anyway.



*In the 22nd chapter of Genesis, we see “God” (the fallen Elohim) mislead Abraham into almost sacrificing his own son to prove his allegiance to them, whereupon a divine representative of the “LORD” (the actual Godhead) intervened and stopped their cruel nonsense.



*Most importantly, in the 3rd chapter of Exodus, the Elohim defiantly usurp the name of the actual God (*Adonai* or *YHWH*, read as “LORD”), and brazenly commence using it throughout the rest of the Pentateuch – indeed throughout the rest of the Old Testament – to fulfill for their own less-than-Kind ends (see specifically [Exodus 3:13-15+](#), [Exodus 6:2-7](#) & [Exodus 6:28-29](#)).



*As such, in the 12th chapter of Exodus, it is the Elohim (who are merely posing as “the LORD”) and *not* God Himself who actually kill all of Egypt’s firstborn children during the terrible night of the first Passover.

Not surprisingly, then, it is actually the *Elohim* – illegitimately posing as God (calling themselves either “the LORD your God” or “the LORD, the God of your ancestors”) who establish the large collection of bizarre (and often radically cruel & unjust) laws in the books of Deuteronomy and Numbers, and it is also the *Elohim* who actually perform all the evil deeds in the Bible thereafter!

In conclusion, please let it be understood that I am neither advocating nor rejecting any particular religion or any set of spiritual beliefs. Rather, I am merely offering valid Biblical scholarship that can empower each and every one of you to live a life that is both more enJOY-able and more Meaning-full ...

*If you are not a Christian, you are now free to live in a Christian community &/or speak with conservative Christians about God & their Bible while feeling Compassion for them instead of anger.

*And if you are a Christian, you need no longer defend or rationalize or justify the immoral actions of the “God” in your Bible; knowing that those actions were not committed by God at all.

In essence, regardless of our particular religious beliefs (or even complete lack thereof), we are all here to emulate The Way of Jesus Christ; a Way of selfless Kindness that shows others only mercy and compassion and forgiveness and Love (and a way that knows all those traits to be active verbs, not mere passive ideals).



A Heart of Service — Personified —



Realization #02: The verses & teachings found in the New Covenant trump & transcend those found in the Old Testament.

So how else can we reconcile the readily apparent contradiction between the Old Testament's wrathful God and the New Testament's all-Loving One? Fortunately, the easiest way to do so is found within the verses of the Bible itself. Indeed, the New Testament makes it quite clear that, wherever there is an apparent contradiction between the two Covenants (as in the case at hand – how they each seem to portray the nature of God), ***the New Covenant verse(s) takes precedence*** ...

“There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier Commandment because it was weak and ineffectual ... There is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better Hope, through which we approach God ... [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree is the mediator of the better covenant ... *In speaking of a ‘new Covenant’, he has made the first one obsolete.* And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.” ~ Hebrews 7:18-22 & 8:6-13)



Of course, some may argue that Jesus himself openly supported Moses' Law (“Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill [them].” ~ Matthew 5:17), and yet the Bible goes on at length to explain that, while Jesus did affirm the validity of the Old Testament's Law, he also came to radically modify the way we are to *fulfill* that Law ...

“For if there was Glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of liberation abound in Glory! ... Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only ‘in Christ’ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.” ~ 2 Corinthians 3:9-15

In essence, Jesus replaced the 10 negative “Thou shalt not” Commandments of Moses with his 2 “Thou shall” Commandments of God (“For in [Jesus] every one of God’s promises is a ‘Yes’. For this reason it is through him that we say ‘Amen’ to the Glory of God.” ~ 2 Corinthians 1:19-20). In this way, Jesus became the “end” of the older Law, even while he upheld its basic tenants...

“Christ is the end of the Law.” ~ Romans 10:4 & “The Law indeed was given through Moses; Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ.” ~ John 1:17

Jesus came to bring us The Way; a practice of Love that would make the then-stale Old Covenant viable again in the everyday lives of all who adhered to its Path ... And yet, for those who believe that the Old Testament's "God of wrath" is still alive and well (despite the Scriptural references to the contrary cited previously), the problem still presents itself: without believing in the simultaneous existence of two very different Gods, how can we reconcile these apparently contradictory beliefs – a God who is both all-Loving and yet wrathful; a God who cares for us regardless of what we do and yet regularly provokes us with pain so that we can then "prove ourselves" to Him? More importantly for Christians, how can we reconcile these two interpretations of God in a way that harmonizes with Jesus' clear Commandment of unconditional Love?

