

# *Preserving Paradise*

*“Saving Salvation – a practical look at Heaven & Hell”*



A scripturally-sound and spiritually-neutral examination of what both reason & the Bible have to say about damnation & salvation; (including an exposé of the practical, non-religious consequences of each) ... A tome of eternal importance for believers & non-believers alike.

*via Scaught*  
... an (i)am publication  
(3<sup>rd</sup> 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*

## *on Heaven & Hell – an Introduction*

Growing up in Alabama, I heard my share of Sunday sermons proclaiming that accepting Jesus Christ as the one & only Son of God – and worshiping him accordingly – was the only way to get to Heaven after we die. And growing up in Alabama, I also had my share of confrontations with well-intended friends who repeatedly told me that I was going to Hell for not being baptized a Christian – or for not confessing my sinful ways – or for not taking communion – or for not believing that Bible was the inerrant word of God. I knew at the time that these attitudes could be found all over the world – not just in the American deep south – and yet wherever they were to be found, they were certain to have one thing in common – they just didn't make sense. They didn't make sense to me as a child then, and they still don't make sense to me today ...

\*How could it be that a God of perfect Love could allow a person like Gandhi (or Buddha, or Rumi, or Einstein, or Benjamin Franklin, or Voltaire, or Peace Pilgrim, or Thich Nhat Hanh, or Robert Frost, or Abraham Lincoln, or Mark Twain, or Epicurus, or Walt Whitman, or Isaac Asimov, or Susan B. Anthony, or Joseph Campbell, or Henry David Thoreau, or Socrates, or Clarence Darrow, or Ram Dass, or Thomas Edison, or Bertrand Russell, or Krishnamurti, or Carl Sagan, or Thomas Jefferson) to burn in Hell for eternity, merely for making the “mistake” of choosing the wrong religion?

\*How could it be that a God of perfect Compassion could sit idly by and do absolutely nothing for the first 98,000+ years of humanity's immense suffering, and only recently provide a way to salvation?

\*How could it be that a God of perfect Justice could allow sinners to suffer for eternity for “crimes” committed over a far shorter period of time (using the same fallible brains that He himself gave us, no less)?

Like I said, even though I had to admit that it was *possibly* correct, traditional Christian theology didn't make any sense to me morally. And yet every time I mentioned these fundamental ethical problems to my Christians friends, I was met with scorn or ridicule or a meekly uttered “I don't make the rules; that's just the way things are.”

Well, after spending the better part of the last ten years studying the texts of the Bible – and spending the better part of the past 8 years radically putting its teachings to the test, I am here today to note that **there is indeed another way** to look at the Christian version of Heaven & Hell – a way that is fully supported by Scripture, a way that contains no factual contradictions or logical conundrums, and a way that is completely practical. My Friends, there is indeed another way to deal with damnation, and there is indeed another way to savor salvation.

I wish you all great Peace while you contemplate this “Narrow Way” ... and I wish you all the great Courage required to go forth and enliven the same.

***Scaughdt***  
(February 2015)



## *Part 1: About the Hereafter*

Back in June of 2013, the Westboro Baptist Church struck again; this time condemning a young girl who was selling lemonade to support Equality House -- the rainbow-colored dwelling that serves as the headquarters for Planting Peace, a nonprofit organization that campaigns for human rights, gay rights and anti-bullying efforts ... Now I am not about to condemn the WBC for voicing their primitive opinions. Personally, I believe that we don't need anti-hate-speech laws as much as we need folks to stand up (firmly yet compassionately) to all those uttering such vile & fear-filled ignorance.

That having been said, I *do* want to take issue with the words the WBC used to make their point, namely: “Fags & enablers all burn in Hell ... Lemonade won't cool any tongues.” I take issue with these words for their hateful content, and I take issue with them because they are just the latest example of the disturbing trend of conservative Christians professing – nay, almost exalting – an eternal torment in Hell for all “non-believers” ...



Frankly, if this was simply an isolated judgment made by only a few extremist members of the Christian religion, then it would be easier for all of us “sinners” to simply shrug our shoulders, forgive them their trespass against us, and get on with our lives ... And yet this is sadly not at all the case.

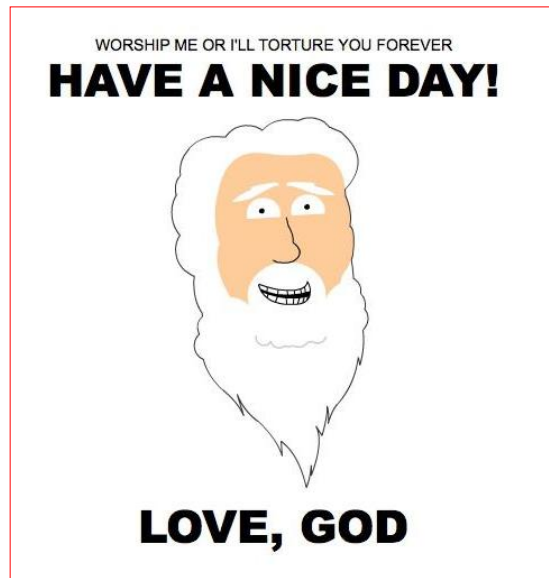
Indeed, as uncomfortable as it might sound to many, being sent to Hell merely for refusing to worship Jesus Christ as humanity's "only Lord & Savior" is one of the central tenants of the Christian religion -- a religion whose members currently comprise almost one third of the entire population of planet Earth; a religion whose members currently comprise almost 75% of the citizenry of the United States, and a religion whose members fill well over 90% of all government offices & judicial positions in that country.



