

A NEW LIFE

OF PEACE WITH GOD

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God's message of salvation according to the Bible

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible. Quotations from the King James Version of the Bible are indicated as KJV, and those from the New International Version of the Bible are indicated as NIV.

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IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

For many Christians the answers to the following questions are obvious. For the majority of Christians, however, they are not necessarily that clear. In the minds of many “Christian-believers” there is uncertainty about these matters. Many non-Christians would also be in a better position to make an informed decision if they knew about these questions and their answers. Some may already have wondered about them. The questions under discussion are:

- How reliable and trustworthy is the Bible?
- What authority does the Bible have?
- Can a person come to know God through the Bible?
- If so, what does the Bible teach about God?
- What does the Bible teach about the natural human being’s relationship with God?
- Is there peace between the natural human being and God?
- If not, why not?
- Can this relationship be restored?
- Can a person be reconciled to God?
- If so, how?
- Is a new life of peace with God possible for human beings?

This booklet attempts—briefly, yet clearly—to answer these important questions. It can help the reader to better understand God’s plan of salvation for humanity.

The reader may already be a Bible-believer (a true Christian) and may already know the answers to these questions. In that case, you are welcome to use this booklet as a “review” to make sure that you know the correct answers, especially in a time when: *“... many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”* (Matthew 24:11-13) This can only strengthen believers’ faith. And it can also help to:- *“...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”* (1 Peter 3:15).

1. THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible reveals to humanity the good news of a God of love, the only true Creator-God, and His dealings with humankind. In these dealings between God and humanity, the Bible teaches that certain events occurred which alienated human beings from the God of love. The bad news of the Bible is that the natural person is estranged from God, abandoned, dead in sin, and therefore lost and condemned to eternal destruction. According to the Bible, this is the condition of every human being on earth, regardless of how good he or she may appear to be. Worse still, the Bible teaches that there is nothing a person can do to restore this relationship with God.

Yet the Bible also contains exceptionally good news: because God *is* love, He has made it possible that the relationship between Himself and humanity can be restored. This restoration of the relationship with God is not only possible; it is an absolute requirement for salvation and for **a new life of peace with God**. For this reason, the Bible calls people to be reconciled to God, including in the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:20b:

"... we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

God desires to restore the relationship, and therefore He makes provision by sending His Savior – Servant, according to Isaiah 52:13 – to make peace with Him possible for humanity. You are encouraged to read the whole of Isaiah 53. See especially Isaiah 53:5:

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."

All of this, however, is meaningless if the Bible is merely a human writing—and that is precisely what Satan and his agents want people to believe. Throughout the ages, and even today, much effort has been made to undermine the Bible's credibility as the Word of God. Already in the Garden of Eden, Satan—through the serpent—began sowing doubt in the human mind about the truth of what God had said, when he asked, *"Has God indeed said, ..."* (**Genesis 3:1**) and declared, *"You will not surely die."* (**Genesis 3:4**). Satan makes God out to be a liar and continues relentlessly to sow doubt about the reliability of the Bible as God's Word. The Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians 11:14–15:

"For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

Just as Satan presents himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), so some of his servants—often highly educated theologians—present themselves as Christians while, in reality, they are liberal (free-thinking) unbelievers who leave no stone unturned in

their efforts to undermine the authority of the Bible. These are people who know the Bible, but do not know the God who is revealed in the Bible.

In schools, universities, and other training institutions, the authority of the Bible is likewise undermined, among other things, by presenting the theory of evolution as gospel truth, as though it were a proven fact, while—apart from evolution that occurs within species—it is essentially an unprovable hypothesis. They find it easier to believe that something so small as to be virtually invisible exploded (the so-called Big Bang), and that the universe, with all its massive planets, star systems, and all the wonders on this earth, is the result of that event. “Nothing” therefore exploded, and everything that exists is supposedly the result.

No scientist can explain what this “something” or “nothing” is that exploded, where it came from, how it came to be, or what caused it to explode. It was simply “there” — is that science, or do they merely believe it? To believe this unscientific “science” truly requires an exceptionally large “faith.”

For them, it is more difficult to believe that an intelligent Being who has always existed created all these wonderful things out of nothing. If He decided that what He created should move away from one another, He — and He alone — could have accomplished it through an explosion, or simply by commanding it to happen, and it would have happened.

There are also numerous other religions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and a vast array of cults—each with its own ideas based on certain writings, all contradicting the Bible.

How can one be certain that the Bible truly is God’s inspired revelation to humanity? It is impossible to prove this scientifically. There are strong and valid philosophical arguments, but these are not proofs. Yet there is ample reason—enough for this writer and for millions of other believers to believe it. So much so that millions have been willing to be tortured and to die for it. This still happens daily in countries and regions where Bible-believing Christians are persecuted, tortured, and killed simply because they are Christians. Most of these believers had a choice: they could have rejected the Bible and the Christian faith and saved their lives, but they were so certain that they were willing to pay the highest price. Among the earliest Christian martyrs were the apostles, who personally knew the Lord Jesus and witnessed His life, His crucifixion, and His resurrection from the dead.

To acknowledge and accept the Bible as God’s revelation is not a blind leap of faith. The Bible is unique, and no other ancient writing even remotely compares to it in credibility and reliability. No one can be forced to believe the Bible, but when one considers the following facts (drawn from *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell and *In Defense of the Faith* by Dave Hunt), one would expect any intelligent person to give serious consideration to the Bible’s content and examine it more closely:

- Over a period of 1,500 years, more than 40 authors—including fishermen, shepherds, kings, physicians, and others—across three continents (Asia, Africa,

and Europe), writing in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), recorded God's revelation to humanity in 66 books. They wrote on numerous potentially controversial subjects without contradicting one another, and in perfect harmony regarding the message of salvation.