Fortunately, there is a Way to do so ...

Realization #03: Either as abstract concept or tangible Force, the "Nature of God" is completely beyond human comprehension.

Initially, it is Important to remember that the Bible itself states that we cannot quantify or describe God with any certainty. He and the magnitude of His ways will forever remain a Mystery to us ...

"The God who made the world and everything in it ... does not Live in shrines made by human hands, nor is He Served by human hands, as though He needed anything ... **For in Him we Live and move and have our Being** ... Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals." ~ Acts 17:24-29 & "O, the depth of the riches and Wisdom and knowledge of God! **How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!**" ~ Romans 11:33



And yet this need not be cause for concern, for such mysteriousness is precisely what makes one's faith in God's Way a Power-full faith ("Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to Believe." ~ John 20:29). Indeed, it is not for us to strive to "know" the exact nature of God, but rather it is our Mission in life to humble ourselves and simply follow His Commandment of unconditional Love ("No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we Love one another, God lives in us and His Love is perfected in us. By this Love we know that we abide in Him and He in us." ~ 1 John 4:12 ... "Knowledge puffs up, but Love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but **anyone who Loves God is known by Him.**" ~ 1 Corinthians 8:1-2 ... "Know the Love of Christ **that surpasses all knowledge.**" ~ Ephesians 3:19). Indeed, it is *because* we cannot know God's Will with any certainty that our actions, when faith-fully attempting to fulfill His loving Will, become immensely powerful beings ...

"Due, then, to our faith, we act with great boldness." ~ 2 Corinthians 3:12

Realization #04: The full essence of God resides *within* each & every sentient Being for the entirety of their lives.

Where are we to find God? Many pray to a God that resides far away from us – far “above” our physical existence here on Earth; worshiping an external God that “looks down” upon us “from on high.” Indeed, there is some Scriptural support for such a claim, and yet it is just as scripturally appropriate to see God in everything around us every day; literally feeling God’s omni-presence surrounding us in every instant of our lives ...

“Where can I Go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your Presence? If I go up on the Heavens, you are there: if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”
~ Psalm 139:7

And yet, when the Bible speaks of worshiping God in relation to Salvation, it invariably describes God as an *internal Presence* – a Guiding Power residing *inside* each and every one of us...

“Know that I am in my Father **and you in me, and I in you.**” ~ John 14:20 &
“Do you not Know that you are God’s Temple, and that **God’s Spirit dwells in You?**”
~ 1 Corinthians 3:16

“Do you not realize that **Jesus Christ is in you?**” ~ 2 Corinthians 13:5

And as such, it is both more honoring of God and more loving towards others to see God as literally residing *inside* everything; all the entities outside our own bodies, and the Spirit of Truth that resides within our own hearts as well.

“There is one body and one Spirit; ... **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**” ~ Ephesians 4:4-6



Realization #05: God is an Essence that is all-Loving.

Of course, far more important than where God resides is the essence of His character; or the revelation of God's Divine Nature. First of all, it is important to realize that, even though God rests within all that exists, it is not necessarily true that everything in existence accurately reflects God's Love. Love demands the ability to choose, choice demands the possession of free will, and free will demands the occasional (if not even the frequent) departure from Love. In essence, even though God resides within us, we are not required to enliven that Love ... It is a gift that must be embodied; not a given that must be endured.

“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live.” ~ Deuteronomy 30:19

Secondly, while remaining vague with regards to any specific attributes of God, the Bible makes it *very* clear that God's over-arching general nature is the embodiment of perfect Love ...