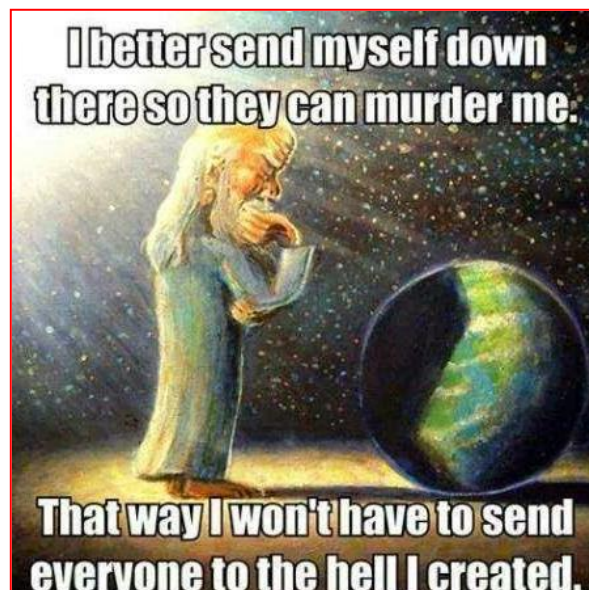
Most non-Christians seem to blandly dismiss Christianity's condemnations – shrugging them off as “childish” or “primitive” or even “ignorant”; preferring to bury their heads in the sand rather than become informed enough to face the wave of bigotry & intolerance that steadily invades their society's shores ... Such a passive dismissal of such a powerful cultural force is a problem unto itself; allowing the highly judgmental and patently intolerant Christian dogma to steadily infiltrate our world's laws, influence our communities' leaders & even invade our private lives.

And yet, today I would like to avoid the fruitlessness of any typical religious debate. Instead, today I would like to discuss the obvious problem that almost all non-Christians (and even most Christians) consistently refuse to consider: namely, *What if fundamentalist Christians are right?* ... What then?

Indeed, if you are a non-Christian and truly want to be as “advanced” & as “enlightened” as you might think you are, then it is necessary for you to set aside your arrogance for a few moments and face the (admittedly seemingly extremely slim) possibility that your unconditional acceptance of all your human brothers & sisters will soon be harshly punished by a celestial tyrant – a divine dictator that would rather have you cowering before his wrath than reaching out to humbly & Care-fully respect the followers of other faiths ...



And on the other hand, if you are a Christian and are truly as “devout” & as “faithful” as you claim to be, then it is possible for you as well to set aside your piousness for a few moments and see your God as the often unjust despot that He himself says He is --- and then thereafter somehow consciously come to grips with continuing to worship and adore Him anyway ...





Now I realize that sincerely thinking about God & life & death in this way can be a bit disconcerting for all of us, and yet I do have some Good News. You see, when we non-Christians (i.e. “the damned”) take a step back and objectively examine the conservative Christian scenario, we come to understand a most amusing Truth: namely, that the Christian version of Hell is not such a bad place after all – that if such a punishment does indeed come to pass, that it can actually prove to be an eternity filled with moments of deep Meaning & great Purpose ...

And for all Christians, on a slightly less amusing note, taking the same humble & earnest glance at your religion allows you to realize that *if* a Rapture-like spiritual “pruning” does indeed take place at some point in the future; that *if* Jesus Christ does indeed someday swoop down and angrily sort the sinners from the saved, -- allowing only the latter to rise up to spend eternity with an all-powerful God while casting the rest into the eternal torment of Revelation’s “fiery lake”, then that “Paradise” is actually not going to be such a pleasurable place to remain after all – that if such a blessing does indeed come only to you and those who believe as you do, that this salvation will actually prove to be an eternity filled with moments of profound guilt, deep-seated regret and abject shame.



Allow me to briefly explain ...

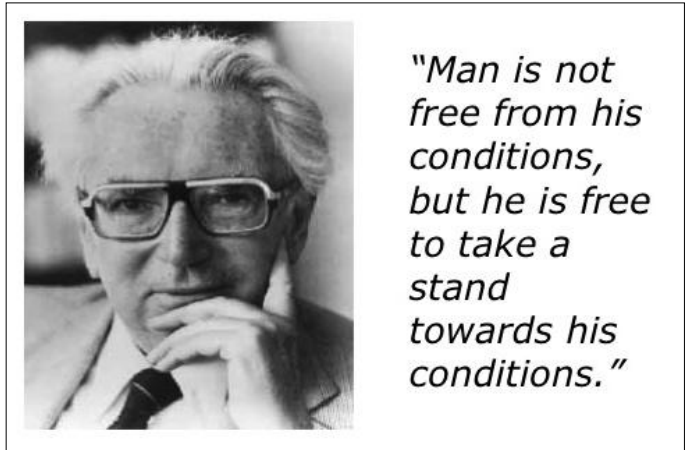
## *The Blessings of the Damned*

First, for all non-Christians (i.e. the “damned”), it is important to remember the simple fact that in order for you to truly suffer at all -- even in this life, it is necessary to be conscious of your existence; it is necessary to focus on yourself & your current predicaments, whatever they might be. Thus, in order for any of us to suffer in Hell, we must maintain a conscious recognition of our individual identities ... Of course, if we remain conscious in this manner, then we also remain **able to choose** how we respond to whatever is happening to us. And when it comes to the torments with which we will be subjected in Hell, this fact becomes extremely important -- if for no other reason than it becomes the source of our potential liberation from that same suffering.

