

JUDGMENT



John and Elaine McLachlan

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Why did we decide to write a book on judgment?

Is judgment always as ominous as our front cover suggests?

Is judgment a fair thing or a good thing?

Is judgment to be feared?

Are there scales of Divine justice? Good versus bad?

This book really becomes an overview of the Bible. God did not want to be forced to judge any person. Because Satan had rebelled before man was created, God knew He would have to teach His ways with the opposition of this rebellious angel who had so much power and hate within him.

Judgment is only distinguishing between good and bad, but it is by God's standard, not flawed human standards. Because we believe God is always good, His judgment is always fair, but judgment is certainly to be feared if we choose to defy God's standard – holiness. There is a human perception that there are Divine scales to weigh good and bad, but the Bible makes it plain that there is no one who does good except God alone. (Psalm 14:1-3 & Romans 3:11&12) People like to do good deeds but God says He is the source of good, so good deeds must be done under His direction, and they can never cancel out our bad deeds and thoughts. This is the big sticking point for those who hope that their good can outweigh their bad.

Since evil comes primarily from the influences of the devil and God is determined that the devil will be destroyed in the end, He is forced

to judge even those who are in His family, but it is with righteous judgment. Those who have been accounted righteous are free from condemnation, purely and simply because Jesus Himself has removed our sin from those Divine scales and only the good is "weighed". This fact is what makes the gospel of Jesus Christ unique among the religions of the world.

Judgment is not punishment. Punishment is given in the hope of correcting what has been judged to be bad behaviour and evil deeds. Although God takes ultimate responsibility for this, His usual way is to withdraw His favour and protection so that the consequences of our actions, which are wrong in His sight, fall on us. Many of the dreadful things that happen in our world today are the consequences of sinful actions, because God is good all the time and His motives are also good all the time.

CONTENTS

1	GOD'S IDEAL	page 4
2	MAN'S FAILURE	page 7
3	GOD'S FIRST PROMISE	page 10
4	GOD'S INITIAL SOLUTION TO MAN'S FAILURE	page 12
5	MAN'S STUBBORNNESS	page 15
6	GOD WILL NOT BE THWARTED	page 18
7	GOD'S SOLUTION BECOMES A POSSIBILITY	page 21
8	MAN'S STRUGGLE	page 23

	4
9 GOD'S GRACE	page 25
10 MAN'S SURRENDER	page 27
11 GOD HAS HIS HOLY PEOPLE	page 30
12 CLOSER TO GOD'S IDEAL	page 32
13 WHAT JUDGMENT WAS ALWAYS FOR – THE FINAL JUDGMENT	page 34
14 GOD'S IDEAL, SPOKEN SO LONG AGO, BECOMES A REALITY	page 38

1. GOD'S IDEAL

This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible because God is a holy God and He wants us to be a holy people, but many people who call themselves Christian fall far short of God's ideal. They are as convinced as the "world" that if they do enough good it will outweigh the bad.

We have written these facts in many of our books, but we are looking at them again to try to come to an understanding about God's ideal, and why He has had to judge, both His people and those who are outside of Covenant with Him.

There were two trees in the Garden of Eden. One was the tree of life and Adam and Eve were encouraged to eat from this tree whenever they liked. They were God's children (procreation), thus He had a covenant with them to be their Mentor, their Source and Sustainer, their Guide and even their Friend who liked to hang out

with them in the cool of the day. This was the first Family, with love and honour flowing freely between parent and children. There was no sin, no sickness, good weather (no rain, because the Garden was watered by the rivers around it), and even friendship with the animals. What an ideal place in which to live!

We could ask the question, why did God put the other tree there, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Obviously knowledge of good is helpful, but God knew that the devil had already been cast out of Heaven and was determined to oppose God because he wanted to be God. God knew, although Adam and Eve did not, that he intended to do everything he could to obtain his desire.

A love and honour relationship was how God's ideal family would work together. Love is not about coercion but about setting an example and expecting obedience because of honour.