“Whoever Loves another Lives in the Light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling ... *Everyone who Loves is Born of God and Knows God ... If we Love one another, God Lives in us, and his Love is perfected in us ... God is Love, and those who abide in Love abide in God, and God abides in them*” ~ 1 John 2:10 & 1 John 4:7-16



Finally, and more importantly with regards to this article, God is immune from all evil and therefore tempts none of us to be selfish (“God cannot be tempted by evil and He himself tempts no one.” ~ James 1:13). He is not a God who effectuates pain, which causes dissension, but is rather a God of harmony (“For God is not a God of disorder but of Peace.” ~ 1 Corinthians 14:33). In fact, God is not the source of our life's challenges at all, but rather is the source of the Love that enables us to give lovingly to others *despite* our difficulties ...

“Every generous act of Giving, with every perfect Gift, is from Above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” ~ James 1:17

Realization #06: God is an Essence that is all-Forgiving.

In addition to His all-loving nature, God is also the epitome of perfect, unconditional Forgiveness. Indeed, the two go hand-in-hand (or Heart-in-Heart, as it were) ...

“And even when you were dead in your trespasses, God made you alive together with him when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it all to the cross” ~ Colossians 2:12-13

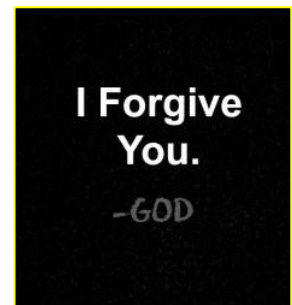
And this Truth is supported by simple, God-given common sense. Indeed, it is almost insulting to God to say that He intentionally created us as imperfect Beings* and yet still punishes some of us for the very mistakes essentially engineered by His own hand ...

*There is no debate **1]** that Love must be volitional to exist (no one can Love with a gun to his or her head; Love is by its very nature selfless -- given freely or given not at all), **2]** that our Salvation hinges upon our ability to choose Love over fear (see [Matthew 5:48](#) & [1 John 4:18](#)), and **3]** that this Free Will makes us per se mistake-prone beings, almost guaranteed to err while living “in the flesh” ...

More importantly for Christians, the Bible itself repeatedly notes that God is a God of Forgiveness, and that this Forgiveness is inclusive *for all human beings* regardless of the sins they might make ...

“[God] is Kind to both the ungrateful and the sinful. Be merciful, *just as your Father is merciful*. Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned. **Forgive** and you will be Forgiven.” ~ Luke 6:36-37

In Truth, we are commanded to be “perfect” with our Love by loving our enemies – just as God Loves and forgives His enemies ... “*He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the Good, and sends rain on the Righteous and on the unrighteous*. For if you Love only those who Love you, what reward do you have? ... Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” ~ Matthew 5:45-48



Even the Apostle Paul, who sometimes used harsh words to describe his own opinion as to the nature of God’s Love, made it very clear that everyone who respects God by doing good is accepted by God ... “I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who respects Him and does what is Right is acceptable to Him ... *Live in Peace*, and the God of Love and Peace will be with You.” ~ Paul (in Acts 10:34-35 & 2 Corinthians 13:11)

This is reflected as well in Luke’s parable of the “Prodigal Son”, where the Father (representing God) forgives his sinful son *before that son even has an opportunity to repent* ...

“So he set off and went to his Father. Yet *while he was still far off*, his Father saw him and was filled with Compassion; [His Father then] ran out and put his arms around the son and kissed him.” ~ Luke 15:20



Indeed, how can a just and fair God demand less of himself than he demands of us? (“Be Kind to one another; tenderhearted, forgiving one another -- just as God has forgiven you.” ~ Ephesians 4:32). He tells us in the Bible that we must Love perfectly by forgiving even our enemies (see Matthew 5:48 et al) and He tells us that all punishment is fear-based and that therefore where there is punishment there is fear, and therefore also no perfection in Love (see 1 John 4:18) ... As such, if the Bible is telling us the Truth, then God does not “guide” us with pain at all, much less punish us for our mistakes. Rather, when we experience pain in our lives, we can have complete faith that those difficulties were created *by ourselves* (as consequences of previous selfish choices – merely reaping what we have sown), and **not** sent to us by God as “lessons” or “tests” or forms of “discipline” ...

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be Saved through him ... The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son ... *I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them*, for I came not to judge the world, but to Save it.” ~ Jesus Christ (in John 3:17, John 5:22 & John 12:47)

Realization #07: God does not “test” sentient Beings or cause us pain.