- Of all ancient manuscripts that have survived, the biblical manuscripts are incomparably more numerous and far closer in time to the originals than secular manuscripts. The New Testament alone has 24,600 manuscripts, some dating to less than a century after the originals, while most are 300–400 years later. No ancient secular work has even 1,000 manuscripts; most have fewer than ten, and the time gap between the original and the oldest copy is often more than 1,000 years. This means biblical manuscripts are far more reliable. It also means that if the Bible cannot be accepted as credible, then no ancient manuscript can be accepted as credible.
- Throughout the centuries, critics have failed in their attempts to discredit the Bible. Many claims of corruption or distortion have been made, but no evidence has ever been produced.
- Archaeological excavations have never disproved anything in the Bible. On the contrary, archaeology has repeatedly confirmed the Bible and proven sceptics wrong. For example, there was once no archaeological evidence for the Hittites as a people in Canaan. Sceptics seized on this as proof that the Bible was unreliable. To their dismay, archaeological evidence began to pour in, and today there is an entire museum in Ankara, Turkey dedicated to the Hittites. This is only one of many examples. Because of the reliability of the Bible's archaeological record, some archaeologists in Israel use the Bible to locate ancient cities.
- The prophetic record of the Bible is flawless. A vast number of prophecies concerning nations and individuals have been fulfilled exactly as written, including all prophecies about the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is certain that all prophecies still awaiting fulfilment will be fulfilled precisely as the Bible states. No other book has such a flawless prophetic record.

The Bible has brought millions of people into contact with the living God, changing their lives forever. They experience the joy and peace of God that surpasses all understanding, even in the direst circumstances and under severe persecution.

The Bible also claims to be the inspired revelation of the true Creator-God: 2 Timothy 3:16:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God,"

And the Lord Jesus issued the following challenge in John 7:17:

"If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God ..."

This remains true: whoever does the will of God, as set out in the Bible, will know that it is indeed from God.

Most people who do not accept the Bible as God's revelation do so against their better judgment. They realize that it *is* the Word of God, but they cannot face the moral demands and standards of the Bible. They then look for faults in order to convince themselves and others that the Bible is not credible. In doing so, they attempt to soothe their own consciences—usually unsuccessfully—which eventually become completely dulled if they persist.

Just as the devil does everything in his power to discredit the Bible as God's revelation, he also leaves no stone unturned in misleading believers and undermining their faith through false teachers and prophets, who often slightly distort great biblical truths in order to lead believers astray. These are often excellent preachers who sometimes do so out of ignorance, but often deliberately. The Lord Jesus warns in Matthew 7:15:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."

In Matthew 24:11 He also warns that before His return,

"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."

The apostles likewise warn repeatedly against false prophets and teachers (see acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1).

For this reason, every believer is responsible for personally getting to know the God of the Bible through prayerful Bible study; otherwise, he or she may be misled by false teachers. Believers owe it to themselves, for only there—in the Bible, prayerfully, and with the help of God through His Holy Spirit—is the **new life of peace with God** to be found.

Any serious student of the Bible will soon discover that the God of the Bible is the only true Creator-God, that He is a God of love, and therefore that there is hope for the natural person who is alienated from God and dead in sin.

2. DEAD IN SIN

When a person (before true conversion) realizes that, because of sin, he or she is alienated from the true God, abandoned, and in a state of spiritual death, it can hardly be good news for anyone. Yet it remains a fact, whether one believes it or not, because humanity has sinned against God.

2.1 What is Sin?

Sin is the transgression or non-fulfilment of God's law, according to 1 John 3:4:

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."

And the law of God is summarized by the Lord Jesus in Mark 12:29–31 as follows:

"..., 'The first of all the commandments is: 'HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'"

God's law is therefore love. This means that all loveless behaviour toward God and neighbour is sin. Yes—every loveless action, thought, and attitude toward God and neighbour is sin.

Loveless behaviour, thoughts, and attitudes toward God and neighbour are essentially selfishness. The first humans' loveless—indeed selfish—action toward God (disobedience and a self-centered attempt to become like God under the serpent's—Satan's—incitement) was therefore the first sin. Likewise, every selfish and loveless action of every human being remains a violation of God's law and is therefore sin. Sin is selfishness and self-interest, an excess of self-love in place of love for God and one's neighbour.

2.2 The Fall of Man

God placed the first humans in a wonderful environment where they enjoyed a special relationship with Him and experienced His special presence. God gave humanity—equipped with free will—the mandate to rule. They loved God and therefore initially obeyed His commands. But under Satan's incitement, they began to act selfishly and lovelessly by ignoring God's commands and attempting to become like God.

God forbade them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned that on the very day they ate from its fruit, they would die (Genesis 2:17). Satan, however, convinced them that *"your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, ..."*

(Genesis 3:5) if they ate the forbidden fruit. This possibility appealed to them (Genesis 3:6), and they ate. This was an act of lovelessness toward God—not only because it was disobedience, but because they attempted to become like God.

Eating the fruit was essentially an occult act: an attempt to become like God, to obtain supernatural knowledge and power. It was about self-exaltation. Just as power-hungry people today still pursue supernatural power through occult practices, the first humans likewise “ate this forbidden fruit” in their attempt to become like God. The sin was not merely the act of eating; the motive was a deliberate attempt to become like God. The first humans loved themselves more than God and, for the first time, placed their own interests above His.

God had warned them, and they did indeed die that same day—a spiritual death—when they were driven out of Eden (God’s special presence) into a world now cursed (Genesis 3:17) and under the power of the Evil One. After the fall, humanity was alienated from God, dead in sin, without hope and without God in the world. To be abandoned by God is, in biblical language, to be dead. Paul writes to the believers in Colossae in Colossians. 2:13:

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,”

See also Roman. 5:17; Ephesians 2:1–5; 5:14. Paul describes the Ephesians’ lost condition before conversion in Ephesians 2:12:

“... at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

Although the first humans did not immediately die physically, they immediately entered into eternal death and condemnation—a state defined in Scripture as being abandoned and alienated from God. This is the condition in which every human being is born after the fall: a state of spiritual death, abandonment by God, and alienation from the only true God. When a person enters this world—which is cursed and lies under the power of the Evil One—he is, by nature, cut off from God and condemned to eternal destruction, unless God Himself intervenes. This is a death worse than the physical death of true believers, because it means total and eternal separation from God for those not reconciled to Him.

