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June 2019

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FORWARD

We meet many people in the streets and villages who say they are spiritual rather than religious. Defining what they are saying is in itself a mystery, because when people have rejected a religion with its "belief package", the learned facts still influence their thinking as they "make up" their new belief system, which usually ends up as a

syncretistic hotchpotch. These people do not know or have not heard the truth from the heart of God, but have received much religious tradition as indoctrination and rejected not only the unpalatable traditions but also the truth that was also in the mix. It is not surprising then that Jesus said "you must be born again". (John 3:7) But this in itself is a mystery from the heart of God. We hope, in this booklet, to address many of these mysteries, as God assures us that "if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt". (James 1:5&6)

1. MAN IS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (Genesis 1:27)

Many people in these days choose not to believe that there is a God, so we cannot address this deliberate unbelief. Some people also refuse to believe what is written in the Bible. This atheism can be caused by others who propose traditions of men as if they are God's ideas, or by bad experiences from some who say they are Christian. But in this booklet we, who are believers in God and trust His revelation through the words of the Bible, are assuming that the reader is open to reason and really wants to know what we believe is God's declaration – the title of the heading.

God said these words in the context of speaking the creation into being. Thus we are created to speak on God's behalf and continue creating, in His power. Apparently God intended us to be an extension of the Godhead here on the earth where we are to rule in His power and by His authority.

God Himself is manifest in three persons, the Father, the Son who is the Aleph and Taw, the Beginning and the End, and the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God. This Trinity was there from the beginning. God intended the Holy Spirit to train Man to work in conjunction with Himself to rule over the creation. Each of us has been given gifts, ideas, hopes and dreams to add to the mix so that every revelation from the heart of God can become a reality. But those who choose to opt out will never be forced to participate in God's wonderful plan, even though the Bible says that God has chosen us in Him before the creation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4) Further He chose us to be holy and blameless in His sight and He predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, and this was for His pleasure.

God's first act was to create Adam and Eve. Because the Bible focuses on God's family and God's plans it does not talk about other "people" who already lived on the earth. From the time Cain was sent to be a wanderer on the earth there were others, because Cain was afraid of being killed by any who found him. So the population of the area was multiplying and apparently some were choosing to acknowledge the Lord among others who chose against. (Genesis 4:26)

God has therefore always given us a choice as to whether we will believe and trust, since this demonstrates our love and faith, because it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists, but He promises to reward those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

So being in the image of God is to reflect His nature, His purposes and especially His holiness and love.

2. THE SEED OF THE WOMAN WILL CRUSH THE SERPENT'S

HEAD (Genesis 3:15)

Unfortunately Adam and Eve, the first people that God made to reflect His likeness, were tricked into giving away their God-given authority before they had learnt the full extent of God's plans. Satan, who had been cast out of heaven and God's presence for pride and a lust for power and position, (Isaiah 14:12-15) possessed a serpent's body to tempt Eve. Some people might ridicule such a thing but we do not have any problem with communicating with and interpreting our pet animals. Perhaps the snake slithered up the forbidden tree and coiled around that delicious fruit to draw attention to it! Whatever happened to cause Adam and Eve to disobey God's command, the end result was that the penalty was death, and death is primarily separation from God who is holy and who always keeps His promises.

When something happens that is against God's plans His answer is always with words, because this is how He designed it to be from the beginning. He had to speak the words that would undo the damage done – His precious family had lost their personal relationship with Him and would not be able to reflect Him as He hoped. The words of the heading did not make sense to the natural mind because women do not have seed. It is the man's role to plant seed and the woman nurtures this seed in her body until it is ready to "flower".

So God's plan to restore fellowship with Himself was spoken into being but would not come to fruition until the time God had chosen. The whole story recorded in the Old Testament is how God gradually taught anyone who wanted to know how to recognise this Saviour.