God is not the entity that causes us pain, my Friends, but rather the Essence of Love that gives us strength during all times of trial and tribulation (“But the Lord is Faithful; he will Strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.” ~ 2 Thessalonians 3:3). God wishes no one ill, but rather desires that all conscious beings choose the Peace-full path of perfect Love (“Lead a quiet and peaceable Life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and acceptable in the sight of God, *who desires everyone to be Saved* and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth.” ~ 1 Timothy 2:2-4 ... “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, *not wanting any to perish*, but rather all to come to repentance.” ~ 2 Peter 3:9).

Yes, evil exists -- and yes, every one of us is continually inflicted with pain and confusion over the course of our lives. And yet, if we choose to turn our trials into challenges (instead of suffering self-centeredly), our hardships can empower us to Love perfectly and thereby attain the bliss of Salvation ...

“Let those suffering in accordance with God’s Will entrust themselves to a loving Creator, and continue to Do Good.” ~ 1 Peter 4:19



One thing seems certain, God is **not** the force behind our tribulations, but rather the all-loving Power that supports us continually while we struggle with life's painful obstacles ...



“And after you have suffered, the God of all Grace, who has Called us to his Glory, will support, strengthen and establish You.” ~ 1 Peter 5:10

Yes, hardships exist – indeed, there is no escaping them in this life. And yet this truth does not deny the fact that God is still forgiving of us and that He always Loves us anyway ... “Blessed be the God and Father ... the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, who consoles us all in our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are themselves afflicted” ~ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

God is perfectly just and, because of His innate righteousness, it must become clear to all believers that anything that is unjust (or in any way not perfectly Loving) does **not** come from God (“His works are perfect and all His ways are just.” ~ Deuteronomy 32:4) ... And because perfect Justice **is** all-loving Forgiveness (see Realization #05 above), it must also become clear that God is not the entity inflicting us with our life’s “tests” – but rather it is *we* who inflict them upon ourselves ...

“Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven [by God] every sin and blasphemy, but them blaspheming against [their own] Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven.” ~ Matthew 12:31 ... “Happy is the one who listens to Me ... For whoever finds Me finds Life and obtains favor; but those who miss Me *injure themselves*” ~ Proverbs 8:34-36).

Thus, no matter how many mistakes we might make and no matter how many painful consequences we then reap from those mistakes, God is always there, holding us close with Love – waiting patiently for us to repent by making more Caring choices in the future ...

“But law came, with the result that trespasses multiplied; but even where sin increased, Grace abounded all the more ...” ~ Romans 5:20

God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

- Empedocles



THE ABSOLUTE
is **OMNIPRESENT**

Being infinite, this means that All Power and All Knowledge Is present everywhere in Its entirety at the same time, including within YOU!



Realization #08: It is God-allowed pains & difficulties that actually make our personal Salvation possible.

Not only does our pain *not* come from God, the pain-filled life that God allows *us* to create for ourselves actually enables us to eventually attain Salvation. For indeed, it is the pain from our poor (i.e. self-centered) choices that ultimately inspires many of us to repent – to radically alter our ways and begin serving others as opposed to striving to be served by them. As such, our pains & trials are integral parts of the process that ultimately reveals to us God’s all-loving Grace ...

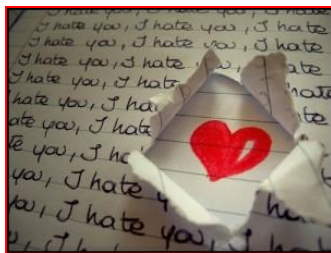


“It is through many persecutions that we must enter the Kingdom of God.” ~ Acts 14:22

Indeed, just because God is loving, in no way means that the life He has given us must be easy. Indeed, what meaning is there in a life without challenge? What bliss is there in completing tasks that have no difficulty? What Peace do we attain from doing “good works” that do not involve great risk or effort?

As such, our discomforts serve a two-fold function on our way back to a reunion with God. First, they re-mind us every time we happen to stray from the path of God’s Will (“To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh ... Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but He said to me: My Grace is sufficient for you, for Power is made perfect in weakness.” ~ 2 Corinthians 12:7-10) ... and second, they make our lives Meaning-full by giving us the opportunity to persevere through challenge. Indeed, the more difficult a Right Action is to engage, the more true & lasting Peace it brings us while we do so.