Because God is love, lovelessness, selfishness—sin—cannot exist in His special presence. Therefore, a person living in sin and persisting in it cannot be reconciled to God. According to Scripture, sin always creates separation between God and humanity. Even in His relationship with His covenant people, God warns in Isaiah 59:2:

“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”

Humanity cannot, by any means, return to God’s special presence or to a state of reconciliation with Him. Humans do not possess the ability to return from this state of death in sin to God and to live again. This inability is symbolized by the cherubim with

the flaming sword in Genesis 3:24 guarding the way back to the garden (God's special presence).

2.3 Power of the Evil One

In this state of spiritual death—dead in sin, abandoned by God, and without hope—human beings live and children are born. Everyone born into this world is, like their parents (before true rebirth), naturally lost, dead in sin, and heading toward an eternity without God.

This world, after the fall, was in such chaos that the very first human born was so self-centred and jealous that he murdered his brother. Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4). Why was Cain angry? Abel brought an offering that God accepted (Genesis 4:4), while Cain's offering was not accepted (Genesis 4:5). Cain was stubborn; he wanted to serve God in his own way, seeking God for the benefits it might bring him. The apostle John wrote in his first letter (3:11-12):

"..., that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."

The world became so utterly wicked that after about 1,500 years ***"... the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."*** (Genesis 6:6). Humanity was doing its own will, against God's will. During all the time from the fall up to Noah, the Bible mentions at most ten individuals who were truly believers, including Abel, who is described as righteous, as well as Enoch and Noah himself, who walked with the Lord. Noah is considered righteous (Genesis 6:8–9). God decided to destroy humanity and save only Noah (and his family for his sake).

After the flood, almost 400 years passed before God found in Abram someone obedient and righteous enough to use. Reading the Old Testament's accounts of the world's wickedness—and Israel's unfaithfulness—it is clear that the world was under the power of the Evil One. What grip must the Evil One have had if even God's chosen people would not listen to Him? According to Isaiah 65:2:

"I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way that is not good, According to their own thoughts;"

In the New Testament, the world is still under the power of the Evil One. Three times the Lord Jesus refers to Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Jesus teaches His disciples in Matthew 6:10 to pray:

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

God's will does not primarily happen on earth because the world is under the Evil One's power. Jesus also teaches them to pray in verse 13: ***"But deliver us from the evil one."*** This would not be necessary if the Evil One posed no threat.

In His prayer in John 17, Jesus distinguishes between “this world” and His disciples, as though their citizenship is elsewhere. He prays in verses 14-15:

“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”

Their citizenship is in God’s kingdom, under His rule, while they remain physically in a world under the Evil One’s power.

When Satan tempted Jesus in Luke 4, he claimed that all the kingdoms of the world belonged to him because they had been handed over to him (verses 5–6). Jesus did not dispute this but simply affirmed that only God must be worshipped.

The apostles agree that the world is under the Evil One’s power. Paul explains in Acts 26:18 that Jesus gave him this mission:

“... to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Concerning believers, Paul writes in Colossians 1:13-14:

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

Paul therefore makes a clear distinction between the darkness of this world and the reign of God (the kingdom of Christ).

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul writes that unbelievers:

“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”

Satan does not blind these people’s minds in a supernatural way; rather, through his lies and deception—just as with the first humans—he succeeds in leading them to focus so willingly on themselves and their own advantage that they do not see the glory of Christ.

The true Christian believer’s citizenship is in the kingdom of God (under His rule) through His Holy Spirit. Paul affirms this as well in Philippians 3:20.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”

The heroes of faith from the Old Testament, according to Hebrews 11:13:

“... confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

They sought another homeland—the heavenly one (Hebrews 11:14–16). This “homeland” is the life hereafter in God’s kingdom. Peter likewise refers to believers as strangers and sojourners (1 Peter 1:17; 2:11).

John (1 John 5:19) is equally certain that the world is in the power of the evil one:

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”

The Lord Jesus said about some people according to Mark 4:15:

“When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 11:14–15:

For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Despite some believers—and even Christian teachers—denying that believers are engaged in a struggle against satanic powers, Paul warns of this struggle and includes himself as someone needing prayer. From Ephesians 6:11 he urges believers to put on God’s armour to ***“... be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”***. He describes this struggle and the Armor in Ephesians 6:12–17:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;”

Paul himself experienced opposition from the Evil One. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 he writes:

“... but Satan hindered us.”

James instructs believers in James 4:7:

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Peter warns in 1 Peter 5:8:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

Can there still be any doubt that this world is under the power of the Evil One? Satan's power operates mainly through human will and consent—people voluntarily yield to his lies and deception for supposed self-advantage, just as Adam and Eve did.

To be dead in sin in a world under the power of the Evil One is truly bad news—but the Bible contains very good news. God desires to deliver humanity from this death-bound existence and reconcile them to Himself, because God is love.

3. GOD IS LOVE

3.1 Some of God's natural attributes.

The God of the Bible—and according to the Bible, the only true God—is **Eternal**. He has no beginning and no end. He exists outside of time. He created time. God is at the beginning of time and already at its end. This is why the Bible says in Revelation 1:8:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’

See also Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 41:4; 48:12; 57:15; Hebrews 1:8.

God is also **Omnipresent** (Psalm 139:7–10; Jeremiah 23:24). Nothing escapes His awareness. However, He is not present everywhere in the same way. At times God is present in a special manner, when His presence is consciously experienced. This is exceptional and happens very, very rarely. A person should never pursue such an experience but leave it to God's will and judgment. Trying to obtain it at all costs can open the door to false experiences produced by evil powers.