When we read that God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God was not limiting Adam. He was keeping Adam safe. We tell our young children not to touch the hot stove for a similar reason. We need to know good in order to understand evil. Just as our children learn gradually what is not good in the context of what is good, God chose to use the second tree as an example of what is not good. You will die if you eat its fruit. Death had not yet come into the Garden so Adam did not know what death was. Adam and Eve enjoyed themselves taking care of the garden and the animals, and God came every evening to have fellowship with them, maybe ask them to tell about their day, just as we do when the children come home from school. Someone defined this scene as God's people in God's place under God's protection and guidance. It

was a peaceful, happy and harmonious time, which could continue to eternity, **provided love and honour continued**. The tree of life would ensure that Adam and Eve never aged as the years went by.

God had already judged Satan. He had been cast out of God's presence because of rebellion. (Isaiah 14:12-14, Luke 10:18) Satan knew how to do it! The tree that represented knowledge already had a bad branch called rebellion. It also had a branch called pride. Both rebellion and pride will cause spiritual death, separation from God, the Source of Life. Evil must be identified and cut off or it will infect the whole tree.

God freely gave authority to His man. "Rule over...every living creature". (Genesis 1:28) He also asked him to work the garden and take care of it. (Genesis 1:15) Pruning would be necessary eventually. A tree is planted in the garden and it is small and neat but it soon grows, sometimes completely out of control unless we take it in hand. God knew about these two bad branches but He trusted His stewards. (1 Corinthians 13:6&7)

Adam and Eve must have been having a wonderful time, so good that Adam neglected to tell Eve God's precise command. When God created Eve He did this to give Adam a suitable helper who would stand beside him and complement his abilities. They would work in partnership. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) What a great idea! God is entwined in this partnership so that it is strong. Maybe there was another shoot starting on that tree of knowledge – a branch that we could call "I'm better than you". It certainly became more obvious after Adam and Eve disobeyed God. God is always positive and hopeful and continued to trust His special children. He would show them how to

prune these bad branches in His fellowship time with them, so that they would keep His Garden beautiful.

We could also ask the question, why did God allow the snake? We find this fascinating because snakes have a fascinating quality – the forked tongue and the staring eyes, the strange smooth skin that looks so rough. We probably think of them now in the light of the curse, but they are beautiful animals in their strange way. A snake that spoke would indeed be hypnotising. Hypnotism is still a tool for mind control. We can read that the only way Jesus could counteract the slimy, hypnotising effect of the devil's speech in the wilderness was to hang on tightly to God's Word, to God's ideal plan, and speak it out more firmly than the devil's deceitful words. (Matthew 4:1-11)

We can see how God did not treat His children in a patronising way but gave them full honour as He expected to be treated, with such grace and trust. This then is His ideal.

2. MAN'S FAILURE

If love and honour are the ideal relationship plan of God, obviously disrespect and unbelief, taking other people's words lightly and without understanding, is the opposite stance. There is already a judgment to be made. Which is better? – Love and honour **or** disrespect and disobedience; lightness and a clear conscience **or** darkness, full of fear.

We have already said that it is plain that Adam had not made sure his wife understood exactly what God did say. Maybe, however, Eve

thought her opinion was just as important. That little "shoot" on the tree of knowledge was a rather pretty shoot. Maybe she even said so to Adam, and thus gave the devil all the ammunition he needed to go in for the attack. The Bible warns us in many places to be careful of our words. "The tongue has the power of life and death". (Proverbs 18:21) "By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:37)

Eve says the words, "God did say...and you must not touch it, or you will die". (Genesis 3:3) But He did not add this extra phrase at all. He would not have added this phrase because He intended that they learn to prune the trees, including the tree of knowledge, to take off any branch that did not bear fruit. Jesus reminds us that the Father will prune even branches that do bear fruit, so that they bear even more fruit. (John 15:2) She fell right into the tempter's trap because he appealed to her pride and vanity. Knowledge came instantly but it was knowledge of evil. They saw their naked bodies and were embarrassed. After they covered themselves with leaves they were still "naked", so they went and hid from the One with whom they had been having such wonderful fellowship and such happy times. After God asked them who told them they were naked, then He asked another leading question. "Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat?" This was their chance to express their sorrow at disobeying and therefore dishonouring God. Is this what God had asked the question for? Micah expresses God's heart well and the appropriate response to Him. (Micah 7:16-20) God's character, His nature has never changed. Adam and Eve had spent evenings with Him and must have known a little about Him. But guilt gives

great pain which is very hard to bear. Humans will do anything to offload, and as we see in this story, the first thought is to blame someone else.