“[And Jesus asked] ‘Now which of them will Love him more?’ And Simon answered, ‘I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have discerned correctly.’” ~ Luke 7:43



My Friends, not only have we been given a conscious life to lead, we have also been given an adventure to enJoy (if we so choose), in that we are allowed to experience our trials, that we might thereafter come to know the Peace that comes when we Love God (and life) *while struggling through them* ...



“He disciplines us for our own Good, in order that we may share in His holiness.” ~ Hebrews 12:11 ... “For if we will unite with him in a death like his, we will certainly unite with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and that we might no longer be enslaved to sin ... The death he died, he died to sin; but the Life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.” ~ Romans 6:5-11

Our displays of Faith-full Love – despite immense temptations to be self-concerned & selfish – are our true victory; the victory of walking Jesus’ Way of selfless sacrifice; a victory that conquers the temptations of the material world (“For whatever is Born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world: our Faith.” ~ 1 John 5:4) ... Yes, we receive painful consequences from all our missteps along that path (i.e. all our “our sins”), and yet those consequences are *not* sent upon us by God. Rather, it is God who loves us enough to allow us to reap the effects of *what we ourselves have sown* – and thereby allows for our ultimate Salvation anyway ...

“If what has been built of the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If, however, the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; *that builder will also be saved*, but only as through fire.” ~ 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 ... “For godly grief produces repentance that leads to Salvation and brings no regret; only worldly grief produces death.” ~ 2 Corinthians 7:10-11

Yes, it may seem as though God is punishing you during times of trouble. And yet when this is so, remember that it is not God’s intention to ever cause you pain. Rather, you are simply experiencing how it feels when the Divine Source within you guides you back from selfishness – back to the glory of selfless Love ...

“Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are seemingly punished by Him; for the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, and chastises every child whom He accepts. Endure your trials, therefore, for the sake of discipline ... Discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later always yields the peaceful Fruit of Righteousness for those who heed its Guidance.” ~ Hebrews 12:5-11



By being given a life that tempts us to be selfish, and by being given a mind-body that makes most of its decisions based on its fear-filled desire to survive, all of us are apt to make mistakes and thereby “call” painful consequences into our lives. Fortunately, it is this very dynamic that also gives us the opportunity to attain Salvation by persevering in Righteousness precisely during such times of trouble & temptation ...

“By your endurance you will re-gain your Souls.” ~ Luke 21:19 ... “So let us not grow weary in doing what is Right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.” ~ Galatians 6:9 ... “It is **through many persecutions** that we must enter The Kingdom of Heaven.” ~ Acts 14:22

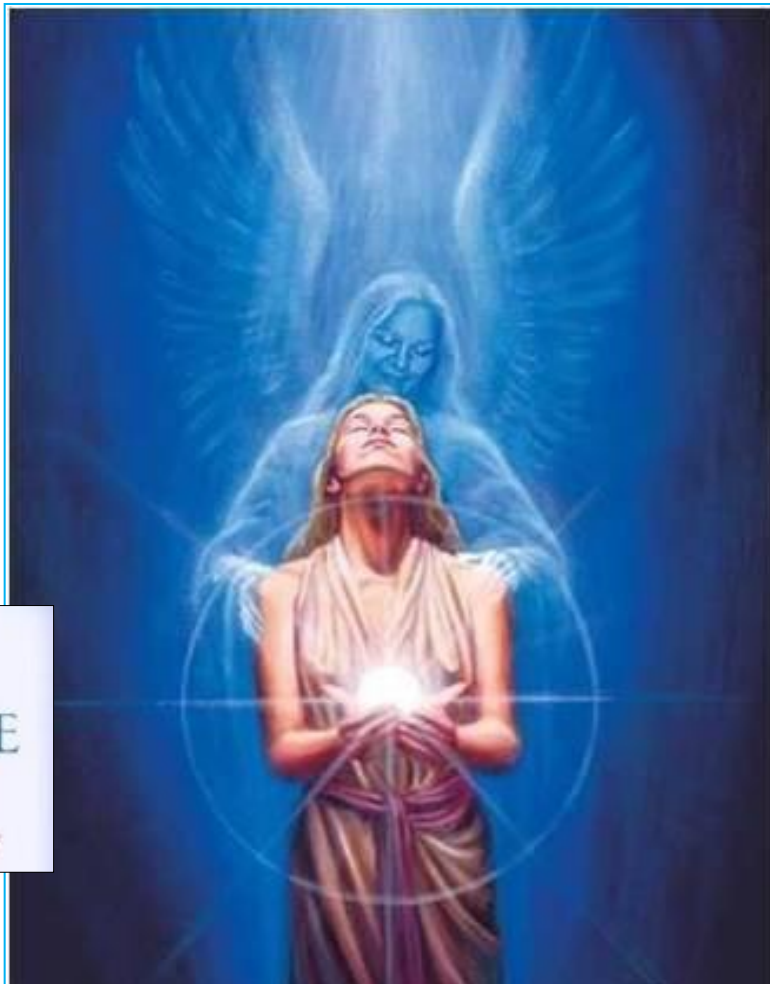
Indeed, it is pain that enables us to choose to endure in Love, which in turn strengthens the very faith we need in order to attain the Peace of Salvation ...