God is also **Omniscient** (Psalm 139:4; Isaiah 46:10; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20). He knows everything—even every human thought and everything that will happen in the future.

God is also **Almighty** (Job 42:2; Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 14:24 & 27; Matthew 19:26). He can do anything that must be done according to His righteous will and judgment. Because He does not will it, God cannot do anything that contradicts His moral attributes. For example, He cannot act unjustly or without love.

God is also **Unchangeable** (Isaiah 41:4; Hebrews 1:11–12; 13:8; James 1:17). God's being cannot change. He does not improve, because improvement is unnecessary. He is perfect.

3.2 Some of God's moral attributes.

God is righteous, gracious, good, patient, and holy. All these attributes of God can be gathered and encompassed in His most important moral attribute, namely His love, which is discussed more fully below. When the perfection of God's love is rightly understood, it becomes in itself a proof of God's existence and of the truth of the Bible. Such perfect love could not have been invented by different writers in different places at different times in such complete harmony, except under the inspiration of the Spirit of God (see *The Authority of the Bible* above).

3.3 Love as God's all-inclusive moral attribute.

When the reader grasps God's love as discussed below, he or she will also understand why it should be regarded as God's most important moral attribute, which includes all His other moral qualities. Love is righteous—it cannot be otherwise. It is also gracious, good, patient, devoted (holy), and benevolent.

The Bible is very clear that the God of the Bible is a God of love. Only a few examples are mentioned. See Numbers 14:18a:

“The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy (loving kindness),”

But He does not merely *love*—He is more than that. He *is* love. God's love is evident throughout the Bible, but in 1 John 4:8 & 16 it is explicitly stated. Verse 8 says:

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

And verse 16:

“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”

This is why God's law is love. His law, which is love, is love because He Himself is love, and therefore it can never change. It is the universal moral law of God, grounded in His character. It will always exist; 1 Corinthians 13:8:

“... Love never fails (ends).”

God's command to His people, Israel in Leviticus 19:18, is:

“... you shall love your neighbor as yourself:”

This includes strangers, as stated in: Leviticus 19:34:

“The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself;”

This means at the very least that God Himself loves, regardless of who the person is. He would not expect more from humanity than He Himself is and does. The Lord Jesus says that a person must even love his enemy (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27). If God expects humans to love everyone—including their enemies—it means at least that God Himself also loves everyone, including His enemies. And so it is. The natural person, because of sin, is an enemy of God, yet God loves him and desires to save him. This is discussed below.

The question may now be asked: *“Why does God punish people if He is love?”* The answer is that He punishes precisely because He is love. Love can never be unjust, and justice requires that sin (unjust and selfish behaviour) be punished (see Exodus 34:7).

God's love is perfect, and therefore humanity, with its limited capacity, cannot fully understand or describe it. What is clear, however, is that God's love is complete benevolence toward all people. God desires the wellbeing of man. **(Please note that**

things can only go well with man when he is in the right relationship with God, because it is eternal and not temporary like earthly prosperity). The fact that things do not always go well for people in temporal matters is not God's fault. It is also not always God's punishment, but more often the result of sin (one's own or others').

The entire Bible is essentially about God's effort to reconcile stubborn and sinful humanity to Himself in a righteous and loving way. God knows that this is the only way to save humanity from the eternal death and condemnation in which they find themselves because of sin. God earnestly desires to save humanity, because He is love. Therefore, God has a plan to save humanity. This *Good News* plan becomes clear when the Bible is studied.

4. GOOD NEWS

4.1 Salvation

Because God is love, and because He is almighty, He does everything that must be done according to His righteous will and judgment in this world, which lies under the power of the Evil One. Therefore, there is indeed hope for humanity, which is dead in sin. God desires to redeem human beings (all people) from this condition and make it possible for them to be reconciled to Him. Only God can do this, for humanity cannot, by its own effort, return to God or be reconciled to Him.

4.2 Peace with God for man

God wants to save man because He is love but love includes righteousness. God is just, therefore, He can and will redeem man to a new life of peace with Him, only in a righteous way. He cannot simply overlook human sin, because justice requires punishment for sin. According to Exodus 34:7 God forgives sin but never leaves it unpunished. That is why God also said in Numbers 14:18:

“The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty,”

This is just, because where sin is not punished, chaos follows, and people suffer under the selfishness (sin) of others.

From the beginning, God involves Himself with humanity. About 400 years after the flood, the Lord calls Abra(ha)m. God has a plan with Abraham: He wants to prepare for Himself a people (Israel) through whom ***“... all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*** (Genesis 12:3). His plan of salvation for humanity—through His perfect Sacrifice. Through covenants (voluntary agreements) with Abraham and his descendants (Israel), God walks a long road with Israel—often difficult because of their unfaithfulness—and at the appointed time the Blessing of God for all nations appears. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes as the perfect sacrifice to take upon Himself the punishment for humanity’s sin and to deliver humanity from sin. He pays the price for humanity’s reconciliation with God. A new life of peace with God is thus made possible.

Punishment for human sin is necessary, because God is righteous and has determined that blood brings atonement (Leviticus 17:11). The same passage says that life (the soul) is in the blood. This means that life is poured out when blood is poured out. Humanity cannot atone for sin through its own life, because one human life would only be sufficient to atone for the first sin—and nothing would remain to offer for all

subsequent sins. Hebrews 9:22b states: ***"... without shedding of blood there is no remission."***

Sin must therefore be punished. The only way is through a perfect, spotless, sinless sacrifice that can bring atonement for humanity. Only God can provide this perfect sacrifice, which brings reconciliation with Him and a new life for humanity. Romans 3:24-25:

"... Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,"

God loves lost humanity so much that He Himself pays the price. John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

This perfect sacrifice is the Lord Jesus Christ, who came as a Jew, from the people of Israel, sent by God, and born as a human with the purpose of being the perfect sacrifice through which reconciliation with God becomes possible. 1 John 4:10:

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Paul refers to this as proof of God's love in Romans 5:8:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus is the sacrifice for humanity's sins, for which no other sacrifice can ever be sufficient. Peter confirms this in 1 Peter 2:24:

"who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness."