Words were spoken and recorded down through the centuries; people either received God or rejected Him and continued on their own way and in their faulty knowledge, always vulnerable to that other voice which had been so persuasive to Eve in the garden. The devil has succeeded so many times, because his whispers to the human mind seem so logical. The tree of knowledge is still being exalted!

In many cultures and countries God's Word is not honoured by the leaders and words are proclaimed contrary to what God has decreed. This has resulted in the devil holding power in these places because God gave this speaking gift to mankind freely. God desires this "headship" to be crushed because people do not flourish under it. The whole world-wide refugee problem is largely the result of this power-hungry leadership, which all people feel deeply is wrong. But by God's decree only Jesus, who is the prophesied "seed", can change anything because He has been given the authority by God because of His willingness to die on our behalf. If we can accept this substitution as God's gift to us we can be restored into fellowship with God and learn to reflect Him as He desires.

3. THE LORD'S GRIEF AT WICKEDNESS (Genesis 6:5&6)

What must it feel like when something we have created with such joy, anticipation and delight goes really bad? Since we have been made in the image of God we can understand God's grief when the world He had created was full of lust, rape and murder, and the people God had chosen to demonstrate His ways to the world outside had joined in with the wickedness. Fallen angels had influenced

these characteristics and had even created giants, named Nephilim, who are described in Ezekiel (32:17-32) as uncircumcised warriors who spread terror and violence in the land of the living. There are many myths and legends in other cultures that tell stories of these, just as in these days those who do evil are often "honoured" by having the stories of their vile deeds recorded in films for "entertainment".

But God is love, and pure and holy, and His desire is that His children are like this. The Bible says His heart was filled with pain. Were there any who wanted to reflect His image? Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:7) He found Noah righteous and blameless among the people of his time, and it is recorded that he walked with God. Even though God had decided to wipe out everything that He had created, He had found someone who would obey Him and thus God's plan could continue. Construction of the Ark which Noah built to survive the flood took very many years, during which time his neighbours must have seen and questioned and quite likely even mocked him, but nobody joined him. As it had never rained they probably thought him mad. But obeying God and submitting to His wisdom is what brings blessing and salvation.

Only Noah and his three sons and each of their wives plus the animals that God had brought to Noah survived the flood, and God made Noah promises and covenants. God had been grieved at the wickedness and had effectively wiped it out, but He was also grieved at what He had done. "Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth". (Genesis 9:11) If God has promised this then every flood since that time

has been a copy-cat act from the heart of the devil so that God will be blamed. Every time it rains and a rainbow appears it is to remind us and Him of His promise.

Since Jesus died in our place and the Holy Spirit has become our Advocate, our sins are not counted against us, but there will be a time when God will again wipe out wickedness, that time by fire. But He waits and hopes that everyone on the earth will come to repentance, because He does not ever want to destroy people again. (2 Peter 3:9)

4. TWO KINGDOMS

On the earth there are many kingdoms, ruled by an assortment of kings and queens, despots, presidents, and others with fancier titles, but in the spiritual realm there are only two – God's and the devil's. When God's people first demanded a king like all the nations, God warned them what a human ruler would do. "He will take your sons and make them serve in the army; he will assign others to be food producers on the property that he acquires; he will assign others to make the weapons of war; he will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks and bakers. Then he will tax all you produce in your fields, vineyards and olive groves so that he can look after his own household. Then he will want more; your servants, your working animals and your flocks and herds so that you will actually become enslaved to him, trying to meet his demands". (1 Samuel 8:11-17)

God's original plan was that He was to be their king. He had made a wonderful promise many years before when He spoke to Moses. "Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all

nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation". (Exodus 19:5&6) Therefore in the kingdom ruled by a human you would be a slave and in God's kingdom we are supposed to be God's representatives to bring Him glory and to have His favour in all respects. We become His treasure which He protects and cares for, as scrupulously as anyone cares for their treasure.