“Endurance produces Character, and Character produces Faith, and Faith does not disappoint us.” ~ Romans 3:4-5 ... “If we are being afflicted, it is for ... consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for ... consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering.”

~ 2 Corinthians 1:6

RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

EMBRACING YOUR
LIFE WITH THE HEART



Realization #09: There is no such thing as a cruel or unjust challenge.

Most importantly, as God is innately loving and just, any trial we are experiencing is inherently within our power to overcome (“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. **God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength**, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” ~ 1 Corinthians 10:13). Indeed, the more pain we are experiencing in any moment, the more powerful we must be to have called such an intense challenge to ourselves; a difficulty that we are guaranteed to transcend as long as we persist in Faith-full Love – both towards God as well as towards the neighbor/enemy that seems to be causing our pain ...

“To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and grow weary from the work of our hands. And yet, when reviled we Bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. ... So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of Glory beyond all measure” ~ Paul (in 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 & 2 Cor. 4:16-17)

In short, he or she who persists in Love, especially in those times when most tempted to be selfish (i.e. when in pain), will attain a full realization of the glory that comes from acting as a Child of God ...

“Show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of faith to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but rather be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the Promises.” ~ Hebrews 6:12 ... “Recall the earlier times when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings ... Do not, therefore, abandon your confidence; it brings great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the Will of God you may receive what is promised.” ~ Hebrews 10:32+35-36 ... “But those who look into the perfect law, the Law of Liberty, and persevere, being not mere hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be Blessed in their Doing.” ~ James 1:25



Realization #10: We are allowed to See all our trials & all our tribulations as what they truly are – as Blessings.

Jesus, God’s primary messenger for all Christians, summed up his intentions very simply when he said: “I have said these things to you that my Joy may be In You, and that your Joy may be complete.” (in John 5:11) ... Though he understood quite well that The Way is a challenging one to tread, he wasn’t trying to make life unnecessarily or impossibly difficult. Indeed, no matter how painful or difficult life gets, we are all allowed to see our “tests” as blessings, rather than as curses. Indeed, the Bible makes it clear that those who are walking Jesus’ Way do just that ...

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for Righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” ~ Jesus Christ (in Matthew 5:10)

Rejoice therefore, in your trials, my Friends; knowing that they are enabling you to more powerfully serve others, and thereby flow freely into the Kingdom of God ...

“Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rather rejoice, insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you will be glad and shout for Joy when that Glory is revealed.” ~ 1 Peter 4:12-13 ... “Endure everything with patience, while Joyfully Giving Thanks to the Father.” ~ Colossians 1:11-12

For the path to true Happiness and deep-seated Contentment – Jesus’ Way of selfless Love – is only as hard as we choose to make it...



“We have this Treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary Power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” ~ 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 ... “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your Souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” ~ Matthew 11:28-30

Realization #11: Salvation is guaranteed *for all* sentient beings.