Paul agrees in Ephesians 1:7:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

So does the writer of Hebrews in 10:14:

"For by one offering (Jesus Christ) He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

God's salvation is available to all. Paul teaches this in 1 Timothy 2:3-4:

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Peter understands it likewise in 2 Peter 3:9:

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

God knows, however, that many people will not be interested in being reconciled to Him. Therefore, Jesus says in Matthew 7:14:

“... narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

And in Luke 13:24:

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

The fact that God knows not all will accept this gift of salvation does not change His love. He still desires that all repent and be saved, so that it may go well with them. This is His desire for every person. Therefore, He makes provision for it.

The main reason some people do not want to be saved is that the self occupies first place in their lives. They cannot face the moral demands of the Christian life of faith. Those who do want to be saved but try unsuccessfully (Luke 13:24) are people who attempt to reach God in selfish ways, like Cain. Their motives are wrong; it is all about self and personal advantage. They want the best of this world as well as the best of the world to come. Many people often go to church but ***“will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;”*** (2 Timothy 4:3). They want to hear that God will bless them with worldly prosperity and health. They also often want to be entertained by music that is not always true praise and worship. This includes those who do not make enough effort to learn from the Bible who God is and what He has done for humanity.

The fact that God has made provision for everyone’s salvation and reconciliation does not mean that all are automatically saved. This gift of salvation and new life with God is received only by those who believe and accept it. Humanity must choose, for humans have a God-given ability to choose.

4.3 Man’s ability to choose (free will)

It is clear from the Bible that humans have the ability to make choices, and that God expects them to make choices. Some theologians struggle with the issue of free will. They seem stuck on the assumption that God can only know in advance what people will decide and do if He Himself predetermines, decrees, and ordains it. They cannot believe that God can know beforehand what every person will decide and do—even before the person himself knows what he will decide.

Some sincere believers throughout the centuries have taught that God cannot know something in advance unless He Himself causes it. For us humans this is difficult to understand, but if we believe the Bible, we must also believe that it is possible for God, because Scripture certainly teaches it.

God warns people repeatedly in Scripture to do certain things and not to do others, making it clear that they could choose whether to obey Him or not. As early as Genesis 4:7, after the fall, God warns Cain:

"... sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Cain did not obey, and he sinned. If he had no ability to choose, God's warning would have made no sense. Furthermore, God gives commands and rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. How could it be just or loving if God predetermined their disobedience and then punished them for it?

If everything were predetermined by God, as some mistakenly teach, it would mean that every human action and event is ordained and caused by God. It would also mean that humans could not be held responsible for selfish wrongdoing (sin), because they had no choice. One could not choose right or wrong, because everything would already be predetermined. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 would not have been possible. One such hero is Abraham. Genesis 15:6:

"And he (Abram) believed in the LORD, and He (God) accounted it to him for righteousness."

If God had predetermined Abraham's faith by manipulating his will, it would make no sense to credit it to him as righteousness.

This applies also to relationships. A relationship cannot be meaningful or genuine if it is not voluntary. Forced relationships are meaningless. This is true for humans and also for the relationship between God and humanity. God seeks meaningful relationships. According to John 4:23, God seeks true worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. To worship God in spirit means to worship Him with full devotion, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, with one's whole heart and being. This requires the will; it cannot be otherwise. To worship God in truth also involves the will—it concerns the motive. It means worshipping God for who He is, not for questionable reasons such as gaining something from it. It remains a choice.

For the purpose of this discussion, free will simply means the ability to make choices. It does not mean total freedom or sovereignty on humanity's part. A person may want to do many things but cannot always do everything he wants. One of these is that humanity cannot, by its own effort, be reconciled to God—even if one desires it and tries in one's own way. Therefore, God involves Himself with humanity. He desires to deliver humanity from this lost condition and give them a new life of reconciliation with Himself.

5. TIME TO DECIDE?

Anyone who has read this far may feel the desire to learn even more about these matters. You are encouraged to read to the end and, if necessary, to search the Bible earnestly for answers to any uncertainties that may still remain. It will also be beneficial to seek out the fellowship of sincere Christian believers, where you can find support and further answers to possible questions. Those who may already have decided to accept God's gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, and reconciliation with Him, are likewise encouraged to read to the end.

It is indeed true that every person who has not yet heard this Good News and received God's gift of salvation must decide whether he or she wishes to remain in a lost condition or rather accept this gracious gift that God makes available. Every person who desires to receive this gift of salvation and reconciliation with God must accept it in prayer to God, trusting Him to enable them—through His Holy Spirit—to live this new life.

5.1 Accept God's gift of peace with Him

Reconciliation with God (salvation and deliverance from sin) is a gift from God—a gift that cannot be earned. God gives it to humanity because He is love. Ephesians 2:8–9:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

And Romans 6:23:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In Acts 16:30–31 the jailer asks Paul and Silas:

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"

This means believing and accepting that the reconciliation with God, made possible through the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, is also for you. It is truly a gift from God to humanity, given out of love, which must be believed and accepted in order to be possessed.

This gift of God is free; no one needs to do anything, nor can anyone do anything, to earn it. It is available to all who hear of it, believe it, and accept it. A gift, in the true sense of the word, is not earned, because it is not remuneration. As with any other gift offered to you, you must accept it. If you do not take it, it never becomes yours, and you can never enjoy its benefits, regardless of the giver's intention. There is no merit in accepting a gift. Accepting a gift can never be an action that contributes to earning

it. This applies equally to God's gift. The Bible sets faith over against works as the only way to receive God's gift of salvation (see Acts 13:38–39; Romans 3:21–28; Galatians 3; Philippians 3:9). This means that faith is not a "work" by which one contributes to earning God's gift of salvation.