It is an interesting question why pride and vanity came in when the devil asked his question to try to make Eve doubt God's goodness. Adam and Eve were created in God's image, without sin. God seems to have taken great risks when He created man, because He actually created them with self-determination, self-will and the ability to reason, which is way above the ability of the animals. It is also interesting that these very gifts of God can turn us against Him. Sometimes we wonder why He did not create robots so He could have it all His own way, and this fact gives insights into God's character. He really does desire to love and be loved. Automotons lack this ability, but people who love and honour others, especially those to whom they owe their life, create relationship flow. Entering into any relationship with evil opens us to influences which test our character and our own standards.

God asks another question of Adam and Eve. "What is this you have done?" Adam and Eve did not realise the full implication of their actions. They had just given away their authority over the earth to the devil. "The whole world is under the control of the evil one." (1 John 5:19) "The secret power of lawlessness is already at work...". (2 Thessalonians 2:7) Even Jesus was aware of the devil's power. The third temptation was when the devil told Jesus he would give Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. (Matthew 4:8) Jesus already knew that this was, at that time, true, although He kept His mouth shut about why He was in the world as a man, and what He was

about to do. If the devil knew he would never have moved the rulers of this age to crucify the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:8)

God had no choice but to judge Adam and Eve for their lack of repentance of what they had done. The penalty was hard. Adam would have to work ground that had been cursed by God, hard labour until he died physically. The woman would no longer be an equal partner with her husband, but subservient to him and childbirth would no longer be a joy but would cause great pain. (Micah 4:10) This punishment, God's curse, has had repercussions down throughout history to the present day.

3. GOD'S FIRST PROMISE

What a wonderful God we have! The disaster was done. It is good that God is omniscient and was ready to solve the problem that Adam and Eve had created. This was not the kind of creation that God had envisaged. Since that day, parents have had their hopes and dreams shattered by their foolish children. (Proverbs 22:15) God's solution is spoken out creatively, as a promise. It would come to pass, but only in God's time. There were many things to be taught and spoken into being, prophetically, before the promise would be fulfilled. God made the promise, not to Adam and Eve, but to the devil. The devil thought he had won, but God took back what He could. He cursed the snake, or more precisely, the devil in the snake. He says He is a jealous God. (Exodus 20:4; Joshua 24:19; Joel 2:18; Nahum 1:2; Zechariah 1:14; Zechariah 8:2) Ezekiel uses the word "zealous" (Ezekiel 39:25) and Paul explains

God's jealousy in 2 Corinthians 11:2&3. God's jealousy is His protectiveness for His own and He is zealous to give this protection even if His own do not appreciate it. Those who come against His own, come against God Himself. (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Zechariah 2:8) Each of these verses speaks of the apple of God's eye, ie, His eyeball, or His focus or of our focus. (Proverbs 7:2) This indicates how protective He is towards His own and how much He wants us to be close to Him.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) Although the punishment for the woman was pain in childbirth, it would nevertheless be through this pain that the world would be rescued. Also very interestingly, the man would have nothing to do with the rescue, except by providing for the woman's welfare.

Even in this God was looking for a woman after His own heart. She would be young because the custom of that culture was to espouse women at a young age to a man of the parent's choice and the man would take her to be his wife when she was old enough or of child-bearing age. Even though Mary was espoused to Joseph, she had not yet gone to his home and his bed. God would have also needed to have a man of integrity and who loved and honoured God to be the partner of this chosen woman.

Paul has written interesting and quite provocative words about the role of the woman in the salvation of the world. (1 Timothy 2:9-15) He was advising Timothy about orderly worship at a time when women were not educated like men, and were expected to stay at home with home

duties, either to their father or to their husband. In the prevailing culture the only women who exercised power were the temple prostitutes, and that was obviously not good power. This "blindness" that anything was changed when Jesus died on the Cross was a little reversion to his Pharisaic background, but a reasonable precaution since Timothy was part Greek and part Jew and would have seen the different styles of worship. The mysterious statement is that women will be restored (saved) through child-bearing – (if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety). This echoes God's promise, made at the beginning. Jesus said that, even though He came to fulfil the Law, not one word of it would pass away. (Matthew 5:18) New revelation and even a new covenant would come, but God will always honour His Word, once spoken. Why might Paul write this to Timothy? Could it be that the original pride and vanity that caused the problem at the beginning was rearing its ugly head? This provocative statement was made, we believe, for an occasion, not as a commandment to be followed slavishly for evermore, unless more modern women behave in the same spiritually dangerous way – with pride and vanity, which the "feminism movement" has demonstrated.