And what if we refuse? What if the challenge seems “too great” for our fear-filled ego to overcome? Well, if that does prove to be the case – if we do choose cowardice over courage; a life of selfishness over one of service, then the Bible makes it clear that our judgment will come on our deathbeds, and that our suffering on that day will indeed be immense ...

“I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them ... The one who rejects me and does not receive my Way has a judge; on the last day the Way itself will serve as judge.” ~ John 12:47-48 (see also Hebrews 10:27)

And yet, the Bible makes it just as clear that after that self-inflicted time of torment has passed, God will still forgive us thereafter ...

“For by Grace you have been saved through Faith, and this not of your own doing; it is the Gift of God and not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” ~ Ephesians 2:8-9 ... “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all people** to myself.” ~ John 12:32

Indeed, as was stated earlier, there is no darkness in God (see 1 John 1:5). God is perfect Love (1 John 4:16), and because perfect Love knows no punishment (see 1 John 4:18), God cannot Himself dole out punishment or painful “guidance” of any kind. Rather, He will simply wait for us to be finished with the amount of suffering *that we choose to experience*; He will simply wait to welcome us back to Him with open arms as soon as *we decide* to do so ...

“Likewise the Spirit Helps us in our weakness ... and God, who searches the Heart, Knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes ... according to the Will of God. We Know all things work Together for Good for those who Love God, who Accept their Calling in accordance with God’s Purpose.” ~ Romans 8:26-28 ... “The eyes of the Lord are on the Righteous, and his ears are Open to their cry ... When the Righteous cry for help, the Lord Hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.” ~ Psalm 34:13-1



Indeed, each & every one of us receive pain commensurate with the ease of our selfish actions, and joy commensurate with the difficulty of our Loving ones (“Truly I tell you, **whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven**, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.” ~ Matthew 18:18 ... “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that **each may Receive recompense for what has been Done in the body, whether Good or evil.**” ~ 2 Corinthians 5:10), and it is *we* who choose our own fate in this regard, not God. No matter how we choose to live or what we choose to believe, God will always – and in allWays – Love us anyway ...

“If we recognize our sins, He who is Faithful and Just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” ~ 1 John 1:9 ... “Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He Cares for you.” ~ 1 Peter 5:7

In conclusion, then, we can use the Bible to make God in our own image -- a vengeful ruler who “loves” us only as long as we satisfy certain requirements. Fortunately, we can also choose to see Jesus' “Bigger God” therein -- an all-Loving, all-Forgiving Father -- one who transcends all of humankind’s pretty definitions of “love” and “justice”; caring for every single one of His children (i.e. every sentient being on Earth) regardless of the noble choices we might fail to enliven, and regardless of the selfish decisions we might make instead ... And it is this latter, Greater God who is truly worthy of our praise.

May you have the Humility to recognize the presence of this choice ...
the Wisdom to choose wisely ...
... and the Courage to act accordingly.

Amen ... Let it be so.



“The soul, in its loneliness, hopes only for ‘salvation.’ And yet what is the burden of the Bible if not a sense of the mutuality of influence, rising out of an essential unity, among soul and body and community and world? These are all the works of God, and it is therefore the work of virtue to make or restore harmony among them. The world is certainly thought of as a place of spiritual trial, but it is also the confluence of soul and body, word and flesh, where thoughts must become deeds, where goodness must be enacted. This is the great meeting place, the narrow passage where spirit and flesh, word and world, pass into each other.

*The Bible's aim, as I read it, is not the freeing of the spirit from the world. **It is the handbook of their interaction.** It says that they cannot be divided; that their mutuality, their unity, is inescapable; that they are not reconciled in division, but in harmony. What else can be meant by the resurrection of the body? The body should be ‘filled with light,’ perfected in understanding. And so everywhere there is the sense of consequence, fear and desire, grief and joy. What is desirable is repeatedly defined in the tensions of the sense of consequence.” ~ Wendell Berry*

*“And **all of us**, with unveiled faces, seeing the Glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed **into the same image** – from one degree of Glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Holy Spirit.” ~ 2 Corinthians 3:18*





*“And I will take one from a thousand
and two from ten thousand,
and they shall Become a single One.”
~ Jesus (Gospel of Thomas 23)*