The benefits of this gift for those who accept it are forgiveness and deliverance from sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life with Him—a new life of peace with God.

Any gift a person receives brings responsibilities; however small the required actions may be. If it is not cared for or used for its intended purpose, one may suffer loss. One may lose it or lose its usefulness. There is therefore always a cost associated with receiving a gift. The cost may range from minor actions to significant effort requiring energy or even money, in the case of large gifts. For example: a woman who receives flowers cares for them; someone who receives a bicycle or car maintains it—sometimes at considerable cost (fuel, servicing, tyres, etc.).

To accept this gift of God essentially means becoming a follower or disciple of the Lord Jesus. This also brings responsibilities—or costs. The Lord Jesus Christ, who made this gift possible, says that these responsibilities are costs that must be counted.

The Lord Jesus explains the cost of discipleship in Luke 9:23:

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" See also Matthew 16:24 and Mark 8:34.

A person can never bring about salvation or reconciliation with God by doing good works. Yet once you have accepted this gift, you have become His disciple, His child, His follower—and then you must fulfil the responsibilities that come with it. If you do not fulfil them, or at least earnestly strive to do so, you are not caring for the gift, and you will not enjoy the full value, benefit, and blessing of this wonderful gift. One may then rightly wonder whether such a person truly received (believed) the gift at all. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 7:21:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

James says in 2:20:

"But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"

If a person claims to believe, but his actions do not align with that belief, it is, according to James, a dead faith. A dead faith is a faith that does not lead to salvation.

Everyone who considers accepting this gift of God must think very seriously about it. Count the cost and decide whether you truly want it. The cost includes, among other things, the old life. One cannot live a new life of reconciliation with God while continuing in the old life of sin. Remember, however, that the new life is not lived in one's own strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When a person has counted the cost and decides to accept this precious gift of God, it is done through prayer. Prayer is the way humanity communicates with God. The following matters should be discussed with God in prayer:

- Confess your sins to God and your need for salvation. He forgives all your sins because the Lord Jesus has already borne the punishment for them, regardless of their extent or seriousness. God desires to settle the matter with you, as He says through the prophet Isaiah in Jes. 1:18:

"Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."

- Accept God's gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus. It is accepted just as any other gift would be accepted, because it is a gift from God's hand. Ephesians 2:8–9:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

- Surrender yourself to Him. Tell Him that from now on you no longer live for yourself but for Him; that you no longer place your own interests first, but that He now holds first place in your life; that you are now a follower of the Lord Jesus and deny yourself, the world, and Satan.

- Thank God that He, without you deserving it, has made it possible through the death of the Lord Jesus for you to return from eternal death to a new life of reconciliation and peace with God.

- Declare your full dependence on God to be enabled by His Holy Spirit to live this new life to His glory.

Everyone who has accepted this gift now has the indescribable privilege of being a child of God, as the Bible promises in John 1:12:

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:"

The meaning and consequences of this step are discussed next, along with the responsibilities of the believer and disciple of the Lord Jesus as an integral part of this new life.

6. THE NEW LIFE

A new believer should, through baptism, become part of the Church of Christ, which consists of all true believers. Through baptism the new believer testifies before the world and Satan, with fellow believers as witnesses, that he or she has died to the old self-life of sin and has now begun this new life in Christ. Paul says in Romans 6:4:

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Finding a congregation or community of believers that functions on biblical principles, in love, is not always easy. The new believer who is not already part of such a congregation must pray earnestly and trust the Spirit of God to lead him or her to such a community. Persevere in trusting that the Lord will provide. Unfortunately, in almost every congregation—even those functioning on biblical principles—there are “Christians” who attend church merely “just in case.” People who are not truly convinced of the faith they are supposed to confess. There are also believers in whom the love of God does not always reign, where jealousy, pride, and various wrong attitudes often lead to enmity toward one another. The new believer must be alert to these negative things (remember that we live in a world under the power of the Evil One) and pray that the true love of God will reign in his or her own heart, to the glory of God and the building up of the body of Christ on earth.

Every believer must also realize that each one must accept responsibility for himself or herself. Therefore, every believer should do what the Bereans did while being taught by Paul. According to Acts 17:11:

“... they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

Please examine the Bible prayerfully and sincerely. Make sure that what is presented to you in sermons, lectures, books, tracts, etc., is in harmony with the message of the Bible. Do not accept every teaching without discernment, regardless of how smooth or convincing the presenter may be. Test everything against the Bible—even what is taught in this booklet. Be first and foremost a follower of the Lord Jesus. Be alert and always make sure, through prayerful Bible study and trust in the Holy Spirit, that the path on which your spiritual leader guides you is indeed the path that leads to the Lord Jesus.

Although the new life of faith is not burdensome (see 1 John 5:3), there are many obstacles in the believer’s path. Satan will do everything in his power to make you doubt. Therefore, every new believer needs to be lovingly ministered to by fellow believers in order to grow in faith. It is the duty and responsibility of every believer to minister to fellow believers with his or her spiritual gifts, in love, for the building up of the body. Read Romans 12:1–8 about the new life in Christ and how believers’ gifts

should be used for the benefit of the congregation. Also read 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:1–16 for insight into how believers should minister to one another in love to build up each other—and thus the body. A living community of believers where believers minister to one another in love for the building up of the body is the place where believers are truly strengthened in their faith.

It is important to remember that the responsibilities associated with this gift of salvation from God are the necessary result or outflow of accepting it, and not the reason for salvation. These are not works by which a person can be saved. It is not even possible to contribute in the slightest to your salvation through works.

6.1 New Birth

To be reconciled to God means the beginning of a new life. On the basis of the Lord Jesus' death on the cross—in your place and for your sins—you now live again in a living relationship with the living God. You are no longer Godforsaken or alienated from God. Paul describes this change in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Through His Spirit the Lord Jesus is now in you, and you in Him. He encourages believers in John 15:4a:

“Abide in Me, and I in you.”