The human ruler should not be in the devil's kingdom but unfortunately, as there are only two spiritual kingdoms, we are in one or the other; we choose to be in God's or, by default, we are subject to the devil, because the Bible says that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one". (1 John 5:19) Paul writes that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work". (2 Thessalonians 2:7) Jesus did not argue with the devil when the devil tempted Jesus by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and offering Him all their authority and splendour. The devil considered it had been given to him and he also considered that he could give it to anyone he wanted to, provided that one worshipped him. (Luke 4:5-7) All Jesus answered was "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only". Jesus was there at the beginning with God and knew how the devil had come by his power – he had tricked Adam and Eve into giving their authority to him way back in the Garden of Eden.

It is rather a horrible proposition that we might be in the devil's kingdom by default, and did not know it. But it is very simple to change allegiance because Jesus has opened the way into God's kingdom and His presence by His death on the Cross. Paul writes it like this. "If you confess with your mouth, "JESUS IS LORD", and

believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved". (Romans 10:9) "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved". "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved". (Romans 10:12)

5. BLESSINGS AND CURSES

God made the Israelites an offer too good to refuse, or we would have thought so. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow the words of this law". (Deuteronomy 29:29) "When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you, and you take them to heart...and when you obey the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you. (Deuteronomy 30:1-3) In the law and through Moses God had revealed everything that God's people needed to live a good life.

The promised blessings reveal God's generosity and love. "You will be blessed in the city and in the country. All your children will be blessed. Your crops and all your animals will be blessed. All your food, bought and home-made will be blessed. You will be blessed at home and away from home. All your enemies will be defeated and even flee from you. The Lord will send a blessing on your storage and everything you work at. The Lord will establish you as His holy people if you walk in His ways. Then all the people on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord and will be in awe of you.

The Lord will grant abundant prosperity and will open the heavens, the storehouse of His bounty, to send rain on your land in season...you will lend to many but never need to borrow. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord you will always be at the top, never at the bottom". (Deuteronomy 28:3-13)

From these words the Bible goes on to warn of the curses that come from disobedience – another 32 verses of horrible consequences. The curses end with these words. "The Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life". (Deuteronomy 28:65&66)

But God just warns in hope that His people will listen and take it all to heart. He says, "Now what I am commanding you is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. No, the Word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it". "See, I have set before you life and prosperity or death and destruction...now choose life... for the Lord is your life". (Deuteronomy 30:11&14, 15&19)

When we choose to obey God's commands there are wonderful blessings which God really does want to pour out on His people. The even more wonderful news for us from the time Jesus took all the curses on the Cross until the present day, is that the blessings are available for all who turn away from sin and turn to God, to appropriate the gift that Jesus has given us. "He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that

brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed".
(Isaiah 53:4&5)

6. SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

The prophet, Hosea, had a very interesting message, quite different from the other prophets. He married an unfaithful woman who went after many lovers but was never satisfied. God used his situation as an illustration of the relationship of His chosen people to Himself.

Hosea was charged with telling the people that "there is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land". (Hosea 4:1) This was regarded as a spirit of prostitution in their hearts. (Hosea 5:4) "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge, (4:6&7) and because they have rejected knowledge... they exchanged My Glory (My Presence on them) for something disgraceful". God says, "I will go back to My place until they admit their guilt". He hopes that in their misery – a sense of loneliness, uncleanness and lack of purpose and direction – they will earnestly seek Him.

Hosea understands what God is on about because he has gone through such pain himself. He exhorts his hearers – Come, let us return to the Lord...He will bind up our wounds...He will revive us...and restore us, that we may live in His presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge Him. (Hosea 6:1&2) Isaiah writes, "your Maker is your husband – the Lord Almighty is His Name – the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth". (Isaiah 54:5) Jeremiah writes that the Lord says "the time is coming when I will make a new covenant...it will not be

like the old covenant I made with the house of Judah...because they broke My covenant though I was a husband to them". (Jeremiah 31:32)

God regards our relationship with Him as a marriage with obligatory promises on each side. Paul explains that a human marriage is to be an illustration of this and is sacred to God's heart. An act of adultery demonstrates unfaithfulness, and opens up a possibility to the devil's influences – in the natural realm; lust, disease, unsatisfied longing, violence and many other evils. Jesus says the only reason for divorce is unfaithfulness. Malachi writes that the Lord no longer pays attention or accepts offerings of His people when they have become unfaithful to their marriage partner.