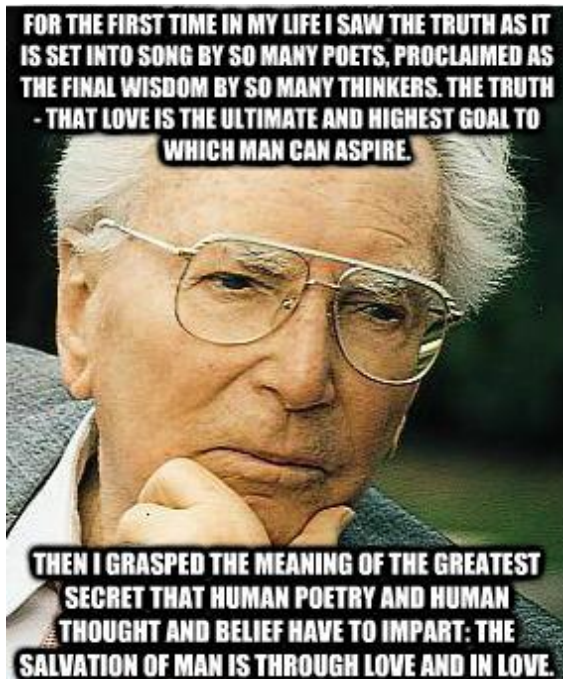
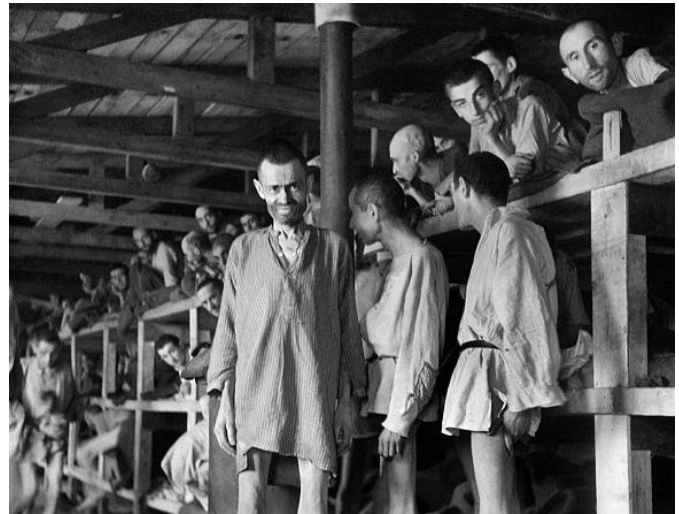
To explain this further, consider that non-biased, scientifically secular pain-studies have consistently shown that over 90% of all perceived pain does not come from the external trauma that originally stimulated it (e.g. the needle poking into our finger, or in the possible case at hand -- the fiery lake into which we will soon be cast), but rather our internal *resistance* to that trauma (i.e. our fear that the needle will remain there, or sink in deeper, or be joined by additional needles -- *or* in the possible case at hand, our *fear* that we will never be freed from Hell’s fiery torment) ... It is also quite obvious (and has been repeatedly verified) that anytime one focuses on the well-being of another, he or she cannot simultaneously be resisting his or her own pain. Thus, it logically follows (and has been empirically verified) that in all our moments of discomfort -- be they in this life or in the hereafter -- purposefully caring for others almost completely eliminates our own personal suffering.

And in Hell, at least according to Christian mathematicians, there will be literally *billions* of other Souls nearby; literally billions of other Souls right next to our own – most of them in states of immense trauma. As a purely practical matter, this means that we will all be provided with an almost endless supply of ready-made opportunities to reach out and help ease the burdens of a brother or sister in need; selfless acts of Kindness which will thereby eliminate almost all of our own suffering in all the moments we choose to give them!

And even in the worst case scenario, where God is an over-the-top Machiavellian and places each of us in solitary confinement while being eternally tortured – **even then** nothing can stop us from openly & compassionately forgiving God for His unjustified malice; **even then** nothing can stop us from Caring for God; **even then** nothing can stop us from reminding Him of the pure Love & unconditional Grace that He has so obviously forgotten ... And here too, at least in those moments we choose to give God such perfect Forgiveness, here too our own personal suffering will weaken & fade just as thoroughly, and we will know complete Peace – even in the depths of Hell.



(Victor Frankl ... Holocaust survivor & author of Man's Search for Meaning)



## *The Sufferings of the Saved*

Next, for all Christians (i.e. the “saved”) -- for all of you who will one day be residing in the version of Heaven described in the book of Revelation and alluded to in the writings of the Apostle Paul, things might actually not be as wonderful as you might be tempted to believe...