The Lord Jesus calls this new life “rebirth.” It is a spiritual birth—a spiritual revival—of someone who is spiritually dead in sin. He says in John 3:3:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

In verses 14–15 He compares Himself to the bronze serpent Moses had to lift up in the wilderness:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Moses had to lift up the bronze serpent so that the Israelites, who were dying from snake bites, could be healed (receive new life) by looking at it (Numbers 21:8–9). They looked with the expectation of being healed. In the same way, in faith and expectation of a new (eternal) life, humanity must look to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Israelites were dying and could do nothing to save themselves. God made healing (life) possible through the lifting up, by Moses, of the bronze serpent. But they were required to look up to it. Those who did not look up died.

Likewise, the natural person is dead in sin because of the serpent (Satan's deception). Only those who look to Christ in faith for deliverance from eternal death receive this

new life from God. God remains the Giver; humanity receives it only through faith. Those who do not look to Christ in faith for rebirth (new life) remain in the eternal death in which they naturally exist because of the fall.

This new life is from God (John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 5:1). It comes from Him. God makes this new spiritual birth possible through His Holy Spirit. A person may want to do many things but cannot always do everything he wants. The new life in Christ is one of the things a person cannot live out by his own ability, no matter how much he desires it. No one can live it by human strength. When a person hears the message, believes it, and decides to accept it, he has still done nothing to earn it—he has nothing to boast about. He has simply done what one does when accepting any other undeserved gift.

This new life replaces the old life of sin. One cannot continue in the old sinful life and at the same time live this new life. Paul says in Romans 6 (especially verses 6–8) that the old self was crucified with Christ and died. In this new life that comes from God, the self—the ego—can no longer be the most important thing. The life of the reborn person is no longer about self, but about Him. He is now first in my life. Someone who wants to continue in the old life does not truly believe—or worse, he does not want to give up the old life for the sake of the new. He has not counted the cost. A little prayer in which one “accepts Jesus” is not enough; there must be a willingness to receive this new life from God in place of the old. Only then is it a living faith that saves.

6.2 Surrender

This means nothing less than total surrender. A reborn person no longer belongs to himself, but to God. He is born of God and is now a child of God. Galatians 3:26–27:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

The new life means living fully for Christ and no longer for self. 2 Corinthians 5:15:

“... and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

The old life (nature) is crucified with Christ, and the Christian believer is no longer a slave to sin. Romans 6:6:

“... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”

This means deliverance from sin (Romans 6:18):

“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

To be delivered from sin means turning away from a life of sin to a life under the control of the Spirit of God. Would such a reborn person, living the new life, want to continue living in sin?

6.3 Holiness

What does it mean to be holy? Does it mean identifying all the major sins in your life and stopping them? When is a person holy? Holiness certainly does not mean pretending to be pious and judging other believers while still living for yourself. That is hypocrisy. Holiness means being set apart for God—surrendered, as discussed above. A person is nowhere near holy if he merely stops obvious sins but still lives for himself. The new life is a holy life and surrender to God means being devoted (holy) to Him.

Does this mean never sinning again? It would have been wonderful if that were possible. Yet we live in a broken world, and one can easily think, say, or do something wrong at times. There must, however, be a sincere longing and striving for wholehearted devotion to the living God, and a continual trust in His Holy Spirit for this. If that is a person's desire, His Spirit will make one aware immediately when you transgress—and even make you aware of it before or during wrongful actions.

Holiness is important to God; therefore, Scripture insists on it. 1 Peter 1:15–16:

"... but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"

Hebrews 12:14 also insists on a holy life:

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:"

So does 1 Thessalonians 4:3:

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification (holiness)"

Paul urges holiness in 2 Corinthians 6:17–7:1. In Ephesians 4:24 he says one must clothe oneself with the new self:

"... and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

James expects perfection, expressed through patience (love). The first letter of John expects a holy life. He does not use the word "holy," but makes it clear that someone born of God does not sin (act lovelessly) (1 John 3:6–10).

6.4 God's love in believers

Because God is love, He desires to see love in humanity. This is why love is the essence of His law. In Matthew 22:37–39 Jesus summarizes God's law in the command of love:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Some teachers—perhaps without fully thinking it through—incorrectly teach that one must learn to love oneself in order to obey this command. If that were necessary, it would imply that Jesus did not know that every person already loves himself, regardless of circumstances. Self-contempt, feelings of inferiority, or unhappiness about failures are in fact proof of self-love. Someone who does not love himself would not care if things went wrong in his life. Even someone who commits suicide loved himself—otherwise deep unhappiness would not have occurred. Furthermore, it would imply that the second part of God’s law does not apply to anyone who has not yet “learned” to love himself.

Paul confirms that love is the fulfilment of the law in Romans 13:10:

“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

And in Galatians 5:14:

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

When a person acts in love (biblical love) toward God and neighbour, he lives out God’s law practically. And this is possible, because although humans can never have perfect love like God, the ability to live in love is a gift from God. He gives it to believers according to Romans 5:5:

“... the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Therefore, He expects believers to live out this love.

Because this is God’s command and desire, living out this love toward one’s neighbour is also love toward God Himself, and proof of one’s love for God. If a person loves God, he will obey His commands. John writes in 1 John 5:2–3:

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

Jesus confirms this in John 14:15:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” and verse 21: ***“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.”*** and verse 23: ***“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word;”***

Therefore, God expects believers to live out this love practically.

Is this love an emotion? Does God expect believers to feel emotional affection toward their neighbour? Is that not impossible? According to Scripture, one’s neighbour includes strangers and even enemies. Jesus says in Matthew 5:44:

“But I say to you, love your enemies”.

And in Deuteronomy 10:19:

“Therefore love the stranger,”

It is crucial to understand what this love is—otherwise one will never be able to live it out.