4. GOD'S INITIAL SOLUTION TO MAN'S FAILURE

We have already said that there were many things to be taught and spoken into being, prophetically, before the promise would be fulfilled. The lessons that God had intended to teach Adam and Eve, step by step, about ruling His earth, now had to be done in the environment

that was under the power of the devil. The Garden of Eden was a place of eternal life, but man could not now live for ever, because his punishment was death. God does not make idle warnings and then wimp out. He always keeps His Word.

First, God introduced blood sacrifice for forgiveness for sin. (Genesis 3:21) This was done through the death of a clean animal, not the death of one's brother. Already in a second generation evil was flourishing. God warned Cain that evil was crouching at the door...and he must master it, but Cain did not. (Genesis 4:7) With the exception of Enoch and Noah, evil went on increasing until God was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:6)

Man was made to have fellowship with God through love and honour, but all God had was wickedness, disrespect and wilfulness. Man was going his own way without any regard for God at all. We can identify with His pain if we have had children who have no respect and wilfully go their own way.

God's solution was to choose a man who wanted to acknowledge God and wanted to do things the best way possible – God's way. Not only was God asking someone to do things His way, no matter how strange and even illogical, but to trust Him and do as He asked. Noah was willing, and Noah's reward was to survive, with his family, the judgment and consequent punishment that God was forced to make against wickedness. There was further reward because God made Noah a new promise. There will always be seedtime and harvest. If we sow honour we will reap honour, if we sow righteousness we will reap righteousness, if we sow love we will

reap love, and if we sow the negative and wicked things we will also reap God's judgment. God is forced to judge because He cannot afford to let wickedness flourish again.

He did, however, promise that never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. (Genesis 9:15) None of the results of disobedience include floods, (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) although this list includes drought and scorching heat. Even when Jesus speaks of the signs of the end of the age He does not mention floods but only earthquakes and famine. (Matthew 24:7) God does send the clouds to punish men, **or** to water the earth and show His love. (Job 37:13) **God's desire is that water will be a blessing.** "Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs." (Isaiah 35:6&7) In fact, God's solution is to use His power to turn every disaster into a blessing, but this requires reciprocal trust and obedience.

There is no mention of an obedient man until Abraham, and the rest of Genesis is about his story and that of his family. It is full of the successes and mistakes of the members of that family, but Abraham, Isaac and Jacob trusted and obeyed God. Abraham became the example of faith, and because of God's promise to him, the "father" of all who **copy his example.** (Romans 4:16-17)

God needed to exercise righteous judgment throughout the history of His people because man insisted on going his own way. Pride and vanity had been released and the devil continued to capitalise on this. The devil cannot invent anything but humans had been made creative, in God's image, but marred by sinful natures, which oppose God's nature. The more sin increased, the more God poured out His

love, hoping that it would move the hearts of His people. When it did not, God was each time forced to allow the devil to do his evil, so that God's people would cry out to Him to be rescued. But the blood of animals and good advice from men did not change hearts. The GREAT solution was still to come.

5. MAN'S STUBBORNNESS

It would seem that no one wanted to follow Abraham's faith example, because the history of the Israelites is a sad story of rebellion, complaining, fear and idolatry – any god except the God who loved them. There were a very few who chose to be God's men, and God blessed them and used them mightily. Although most were not appreciated by those they served, their names are in God's roll of honour. God sent many prophets to warn the Israelites, to encourage them and to point the way back to God's favour. God has not changed. "Those who honour Me I will honour". (1 Samuel 2:30) "He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honour." (Proverbs 21:21)

The one thing that is not mentioned much in the Old Testament is the way the devil continues his work to undermine God and His faithful followers. Unless we keep God's Word in our heart, like Jesus did, especially in the wilderness, the voices of self and the devil bombard us. It is not God who tempts us. (James 1:13-15)

Jesus describes the devil as the thief who comes to kill, steal and destroy, and as the wolf that attacks the flock and scatters it. (John

10:10&12) Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, (1 John 3:8) to disarm the powers and authorities, (Colossians 2:15) and to heal all who were under the power of the devil. (Acts 10:38) In the Old Testament the power and authority, which is the manifested power of the devil, is always named. The prophets spoke that he worked through human beings who were willing puppets of his evil. Isaiah wrote of the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14) and Ezekiel of the king of Tyre. (Ezekiel 28) Daniel wrote about the prince of the Persian kingdom. (Daniel 10:13)

The devil is always about his plan to extend his kingdom, because all who choose against God are in his kingdom by default. He began with Eve, but the fight will go to the end of the age. If man stubbornly refuses to follow God's way, he will actually follow the devil, be enslaved by the devil and thus become a puppet of the devil, even though he does not realise it.