You see, the same psychological realities that make Hell a place of torment for the damned are the ones that allow your experience in Heaven to be potentially blissful. And by that I mean, that in order for you to truly revel in your salvation – in order for you to fully experience the overwhelming Joy & deep-seated Contentment that supposedly comes with residing forever in the presence your God, you too must remain conscious of your individual existence. And as such, both your innate moral compass (a.k.a. your conscience – or the "Advocate within", as Jesus describes it in chapters 14 & 15 of the Gospel of John) as well as all your memories of living on Earth “amongst sinners” must remain intact.

Under normal circumstances, this would not be a problem, and yet in the Christian Heaven things start to become problematic ... You see, as much as you might rail against its premise, every one of you has a fundamental understanding of Fairness & Justice & Kindness & Compassion. Every single one of you deeply understands the very real & dramatic difference between a full LOVE that is truly unconditional and a hollow “love” that is based on satisfying a set of demands.

And as such, every one of you “up there” in Heaven will know very well that your God – either directly (by actively tossing sinners into Hell) or indirectly (by passively allowing them to be so condemned) -- has sentenced *billions* of mostly Good Souls to an *eternity* of torment; most of them merely for committing the relatively innocent “crime” of refusing to believe in a religion that is based in having devout faith in the existence of a God for whom there is absolutely no concrete evidence whatsoever. Is such a choice a mistake – even a “sin”? Maybe so ... And yet is such a mistake worthy of *eternal* punishment; a “sin” worthy of *eternal* torture & suffering? Absolutely **NOT!**

And here's the kicker my Friends: as one of the “saved”, you are going to be required to spend forever not only hanging out with the Celestial Dictator who sentenced all those Souls to their contemptibly cruel fate, you are going to have to actively worship & praise & honor Him while you do so. That means that while Mahatma Gandhi & Thich Nhat Hanh & Peace Pilgrim & the Dalai Lama & Rabindranath Tagore & Lao Tsu and so many other brilliantly Kind & Noble human Souls are writhing in Hell forever, you are going to be spending your eternity openly adoring the evil deity that condemned them to such a despicable injustice ... And you better believe that your conscience is not going to let you enjoy yourself while you are doing so -- not even for one minute!

You see, you have a Good Soul as well, my dear Friend – and *not* because you happened to “win the spiritual lottery” by guessing correctly about the nature of Jesus Christ, but rather because you too are Kind – because you too are Caring – because you too are Just; because when you see a brother or a sister suffering, you too – just like all other sentient beings; even all the “sinners”, even all the “heathens”, even all the “lost” – you too yearn to ease their pain ... And because this yearning is so fundamental and because it is so heartfelt, it will never be possible for you to laugh fully or rest easily until you do so.

As such, *if* Christian theology does indeed prove to be true, *if* you are required to spend eternity honoring a godhead who has allowed billions of mostly Good Souls to suffer an eternity of torment, then the “Heaven” that you inherit will for you simply become another version of Hell.



And yet *fear not*, my Friends, for you too will have an alternative; you too will have a choice. For while you are residing in this emotionally painful “paradise”, you will still be conscious -- and thus will still have free will. Just like all the other brave men & women throughout history who have openly challenged unjust despots & cruel dictators, you too will be able to stand before your God and bravely protest His flagrant callousness (if not His outright malice).

Yes, while those who are in Hell might not be able to escape their torment, *you can set them free*. You can be the ones who remind God of the latent perfection of His all-mighty Grace. You can be the ones who remind Him what it means to be Kind to the ignorant & what it is to Forgive those who trespass. You can be the ones who remind Him of the teachings of His own son, Jesus Christ, who so nobly & who so brilliantly championed Love over condemnation and Mercy over judgment.

In essence, my Christian Friends, in those days of darkness when God no longer hears the pleas of the persecuted & the suffering of the tormented, *you* can speak for them ... In those times of tragedy & trauma when they can no longer save themselves, *you* can rain your Love down from on high and become their Salvation.



Frankly, I'm personally not too concerned about Hell, for I have faith in a very different God – a God who is not nearly as pious and not nearly as personal, and therefore also not nearly as petty. In essence, I know how great my own Love is, and I simply assume that God's Grace – if He exists at all – simply must be far greater than my own.

And yet even if I am wrong, I have even more Faith in the innate Goodness of you Christians ... I have even more Faith in the courageous many of you who will go up to Heaven and make things Right again.

*Amen* ... Let it be so.



## *Part 2: Claiming our Final Breath*

(on embracing the "eternal instant" between Life & Death)

Especially when it comes to Heaven & Hell, the Bible is – to say the very least – a most intriguing tome. Sometimes it is contradictory and often it is confusing ... and yet always is it insightful. As a prime example, consider the following verses from the Gospel of John:

***\*“He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God will abide on him.” ~ Jesus Christ (John 3:36)***

***\*“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son ... I pass judgment on no one.” ~ Jesus Christ (John 5:22 & John 8:15)***

How is it even remotely possible to reconcile these passages? They are both written by the same author, they are both found in the same book, and they are both supposedly uttered by the same man ... and yet they seem quite clearly to directly contradict one another quite undeniably. When we add in Jesus’ brilliant treatise on God’s perfect Love being given to **all** without blemish or condition – that we too are to forgive and care for others without any exception whatsoever (see specifically [Matthew 5:40-48](#)), then things get even more puzzling ... After all, a God who judges no one cannot send *anyone* His wrath. Just as clearly, a God would not give all judgment to a Son who then refuses to do any judging (unless “the Son” in this verse doesn't refer specifically to Jesus ... hmmm) ... And on top of that, if all of his teachings are indeed authentic, what are we to make of Jesus’ Biblical warnings about Hell & damnation & the torment due to all “sinners” (warnings almost exclusively found in the Gospel of Matthew)?