Hosea has the answer to spiritual adultery. "Return to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously'". Then Hosea writes that God will heal their waywardness and backsliding and love them freely. (Hosea 14:1-4)

Micah writes, "Who is a God like You, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression...You delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea". (Micah 7:18&19)

7. THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead and is first mentioned in Genesis (1:2) as "hovering over the waters". God, the Creator speaks and the Holy Spirit, also described as the Wind (John 3:8) or Breath (Genesis 2:7), blows into action and brings LIFE. This LIFE

is not just alive and breathing, but connected to God in a supernatural way, to be an extension of Him to work on the earth. Because of sin (or separation from God) humans are "DEAD in their transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) even though they are breathing and seemingly alive. This DEATH reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as Adam did. (Romans 5:14) But God's commandments came through Moses and sin was defined. Humanly they were almost impossible to keep. How could anyone know for certainty how to love the Lord with ALL their heart, soul and mind and how could anyone love their neighbour as themselves?

Humanity was doomed to failure except that God had made a promise. He had a new way in His mind. Jesus came to the earth, fully Man through His being born of a woman and fully God as to the power of the Holy Spirit who supernaturally fertilised the egg in Mary's body. God had prophesied this through Ezekiel. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws". (Ezekiel 36:26&27)

Jesus warned His followers that they must be born again. (John 3:7) They had arrived on the earth through natural descent, human decision or a husband's will. (John 1:13) They could only connect to God in a supernatural way by the actions of the Holy Spirit, in the same way as Jesus was conceived. Because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit without limit (John 3:34) He can give this Holy Spirit as a gift to anyone who will receive Him. God really longs for people to ask Him for the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11:13)

The Holy Spirit imparts to us the knowledge and the thoughts of God (1 Corinthians 2:11-13) and guides us into all truth. (John 16:13) He also convicts of guilt in regard to sin, so that we are supposed to feel it when we have done wrong. God always hopes we will turn to Him for the forgiveness that Jesus won for us on the Cross, rather than excuse or justify ourselves. The Holy Spirit also convinces us of our right standing before a holy God which we did not earn or deserve, except that it is a gift when we ask Jesus into our lives. It is good to walk humbly before our God (Isaiah 66:2 and 57:15), but we also are His ambassadors; God makes His appeal through us so that others will be reconciled to Him through our witness. (2 Corinthians 5:19&20) The Holy Spirit's presence in us is our "seal" which guarantees our citizenship of heaven. This is God's plan for any and all who will accept it.

8. FOUR GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

People wonder why there are four gospel accounts and they do not match exactly. This is a very interesting question and the answer is amazing.

Ezekiel had a vision from God and of God. (Ezekiel 1:1) The meaning of his name is "God strengthens", so Ezekiel's message is to strengthen our faith in God's Word. In the vision he saw four living creatures and he describes them. They were in the centre of fire and each was in the form of a man, but each had four faces; one face was of a man, one of a lion, one of an ox and one of an eagle. The symbolism indicates four aspects of the Son of Man; human, but a King, a load-bearer and soaring to spiritual heights, yet able to swoop

to earth in a moment. This picture is repeated in Revelation. (Revelation 4:7)

The testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each convey one aspect. Matthew writes about the Kingship, Mark conveys the load-bearing, Luke, being a doctor, the humanity and compassion of Jesus and John conveys the spiritual concepts. Whereas Matthew, Mark and Luke write the story of their witness and research as to Jesus' earthly ministry, John wants to tell how Jesus wanted mankind to understand God's purposes to restore fellowship with Himself, so that His ministry would continue after He was in Heaven. John was a witness of Jesus' ministry because he was an Apostle and was with Jesus most of the time, including the special occasions when there were only a few with Jesus, such as on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, covered with the glory of God. Matthew was also an Apostle and with Jesus most of the time. Luke travelled with Paul so he not only researched the ministry of Jesus but also recorded the ongoing work of Jesus through His followers. Mark's account was written first, perhaps just notes of what he saw and heard of Jesus. His mother was wealthy and possibly sometimes one of the women who gave to support Jesus, or in the crowds that gathered to hear Jesus preach. There is a personal anecdote of a young man who fled when seized by the authorities after Jesus was arrested. (Mark 14:51&52) Mark travelled with Paul for a short time because his cousin, Barnabas, went with Paul on his earlier journeys. (Acts 12:25)

The Bible is God's story; His longings for a family and His relationships, His hopes and plans, so it also becomes full of personal stories, written down because God wants all people to understand

that it has always been His intention to relate to His highest creation. He wants us to know Him and be known by Him. Because of the sin problem which caused a holy God to separate Himself, it was very important that Jesus' story also be told, since it is He who solved the separation problem by taking on the death penalty on our behalf.

9. THE PARABLES AND MIRACLES

Jesus chose to teach with parables – which the dictionary defines as stories of imagined events used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, or an allegory. The stories He used were familiar experiences to the hearers but they required spiritual understanding. When Jesus' disciples asked Jesus to explain why He taught like this, (Matthew 13:10-16) He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have in abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he does have will be taken from him. This is why I speak in parables". This comment seems even more of a mystery than the parables themselves!

The secrets of the Kingdom are for those who **want** to be in the Kingdom. When anyone desires to be in the Kingdom, the family of God, they will submit to the wisdom of God and will not think they know it all. There is humanly acquired knowledge and there is revelation from the heart of God, and these two are not necessarily the same. Jesus does explain the parable of the sower and the seed which falls into different places to His disciples, and this helped them and all who read the story to understand better. Paul has something

interesting to say about death and resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:35-54)
 "The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual". Jesus taught in parables because if we understand a natural process we can actually more easily see a spiritual truth if we have been enlightened by God's Spirit. Paul also uses an allegory to teach about being in the family of God, in the context of the gifts each person has – a functioning body of many parts all working together.

The miracles on the other hand were signs and wonders that Jesus performed on earth, to show the power of the Kingdom of God that He was preaching – the time has come, the Kingdom of God is near. (Mark 1:15) Jesus calmed a storm and turned water into wine to show God's power over nature. He healed the blind, the sick and the lame to show God's power to restore brokenness. He cast out demons to show God's power over the supernatural world. He fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and two fish to show God's power to meet our needs. Even more importantly, Jesus wanted to demonstrate that He knew the Father's will and did it in the Father's power. He came to fulfil the prophecies about the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, so that the people could witness God in action in our world. From the eye witness accounts, people from that time to this and always while this world exists, could believe that Jesus is truly the Saviour who is all that God promised. "God loved the world so much that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him". (John 3:16&17) Jesus, just before He was condemned to die, prayed to His Father, "I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of this

world...now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You...they knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me". (John 17:6-8)

10. JESUS IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Paul writes that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...for God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus". (Colossians 1:15-19) Jesus said He saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven, (Luke 10:18) and this happened before Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden. (Isaiah 14:12)

For the human mind this is hard to accept. We have to rely on the truth of the Bible, but by searching the words written down by those who had a personal relationship with God we receive these words by faith, and the Holy Spirit helps us to understand. Some religions believe in reincarnation, that is, returning to the earth after dying but the Bible makes it plain that man only dies once and then must face God. (Hebrews 9:27) This belief is understandable when God has planted eternity in our hearts, but God has decreed that there is only one way into Heaven and that is through Jesus Christ. (John 14:6) We sometimes explain it that Jesus provides us with a "ticket", which Paul describes as the "seal of the Holy Spirit". (Ephesians 1:13). This "ticket" is given to us when we put our trust in Jesus because He has paid the

death penalty which was given to us because of our sin. This was the reason He left heaven where He dwelt from the beginning and was born as a man; to claim back the authority that Satan had stolen from humankind. Paul writes that Jesus, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness". (Philippians 2:6&7)