David had many insights by the Holy Spirit about how wickedness comes about, how it manifests through people and what God thinks and does about it.

- "If I had cherished (valued, enjoyed) sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened". (Psalm 66:18)
- "When we were overwhelmed (intensely sorry for) by sins, You forgave our transgressions." (Psalm 65:3)
- "The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." (Psalm 1:5)
- "How long, O men,...will you love delusions and seek false gods? Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself". (Psalm 4:2)

- "You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with You the wicked cannot dwell." (Psalm 5:4)
- "In his pride the wicked does not seek Him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." (Psalm 10:4)
- The fool says in his heart, "there is no God". (Psalm 14:1)
- The wicked...are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover. (Psalm 17:12)
- At the time of Your appearing You will make them like a fiery furnace. In His wrath the Lord will swallow them up, and His fire will consume them. (Psalm 21:9)
- Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. (Psalm 22:13)
- I do not sit with deceitful men, or...hypocrites, or...evildoers, or the wicked. (Psalm 26:4&5)
- The wicked...those who harbour malice in their hearts. (Psalm 28:3)
- I hate those who cling to worthless idols. (Psalm 31:6)
- Let the wicked be put to shame...let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous. (Psalm 31:17&18)
- Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. (Psalm 34:14)
- The sinfulness of the wicked...there is no fear of God before their eyes. (Psalm 36:1)
- The wicked borrow and do not repay. (Psalm 37:21)

- My enemies say...in malice, "when will he die and his name perish?"...then go out and spread (bad news) abroad. (Psalm 41:5&6)

These insights continue throughout the Psalms because David recognised that God clearly distinguished and judged between His own who were in Covenant with Him, and those who continued in the kingdom of the devil. David demonstrates in his prayer (Psalm 51) the response God is looking for when a person is convicted of sin.

For 4000 years God pleaded with His people to turn to Him, to trust Him and to honour Him. Not only did David write words to identify "the wicked", but God sent prophets for all but the last 400 years before Jesus came, to beg, warn, plead and persuade, and He allowed punishments, terrors and hardships when the begging did not have any effect on the stubbornness.

But these years did not go by without some positive things because all the prophecy that was required to be spoken was done and God could bring about the CHANGE OF COVENANT which was promised by the words of Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

6. GOD WILL NOT BE THWARTED

God had offered a temporary solution to deal with sin, which is basically rebellion from God's way. There were elaborate rituals around the shedding of the blood of animals. These animals had to be clean, according to God's definition, and they had to be sacrificed in God's appointed place by God's appointed people. Saul lost favour with God because he disobeyed this injunction. (1 Samuel 13:9-14) God's

people had chosen long before that they wanted to relate to God by being told by Moses what to do, (Exodus 20:19 & 24:3) and God had honoured them by giving them a list of rules, but obeying rules does not change the heart. What makes things more difficult – disobeying rules that people said they would keep makes them liars, in the same class as the devil, because the devil is the father of lies. (John 8:44)

God had His "trump card" ready – His secret wisdom. (1 Corinthians 2:7) God was determined to have a holy people who would carry out His original ideals. "See, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me." (Malachi 3:1) "I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes." (Malachi 4:5)

Although the devil thinks he has won, God is really in charge. It is a mystery why God let the devil play his evil games, but it certainly does test how much love and honour His humans will give to God. Jesus said the time is coming when the love of most will grow cold. (Matthew 24:12) This will happen when wickedness increases. Jesus says that many will turn away from the faith, and will betray and hate each other. Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Paul writes that in the last days wickedness will increase. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) God had enough to put up with after He chose the Israelites. John writes that Jesus came to His own (the House of Israel) but they did not receive Him. (John 1:11) God gave them a spirit of stupor. Israel experienced a hardening of their hearts until the full number of Gentiles (those outside of Covenant with God) has come in to the Kingdom. (Romans 11:8&25) This is by the mercy and grace of God, Who does not want anyone to perish, but come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