Some Christians attempt to reconcile this conundrum by stating that it is somehow “sinners” themselves who openly abandon God’s grace and thereby consciously choose to burn for eternity in Revelation’s “unquenchable fire”, and yet such a position is simply not tenable, as even the most radical of masochists would never willingly opt for such a fate.

And besides, if God truly is all-potent – and if He truly did create the entire Universe, then He also created the system of deliverance that by its very nature demands that billions of fallible humans continue to make such an ill-informed choice. As such, at the very least by indirect omission – at the very least by knowing ahead of time that such poor choices will be made and then doing nothing to stop them (much less soften their overly harsh consequences once they are ultimately chosen), such a God is directly implicated as a deity who does indeed unfairly judge & who does indeed unjustly condemn.

So what are we to make of all this?

Well, for Christians & non-Christians alike, we are essentially left with two primary alternatives: *either* the Bible fundamentally contradicts itself (freeing each of us to choose which interpretation we happen to like best), *or* – maybe Jesus was talking about something else when he mentioned “Hell”. Maybe he was warning us about a very real psychological phenomenon that visits every single sentient being in the final moments of his or her life. Considering the gravity of the consequences if the latter option proves to be true, it would be worthwhile for each of you to earnestly ponder the explanation that follows ...

\*For starters, realize that time is not an objective essence; that it cannot be perceived consistently, but rather is repeatedly reconstructed by the particular brain perceiving it. In essence, time doesn't make us, we make time – literally.

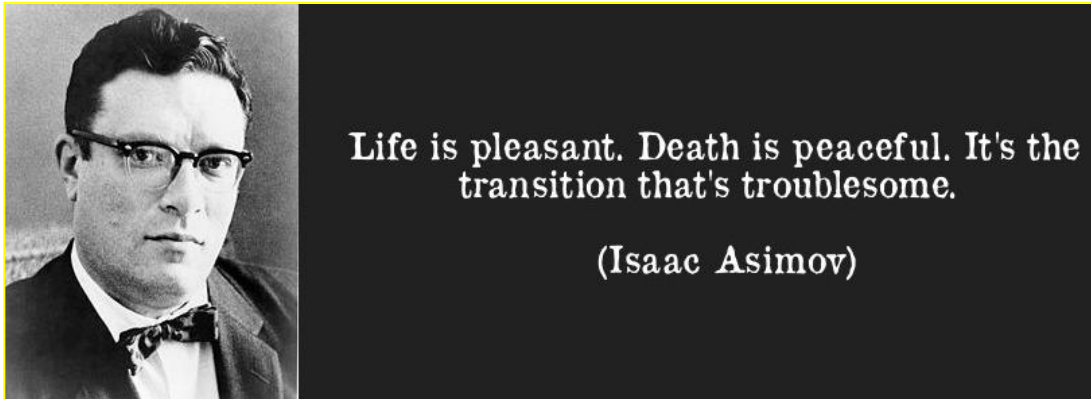
\*It has also been established that different conscious beings perceive the passage of time quite differently, and even that the same conscious being will often perceive an identical span of time quite differently as well, depending upon one's internal response to that moment's surrounding circumstances. Albert Einstein summed this Truth up quite well when he jokingly noted that, "When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, you think it's only a minute, and yet when you sit on a hot stove for only one minute, you think it's two hours."

\*And here's the rub: when taking this all into account, it becomes quite probable that this “time stretching” phenomenon becomes acutely crystallized during a person's last moment of consciousness ... You see, in the moment that the body-mind ceases to function, there is nothing left for us humans to use to measure the passage of time. As such, while this “final breath” moment may seem like but a split second to those witnessing that “ultimate transition”, for the one doing the transitioning, this last moment of consciousness stretches smoothly yet steadily into what seems like – and therefore essentially becomes – eternity.





Now I'm not saying that this final moment *actually* becomes eternity, of course, and yet I *am* postulating that this last moment is *perceived* to be an almost eternal one – that it literally *feels* like forever.



And this dramatic slowing of time is quite critical to the one experiencing it, for this “eternal instant” allows us all to literally “reap what we have sown” during the course of our lives – and it allows us to do so most vividly ...

\*For those who have lived lives primarily of active, self-sacrificial LOVE for others, such an “eternal moment” is perceived as pure Bliss – a soft & steady shower of Peace & Gratitude & Joy.



\*And for those who have chosen to primarily live lives steeped in satisfying their own desires, rationalizing their own aggressions, justifying their own condemnations &/or cowering from their own fears, then this final moment truly becomes “the wrath of God” – it truly becomes a living Hell. For in this very long instant these individuals will realize what the priceless Gift of Life was truly all about; namely, that we are here to Give and not to receive; that we are here to Serve and not to be served; that we are here to Care and not to condemn.

And it is in this moment that these people will realize that they have squandered this Gift ... & they will realize that there is nothing more that they can do about it.

*And yet*, how fortunate it is for us *all* that none of us are required to suffer such an awful fate! And how brilliant it is that we – each & every one of us – can choose **today** to turn our lives around; that we can begin **today** to live for others as opposed to merely for ourselves!