John writes that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1&2) John goes on, "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made" "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us". Jesus always was the manifest Word of God. No one has ever seen God but the Only Begotten Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known". (John 1:14&18)

Interestingly, when the Angel of the Lord appeared to men and women before Jesus was born of Mary He came as the Word of God, speaking with all the authority He has always had. He came to Hagar when she was fleeing from Sarai, (Genesis 16:7) He came to Moses in a burning bush, (Exodus 3:2) He came to Gideon who was hiding in a winepress, (Judges 6:11) and He came to the wife of Manoah. (Judges 13:3) On each occasion it was to bring God's Word.

11. JESUS, THE ONLY WAY TO GOD. (John 14:6)

Many people like to think that there are many ways to find God, and from a worldly point of view it might seem so. All people are on their personal journey through life, doing their best (hopefully) to achieve their goals. Some of these do give up and settle for way less than their original goals, often because of failures and discouragements, but the more persevering ones press on. They seek advice and training from those they perceive to be equippers and trainers.

God did not design us to "get there" on our own. He has an interest in our success because He made us with our gifts and abilities. Because He made us He also wants us to ask Him for His advice and training. But we cannot come to Him if we are "stained" with our sins.

There is a wonderful book in the New Testament which has an unknown author, and it is written to Jews who have become followers of Jesus. This author writes about how God spoke in the past (to the Israelites, God's chosen people) through prophets (human messengers), but since Jesus' death and resurrection He has changed the way of speaking to His people. He now speaks to people through His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, and through Whom He made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1&2) This author writes that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being. (v3) Jesus is greater than any angel or other created being and God has exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him **THE** Name that is above every name. Every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is **LORD**. (Philippians 2:9-11)

Because of the very specific instructions to the Israelites about keeping God's law and the Ten Commandments, even people today

think that this is the way to come into God's presence, but they know they cannot actually keep them. The book of Hebrews is an essential writing to help those who began to follow Jesus to understand that all the old instruction was a picture but it points to the Christ. When the curtain in the Temple was torn at the moment of Jesus' death, this act, the hand of God, indicated that Jesus was the Way into God's presence. This is why Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me". (John 14:6)

There are many prophets who have come but there is no one except Jesus who has been promoted to the Highest Place, sitting at the right hand of God, and been called "God" by God Himself. (Hebrews 1:8) John's testimony is that no one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (or the Only Begotten, ie, God's Son), who is at the Father's side has made Him known". (John 1:18)

12. GOD PRESENTED HIM AS A SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT

(Romans 3:25)

To the person who is totally unchurched the idea of God sacrificing His Only Son seems ridiculous, and yet sons and daughters have been sent to war for their country in what might seem the same sacrifice. They were supposedly sent to save others who might otherwise die.

Spiritual death, that is separation from God because of sin, is equally disastrous, even though it might not seem so. Hell is not a good place to go and indeed it was never meant for humans, but reserved for the devil and his team. When God saw that this would

be the final place for His precious humans He took it into His own hands to rescue them. He had an agreement with Jesus that Jesus would be born into our world as a human, and would take our place by dying on a cross. It was a curse to die in this way and during the time of the Roman occupation of Israel this was their preferred way to kill those they deemed criminals. Paul writes, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, as it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree". (Galatians 3:13 and Deuteronomy 21:23)

Jesus' sacrifice was considered by God totally satisfactory for all the sin that was ever committed, past, present and future. Atonement is a powerful word – made to be at one (connected) with God. We are able to come into His presence because the blood that was shed enabled God to forgive sins. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness". (Hebrews 9:22) This statement goes back to the early decrees of God to the Israelite people. God provided the skin of an animal to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Then He commanded circumcision, and animal sacrifice, as symbolic for the same reason.