All people are bound to disobedience so that our rescue is only by this mercy. (Romans 11:32) We cannot be saved by good deeds alone. This is a lie that the devil has whispered into the minds of all who are bound to disobedience. There is only one way, for Jew and Gentile. It is by a righteousness that is imputed to us. (Romans 10:3&4) God had tried this out with Abraham, and Habakkuk (2:4) records God's revelation to him. The righteous will live by his faith. (His faithfulness)

Faith is defined as complete trust or confidence and spiritual apprehension of divine truth apart from proof. If those whom God has drawn to Himself choose to receive this revelation, God does reveal Himself to them. This is why Jesus said the only unforgivable sin is against the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:32) When the Holy Spirit convicts a person of sin and then draws him to God, he is supposed to surrender his life at that point. God does, in His mercy, give other opportunities if the person refuses the sweet voice of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit does not strive for ever. We all only have the time we are on the earth to surrender to God and receive our eternal life. "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment". (Hebrews 9:27) This is why God wanted to change the rules. He would ask His only Son to pay the price, serve the sentence of death so that man would not be condemned, but could be judged blameless and holy.

7. GOD'S SOLUTION BECOMES A POSSIBILITY FOR HIS MAN

The promise God made so long ago suddenly came to pass at the conception and birth of Jesus. The "seed" or "offspring" of the woman was born. But women do not have seed. God's seed was planted in the woman so that it became her seed as she received it as a gift. Mary agreed to receive God's seed in spite of the shame that her agreement might bring. She valued God's desire above her own and submitted to Him.

God plants His seed into the heart of any who will receive it. This seed is the Word of God and the Faith of God and it is supposed to grow and produce fruit. God's initial seed is Jesus Himself. That is why we ask Jesus to come into our hearts when we first hear and receive the gospel. If this seed grows to fullness we become as Christ demonstrated in His flesh – mighty men and women of God and God can indeed make His appeal through us.

Jesus came into the world, not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved. (John 3:17) Although He had lived in Heaven with the Father from the beginning, He agreed to come in response to the Father's will; to be born as a human being, but sinless, so that the price for sin could be paid by a man, the second Adam. This is so extraordinary that it is unbelievable by human logic. It can only be received by faith. Does God speak the Truth? Our salvation lies in our answer to this question.

This question is answered by Paul in his letters.

"Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8)

"He is the image of the Invisible God,...He is before all things,...and the firstborn from among the dead,...making peace through His blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:15-20)

God intended that His seed would recreate His people to reach their full potential. As a seed grows it puts out roots. These roots will draw in life-giving living water. As the "plant" grows it becomes "useful". It might have a beautiful perfume or it might be enjoyable to taste. It might be a tree that will shelter many or a herb used for healing. There are so many possibilities according to the seed planted.

As we meditate on the thought that God plants His seed into our hearts, that He is in us and we are in Him (John 14:20) we begin to realise the enormity of God's grace and generosity. He really does want to restore us and our relationship with Him, He wants us in His family and to be a Father to us. He cares about everything that we think and do and wants to guide us and bless us. But this actually depends on whether, like Mary, we will accept His seed and allow it to grow within us. Unless we will accept this seed God's plan remains only a possibility.

8. MAN'S STRUGGLE

Jesus set out the ideals that God has always had – how to live God's way, but pride and vanity, not just for women but also for men, have continued to dog our world. No matter how God pleads, the desire to go our own way is the iniquity that pervades our hearts. We believe that God was trying to make it easier to come into covenant with Him. Jesus has made the way. He truly said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me".

(John 14:6)

The Israelites were given the Law because they did not want to relate to God in a personal way. They obviously hoped it would be easy to keep the Law, even when the teachers of the law extended it from 10 commandments to 613, to include dietary and hygiene laws and other judgments. They then had the same trouble that God had. People want to go their own way and rule their own lives in their own way. This had continued until Jesus began to teach another way – get to know God's heart and understand that He is a God of love. He really does have our best interests in His heart.