How wonderful it is that we can choose to be inspired by the admonishments of Jesus Christ (indeed, by the more gentle teachings of the founders of almost all the world’s religions) – namely, that we can all allow ourselves to be encouraged (in-Couraged) to awaken to the soft & pure interconnection we share with others, and then to act accordingly thereafter.

*“Repent\*, for the Kingdom of Heaven is already at hand.”*  
~ *Jesus Christ* (in Matthew 4:17)

Jesus also repeatedly emphasized during his ministry that our time is short; that our own death – our own personal Day of Judgment – will come unexpectedly “like a thief in the night”; that we must prepare for such an arrival as though it were coming tomorrow;

... and that we must live consciously as if it is arriving today.

*Amen* ... Let it be so.

*“And those who have done good  
come out to the resurrection of life;  
while those who have done evil,  
to the resurrection of judgment.”*  
~ *Jesus Christ* (in John 5:29)

*“Fear not, for it is your Father's good  
pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”*  
~ *Jesus Christ* (in Luke 12:32)



\*Please **NOTE** that the Biblical word translated into English as “repent” in this verse comes from the Greek word “*metanoia*”, which literally means “a full shift of mind & heart” – or in more practical terms: a radical & purposeful alteration of one’s inner being that comes via purposefully & radically altering the intention (from selfish to selfless) behind one’s behaviors.

### *Part 3: Salvation -- right HERE, right NOW*

*"The Kingdom of God does not come with things that can be observed, nor will they someday say, 'See it here!' or 'See it there!' For indeed, **the Kingdom of God is already within you.**" ~ Jesus Christ (Luke 17:20-21)*

*"Heaven & Hell are both here – both around us, and both within us ...  
They are both alive in every action, and in every inaction –  
nowhere exotic or banished; **simply here.**"  
~ inspired by Chunmun Kamal*

In the Gospels, both directly in conversations and indirectly via parables, Jesus Christ made it quite clear that Heaven – at least as far as he was concerned – was, is & forever remains a Here&Now event; a Bliss-full state of Being experienced in all the moments we exude both the humility & the courage to actively & selflessly place the needs of others ahead of our own. And as such, it makes complete sense that -- if Heaven for Jesus was a present moment occurrence – then Hell was, is & forever remains **a present moment experience** as well.

Indeed, Jesus did not mention “Hell” as we know it at all in the Scriptures, but rather is said to have used the name “**Gehenna**” to describe the suffering we all ultimately experience when reaping the consequences of living a self-centered existence. As it turns out, Gehenna was the name of a small valley just outside of Jerusalem where children were sacrificed in Old Testament times (see [Jeremiah 32:35](#)) and where much of the city’s garbage was burned in Jesus’ day. To all those listening to Jesus’ during his 3-year ministry, Gehenna was a well-known place of death & decomposition & maggots & fire -- a perfect symbolic representation of what Jesus was teaching at the time: namely, that immense pain & discomfort do indeed accompany our inevitable transcendence – that though we are steeped in the stink of weak-willed self-centeredness, we will indeed rise from the rot of greed & fear that infests our lives; that we will in-deed inevitably come to a point in our lives when we choose to burn off our sins of greed & arrogance & violence by leaping into the purifying flames of selfless acts of radical Love.



Gehenna was a foul place of pain & suffering, to be sure ... it was indeed a form of “damnation” for those living in Jesus’ time. *And yet* Gehenna was **also** a place of transmutation – it was also a gateway through which one could pass to a place of purity & calm ... Fittingly, modern-day visitors to Israel can witness firsthand that the valley of Gehenna herself has been reborn, for she has successfully transcended the centuries of being a center of torture & disgust, and has today become a lovely garden of peace & tranquility.



So too, my Friends, can our own lives be reborn. So too, can we all – in any moment we choose -- depart from Hell and enter into Heaven.

But how can we do so? Rest assured, it is indeed possible, though not in the ways traditionally believed. Merely being “devout” or “zealous” worshipers in church won’t cut it, and merely being or “nice” or “friendly” or “tactful” or “polite” or “tolerant” towards others is not nearly enough ... Indeed, even performing mere “good deeds” sufficient.

No, to enter Jesus’ “Kingdom of Heaven”, it is necessary to face your fears in a fashion much more radical, and enliven a Kindness that is far more complete. In essence, in order for us to enter this “Kingdom of Heaven”, it is necessary to sacrifice ourselves in some way for the betterment of others ...

\*When we are shunned or ridiculed or rejected or even attacked, we can have compassion for our enemies and *openly* forgive them.



\*When we are frightened or made uneasy by a stranger, we can look them in the eye and greet them *warmly* with a smile.

\*When we feel unsettled or even disgusted by a homeless person, we can touch them *gently* on the shoulder and ask how they are doing.





\*When we feel poor, we can donate to the poor ... When we feel hungry, we can give another food ... When we feel thirsty, we can give another a drink ... When we feel cold, we can give another our coat.

\*When we feel down or depressed or saddened, we can *joyously* announce to another how grateful we are to be alive.