No one can obey a command to feel emotional affection toward a stranger or an enemy. Is God unreasonable? Certainly not. Scripture teaches that God is just and cannot act unjustly.

God knows humans have no direct control over emotions. Love as a feeling is a secondary reaction, triggered by circumstances or relationships. One cannot simply decide to feel fear, sadness, or joy. Emotions are initiated by something outside one's direct control.

Therefore, God does not expect believers to “like” everyone or feel attracted to everyone. He knows that is impossible. God Himself, who has perfect love (perfect benevolence) toward all, “likes” some people more than others. David was “a man after God's heart” (Acts 13:22). God did not “like” Esau (Malachi 1:3). God loved both equally—He desired good for both—but He liked one more because of their attitudes and choices, which He knew beforehand.

God's love—His perfect benevolence, His desire for the good of every person—is an inherent attribute of God. It is His chosen disposition. Therefore, biblical love in humans is also a decision, a disposition—something under human control because God enables it through His Spirit. Because humans can control this disposition, God can require it. If the believer wills it, God will enable it.

The believer should have this disposition of benevolence (love) toward everyone he encounters—including those he does not like, and even his enemies. It means placing God's interests above one's own, and one's neighbour's interests equal to one's own, and then acting according to what the situation requires. This act of love must not be done for personal gain, recognition, or praise. Biblical love is selfless benevolence. Paul describes this disposition in Philippians 2:3–4:

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Even a good deed done for selfish gain is sin. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13:3:

“If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” (NIV)

Biblical love (God's law) is always doing to another what you would want done to you in similar circumstances. Jesus explains this in Matthew 7:12:

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Two lessons arise from the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37): what love is, and who one's neighbour is. The Samaritan likely despised the injured Jew, yet he showed love (benevolence) despite negative feelings. The injured man was someone who crossed his path, was in need, and whom he could help. He understood that he was the neighbour of anyone he encountered—and that such a person was his neighbour. He applied the golden rule (Luke 6:27b & 31).

(27b) ***"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,"*** & (31) ***"And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."***

Biblical love is not merely words or prayers. John writes in 1 John 3:18:

"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

If everyone on earth lived out this practical, selfless benevolence, the world would be a paradise. No one would harm another. There would be no fear. This is likely why John writes in 1 John 4:18:

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear,"

Paul expands on this in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7:

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

One can write, say, pray, and preach the most beautiful things, but if you do not have this love and do not live it out, it benefits you nothing. If you are impatient, unkind, jealous, easily offended, keep record of wrongs, gossip, etc., you are not living out love. Then you are nothing, and it benefits you nothing, no matter how wonderful you may otherwise be.

A holy life is to live out God's law of love in practice. It is to place God's interests always above your own, and your neighbour's interests equal to your own. It is to be set apart for God. A new life in Christ can be nothing other than being set apart for Him. How can a person be reconciled to God and still live for himself?

It is, unfortunately, our experience as Christians that it is difficult—perhaps even impossible—to be holy by living out this love in practical ways. We realise how easily we think, do, and say the wrong things, yet we must persevere to the very end. The Lord Jesus says in Mark 13:13, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

But where will our help come from?

7. POWER FOR THE NEW LIFE

In Psalm 121:1 the psalmist asks: ***“I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?”*** He then gives the answer himself: ***“My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.”***

This has not changed—our help is still from the Lord. Through His power God enables the new disciple (Christian-believer) to do these things and to live this new life. The Lord Jesus describes it in John 15:5:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”

The Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to comfort us, teach us, guide us, and equip us with power (John 14 & 16; Acts 1:8). We have no excuse—if we are willing, He will give us the ability through His Spirit. If He gives us the ability, and we consciously live in dependence on the Holy Spirit, then we *can*. Our new (reborn) life is from God, through His Holy Spirit. We can live it only through His Holy Spirit, never by our own strength.

Just as one believes that Christ accomplished your salvation, so you must believe that the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to live the life of faith. Paul expresses it in Colossians 2:6–7:

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” (NIV)

Paul declares his complete dependence on Christ through the Holy Spirit in Philippians 4:13:

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,”

And in Galatians 2:20:

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,”

Also, in Galatians 5:16:

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

If a person is a reborn believer, the Spirit of God dwells in him and will give him strength to live the new life. Romans 8:8–9 says:

“So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

If you have read 1 John as recommended, you would have seen this precious truth in 1 John 5:4–5:

"For whatever is born of God (born again Christian) overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world (sin in your life)—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" See also 1 John 3:6–11.

We have no excuse—the power and help from above are available if we truly desire them. Romans 8:4:

"He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Keep in mind, the "requirements of the law" are nothing more than the practical living out of biblical love.

Will God, through His Spirit, make a holy life possible if we truly desire it? In 2 Peter 1:3 we receive this assurance:

"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,"

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24:

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it."

Believe that through Christ you are dead to sin (excessive self-love). Romans 6:11:

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Believe that as a child of God you are led by the Spirit of God, according to Romans 8:14:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons (children) of God."

Also believe that the love of God has been poured into your heart according to Romans 5:5:

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

The new disciple (a Christian believer) is someone who earnestly strives to live in holiness—a life devoted to God. 1 John 3:6:

"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him."

Unfortunately, the self—the ego—remains a problem in us as believers, always wanting to be first. Even in devoted followers of the Lord Jesus this remains a struggle, which must be resisted with power from above. Therefore, if in a moment of weakness, we do sin by giving in to the self, there is comfort in 1 John 1:9:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The Lord Jesus also knows human weakness and our tendency toward sin. Therefore, He teaches His disciples to pray, among other things: Mat 6:12-13:

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. "

This promise of forgiveness must never be used as an excuse to sin and then simply confess and receive forgiveness again.

This new life—a life of complete peace and joy in the Lord, regardless of circumstances—will be possible if we can (or will) say with Paul:

"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14)