This is what our salvation gives us – free access to God, so that we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need". (Hebrews 4:16) Paul writes, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him". (1 John 5:14&15) "God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body". (Colossians 1:22) Every time we celebrate our communion

with God through taking the cup that reminds us of the blood that Christ shed, we honour what Jesus has done for us. (1 Corinthians 11:25&26) It also, by faith, fills us with His eternal life. (John 6:54)

John takes the atonement even further. "The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from every sin". (1 John 1:7) He reminds us, "everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that He (Jesus) appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin. No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him". (1 John 3:4-6)

13. YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN (John 3:7)

How could we possibly not continue to sin? We are just human, aren't we? "But this is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother". (1 John 3:10)

Because Jesus has taken all the sin of the world on Himself God has a new Covenant with humanity. He desires us to do His will, indicative of our love and honour of Him. To know His will for us we have to consult Him. That means we have to pray to Him, but our sin will keep us apart from Him.

Jesus made it plain how it works. We must be born again. (John 3:7) He first told this to Nicodemus who was most perplexed. Being born again is a spiritual birth, by the Breath of God, the quickening of the Holy Spirit, and it is by our choice and cooperation. This gives us a new heart, through which God moves us to follow His decrees and be

careful to keep His laws. (Ezekiel 36:27) "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people". (Jeremiah 31:33) God spoke into the hearts of His prophets and they proclaimed it to be, and it came to pass. Being born again is a miracle. John explains, "Jesus came to those who were His own (by the Old Covenant – the Jewish people), but they did not receive Him (and condemned Him to die). Yet all who receive Him, to those who believe in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will but born of God". (John 1:11-13) Therefore to come into God's family we must receive the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God.

Some people talk about born-again Christians as if it is a new denomination, but the truth is that one is not a Christian if one is not born by the Holy Spirit. A Christian is a Jesus-follower, doing what He asks us to do, not just a person who tries to do good things. Of course Jesus asks us to do good things because He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him. (Acts 10:38) But this scripture says that God anointed Him for this. His work was God-ordained and God-inspired.

God has made each one of us with gifts and abilities, interests and training so when He anoints us it is within the scope of our own hopes and dreams and not necessarily what someone else thinks is a good thing for us.

14. WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH...HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN

(Ephesians 4:8)

Jesus went to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, because God promoted Him because He was obedient unto death. He has been made **King** of kings and **Lord** of lords. (Revelation 17:14 and 19:16) God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth". (Philippians 2:9&10) God intended that the work on earth that Jesus began would continue to the close of the age. God relies on His children, His family, those in His kingdom, to continue this work.

So how do we know what our work is? God has given us those gifts, natural talents and things we enjoy to do. "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men". (1 Corinthians 12:5&6) Then there are also the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are supernatural gifts – wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, different kinds of tongues (spoken languages and angelic languages), and interpretation of tongues.

There are leadership gifts, teaching gifts, the gift of encouraging people, the gift of generosity in giving, and the gift of mercy and compassion. (Romans 12:6-8) These are some of the examples given but there are many more.

People who are not interested in God and His plans do not acknowledge that their gifts are from God. Some like to think they are "self-made" because they have worked hard and achieved a high

standard of ability. Working hard and achieving a high standard is very commendable, but God is really interested in the gifts He has given. He regards them as a reward to Jesus for His great sacrifice. We believe He wants to work with us in those gifts so that we are successful. When these gifts are done in this spirit they are regarded by God as good works, which are recorded by angels in the books that will be opened in heaven on Judgment Day. (Revelation 20:12&13) Paul writes that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". (Ephesians 2:10) Our work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's (and woman's) work. If what he has done survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss (though he will be saved). (1 Corinthians 3:13-15)

15. CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY (Colossians 1:27)

"The Christ" is the Anointed One and His anointing. The Old Testament priests were anointed with oil, representative of the Holy Spirit, the power and the breath of God, in order to do the works that God had ordained for them, as mediators between the people and God Himself. When the Holy Spirit came on Saul he was "changed into a different person". (1 Samuel 10:6) Later after many disobedient acts the Holy Spirit left him (1 Samuel 16:14), and he became subject to an evil spirit. David was anointed with oil and it is recorded that the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power". (1 Samuel 16:13) When David committed a sin he repented and begged that the Holy Spirit

would not be taken from him, and he asked for a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:11&12) David had a most beautiful relationship with God, and Paul stated that God said "I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do". (Acts 13:22)

Isaiah prophesied that the anointing (the fatness of spiritual oil) would break yokes and lift burdens. (Isaiah 10:27) But it was not until Jesus had completed His redemption work for us that it was possible to have the Holy Spirit indwell us. Jesus told His followers, "if you love me you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you **forever** – the Spirit of Truth...you know Him because He lives with you and will be **in** you".

(John 14:15-17)

John reminded the "dear children", the believers to whom he is writing; "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth...the anointing you received from Him remains in you...that anointing is real, not counterfeit – remain in Him". (1 John 2:18-27) So when we are born again and truly God's children we have been "marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit". (Ephesians 1:13) He is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...to the praise of His glory. He has won us back from the devil's kingdom and this even causes rejoicing in heaven. (Luke 15:7) But now we carry the "mark" we are on display. We become responsible to be truly witnesses to God's goodness and kindness which has led us to repentance. (Romans 2:4) God has entrusted us with His glory in order to win the lost. Jesus thanked the Father that He had given to Jesus His glory so that Jesus could impart it to His followers "that they may be one as We are One: I in them and You in Me". (John 17:22&23)

This then is God's plan; His power in us to bring Him glory and honour which we actually share in. We enjoy the fruit as much as God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit do. This is the hope that will never disappoint, (Romans 5:5) because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

16. THINGS NOT IN THE BOOK (Revelation 22:18&19)

We have tried to answer questions we are frequently asked, to present the gospel, but there are many other questions to which the Bible has no answer.

The Bible does not try to be a scientific book. It states that God made the world in 6 days and rested on the 7th, but it also states that "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day". (2 Peter 3:8) This use of the number could easily mean many thousands or even millions, so those who declare themselves "Creationists" are deliberately at odds with those who call themselves "Scientists", without any substantial foundation for either side. Let each man decide in his heart what he believes. The Bible does not say much about dinosaurs or what actual animals entered the Ark, but archaeology indicates that they were destroyed by the flood, which might have been relatively local to the Middle East but not literally the whole world as we know it today. These questions are interesting perhaps, but the Bible is mainly God's story of His family and His determination to have it as big as possible. There were obviously humans of some form outside of Eden because Cain was afraid they would kill him. (Genesis 4:15)

The lives of some Bible characters are written in detail but not much is written about the childhood of Jesus, which has always aroused curiosity. If He was sinless what was His childhood like? Even the routine things of His life would be interesting to know. But the Bible stays true to its purpose. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". (2 Timothy 3:16&17) John finishes his gospel account with the words, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written". (John 21:25)

The greatest blessing of receiving the Holy Spirit is that on subjects where we want God's wisdom, perhaps as opposed to curiosity for facts, is that we can ask God. James assures us that if any of us lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt. (James 1:5&6) This wisdom is spoken into our hearts by conviction of a matter. This will be a personal revelation, not a doctrine. There are warnings to avoid foolish controversies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. There is also a warning at the end of the book, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything God will add...if anyone takes words away...God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city..." (Revelation 22:18&19) The Bible is not therefore open to picking and choosing because it is indeed God's story, written down by many people whose hearts have been touched and inspired to

write what they believed God spoke to them, in agreement and trust that they were "speaking spirits" as God ordained them to be.