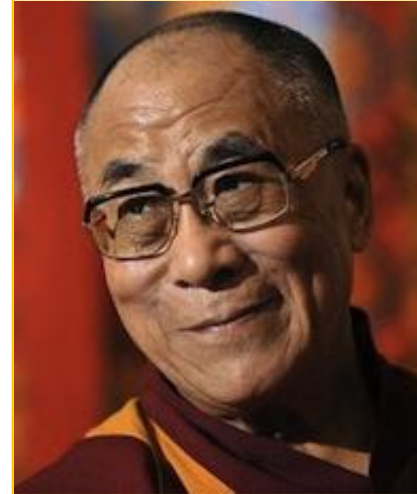


\*When we feel angry or enraged or upset, we can reach out to another with an open *act* of gentleness.

\*When we hear negative criticism or gossip, we can *humbly* offer soft reminders about the Goodness of the accused.

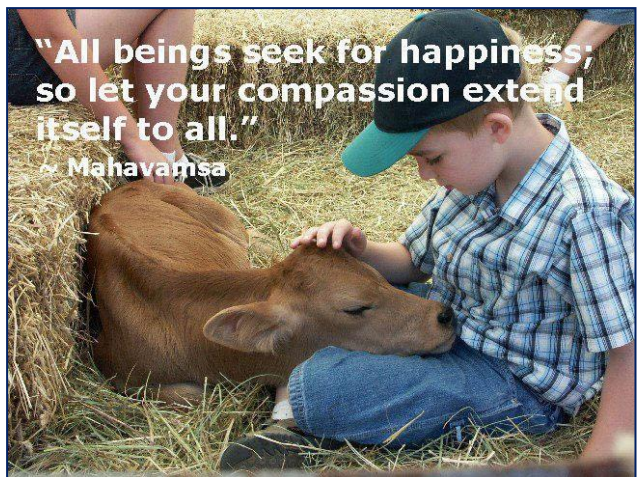


\*When we are judged as unworthy or feel condemned, we can reach out to our accusers and *directly* forgive them both for their callousness & for their arrogance.



\*When we feel bored or annoyed, we can *reverently* witness to another the raw & miraculous Beauty that always surrounds & ever fills us.

\*When we are in doubt about the future of our lives -- or the future of our relationships -- or the future of our country -- or the future of our world, we can stride forth *boldly* into our moment, and **Be the Change** we wish to See.



And these are but a few of the many ways we can fully experience the raw Bliss of our innate Oneness – our intimate & complete Interconnection with everyone & everything in our lives. And the Good News is that, regardless of what happens to us after we die, we can all enter this brilliantly Bliss-full “Kingdom of Heaven” while we still live – **right now**, in every moment we are alive ... **right here**, in every place we already reside.

**Amen** ... Let it be so.

*“Within every arising second, a second has already died. So, instead of focusing on the end, focus on this moment, this very moment ... Live in it ... Die in it ... Be laid on the cross ... Be resurrected. It's all within. This moment, this place, with these people, with this frame of mind ... With all that is and all that is within me. I am my Hell ... just as much as I am my Heaven.” ~ Chunmun Kamal*

*“And his disciples asked him, ‘When will the rest for the dead take place, and when will the new world come?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘What you are looking forward to has already arrived; you simply don't yet realize it.’” ~ Jesus Christ (Gospel of Thomas 51)*



***“The time is even now fulfilled, and the Kingdom of Heaven is already at hand.”***  
~ Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15)



*“I sought to hear the voice of God  
and climbed the topmost steeple,  
but God declared: ‘Go down again –  
I dwell among the people.’”*  
~ John Henry Newman



*“If man had his way, the plan of redemption would be an endless and bloody conflict. And yet in reality, salvation was bought not by the fists of Jesus, but by his surrender; not by his muscle but by his Love; not by God’s vengeance but by His forgiveness; not by force but by self-sacrifice. Jesus surrendered in apparent defeat in order that we might walk a similar way and taste victory; he destroyed his enemies by Loving them – by dying for them. He conquered death by allowing death to conquer him.”*  
~ inspired by A. W. Tozer

*“I do not feel obliged to believe  
that the same God who has endowed us  
with sense, reason, and intellect  
has intended for us to forgo their use.”*  
~ Galileo Galilei

## *Part 4: God of Wrath; God of LOVE*

... a Biblical case for the unconditional Grace of God

I realize that the contents of this tome's previous pages will possibly not prove to be very soothing to more than a few of you; especially those of you who are (and who desire to remain) "steadfast Christians". After all, as a Christian it was probably a bit unpleasant to read in Part 1 that your "eternal salvation" will probably not be the eternal Joy-ride that your preachers have promised ... And I bet as Christians that you didn't feel too thrilled with the idea presented in Part 2 – namely, that the sermons & teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels were not referring to any traditional type of heavenly hereafter at all, but rather were possibly referencing the last moment of pre-death consciousness; the "eternal instant" that immediately precedes every person's passing from this life to the next ... And I am almost positive that as Christians you don't even want to consider what was mentioned in Part 3 – that the "Kingdom of Heaven" mentioned by Jesus throughout the Gospels has nothing to do with an eternity of happiness in the future, but is rather a Bliss-full state of Being right Here&Now (see [Matthew 10:7](#)) – one that that is already available to every single sentient being, and accessible to anyone who chooses to sacrifice his or her own well-being in order to enhance the Peace or Joy of another (see [Matthew 24:12-14](#)).

No, my Friends, I realize that a sizeable portion of you probably want to remain members of the traditional Christian church, and yet I have faith that a sizeable portion of you *also* want to be able to do so in a way that harmonizes with your conscience – your "Advocate Within", and that you *also* want to do so in a way that resonates with your Soul – your "Spirit of Truth"; the innate sense of Justice & Decency & Goodness that the conservative Christian dogma simply does not invoke and simply cannot provide.

In essence, I have faith that you want to worship a God who is worth worshiping; that you want to worship an all-Loving God – one who refuses to demand petty hosannas & hallelujahs from His followers, and one who refuses to condemn minor offenders of "false religions" to an eternity of torment ... Though you have been told to believe that God is a "testing God", you want to love a God of a more radical Kindness ... Though you have been taught that God purposefully places painful obstacles and challenges into our lives that we may then "prove ourselves" to Him, you want to worship a God of a more awesome Grace ... Though you might have come to believe that God punishes us when we 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, you want to honor a God of a more complete Compassion. In essence, while you have been repeatedly told that God is only sometimes all-Loving and other times angry & stern, you want to believe in a God who is consistently gentle & Loving.

I have faith that you want to worship such a God of unconditional Love, and yet I also understand that you also feel the need for Biblical confirmation in Him in order to do so.

For starters, while I readily admit that evidence for the more traditional “fire & brimstone” God does abound in the Hebrew Bible’s “Old Testament”, the New Testament clearly and repeatedly states that God is both all-Loving (e.g. “God is Love, and those who abide in Love abide in God, and God abides in them.” ~ 1 John 4:16) and all-Forgiving (e.g. “I desire Mercy, not sacrifice.” ~ Matthew 9:13). Indeed, a “God of Mercy” is clearly evident in the vast majority of the teachings of Jesus Christ – and even frequently appears throughout the Bible as a whole. And as such, I thought it would be a Kind gesture to enable you all to more readily seek – and thereby more easily find – this far greater God; this far greater Father Above.

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 the Scriptures to become reborn with fresh insights & deeper meanings ...

***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 9<sup>th</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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

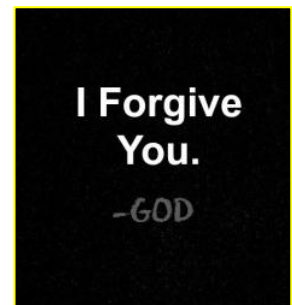
And this Truth is supported by simple, God-given common sense. Indeed, it is almost insulting to God to say that He intentionally created us as imperfect Beings\* and yet still punishes some of us for the very mistakes essentially engineered by His own hand ...

\*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-remind 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

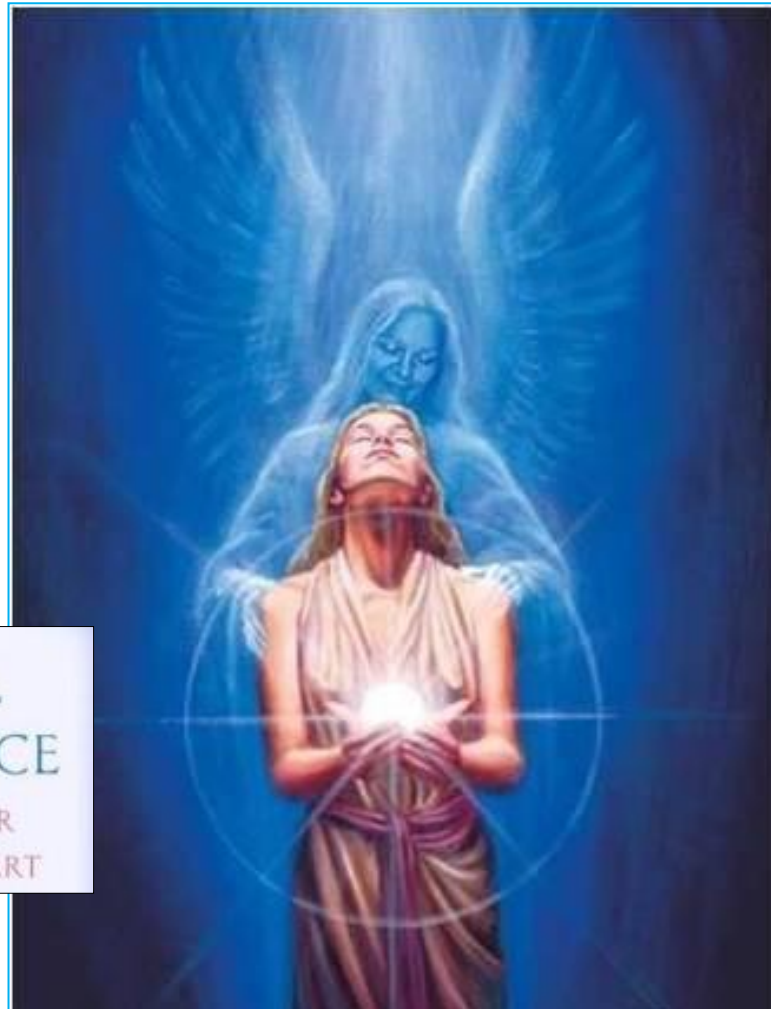
Indeed, it is pain that enables us to choose to endure in Love, which in turn strengthens the very faith we need in order to attain the Peace of Salvation ...

“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 fro 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)*