The pattern of trying to earn God's approval has been practised for a long time. This idea is established in the minds of all who have not surrendered to God so that their minds are renewed. We think it is true to say that unless one's mind has been renewed by the Holy Spirit it is inevitable that people will think that good deeds earn God's favour, because it seems "logical". If God is a good God He must approve of "good" things. But what is good? Our sinful hearts cannot know what is good, because Eve ruined our perception of "good" when she decided for knowledge rather than obedience. **Unless we**

are obedient to God's will first, we will not receive revelation of what is good for us to do. Our actions will inevitably be what Paul described about the Israelites. "They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge (intimate relationship with God). Since they did not know the righteousness (right thinking and actions) that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." (Romans 10:2&3)

Man's struggle with logic versus faith and simple trust is not just confined to those outside the family of God. Those in the family are barraged with worldly logic, by friends and family and by the media in all its forms. We really have to decide God's way is best and surrender to Him. **Knowledge of God which comes by revelation from His heart is the only knowledge worth having** for spiritual welfare. We will know good in the context of evil and be able to choose wisely. God has always been generous in imparting wisdom because it is supreme. (Proverbs 4:7) In fact this wisdom that comes from the heart of God imparts a crown of splendour. (Proverbs 4:9) This splendour is the visible presence of God which clothes us from on high. "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and ... (enable us) to lead many to righteousness". (Daniel 12:3) If we really sought God with all our heart and really loved God with all our strength there would actually be no struggle. An old chorus said, "simply cease from struggling and strife and walk in newness of life". (hymn writer, T Ryder)

Paul says that knowledge puffs up (1 Corinthians 8:1) but we are sold on acquiring knowledge. People speak about the value of education as if it were the ultimate goal. But God regards character and attitudes

of more importance. When we go back to God's basics, proclaimed in the Garden of Eden; **walking with Him, dependant on Him and learning from Him, and only acquiring the skills that He directs us to do**, prevent the pride by which we are so easily entangled.

9. GOD'S GRACE

Is it possible to believe that God is that good – that He loves the world so much? Jesus said, when asked what we must do to do the works of God, "The work of God is to believe in the One He has sent". (John 6:28&29) **All God hopes for is trust and honour, that His words are true.** Jesus said that anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Luke 10:15) This means that simple trust is required. Paul wrote, "I consider everything (every qualification, worldly honour and righteous act) a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord". (Philippians 3:8) This knowing is the intimate relationship that God has offered and the glory which is "Christ in us". God's grace is the offer of a transformed life. The old has gone, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

It is by God's grace, unmerited favour, that we are able to know God's will. His Holy Spirit speaks into our hearts constantly but softly. The written Word of God has advice, encouragement and warnings and if we read it and take notice of it and obey it, more and more will we sense God's presence and His "well done". This is the experience of the writers of this book and we are continually amazed by God's grace. Radical obedience to God's Holy Spirit fills us with

unspeakable joy, even as the devil continues to attack our minds and sometimes other things or people we love. But we have a helmet of salvation. When we are confident that God dwells in us we do not listen to the devil. We draw near to God and resist the devil, as the Word says. (James 4:7) It is by God's grace that we are guided to the fulfilment that using all our gifts and abilities, which were planted in us by God when we were created in the womb, and trained into us throughout our lives, brings. We become contented with our lives because we seem to have been good at something or successful in what we dreamed to do. God in His grace has made beautiful plans for us and if we seek His guidance He can deliver us into this. God's plans are for all sorts of work and so-called secular work is just as important to God as is "church" work and church attendance on a particular day. His "rest day" is proclaimed for our spiritual welfare. Under the Jewish Law it had to be the Sabbath and this is probably more convenient as it is still a proclaimed day to have spiritual refreshment but **God's grace** says that any one day in seven is good.

For retirees (like the writers) we can spend large amounts of time every day in prayer and meditation, not in a corner, but anywhere, even talking to people or driving on our country trips. The sense of God's presence is so real because we have chosen to try to comprehend God's grace. Since God is so great this is an adventure that can never end. There is no longer fear of God's judgment because God has not only promised but is delivering His grace day by day. It is not at all surprising that John Newton wrote a song that is a favourite even with those who are not members of a church. "AMAZING GRACE"

As we open our hearts to receive even more of God's grace which is unlimited, we become more like our Master, Jesus, and are able to share this with all we meet if they too will receive it. When Jesus sent His followers out He told them that if those they met received them, they were actually receiving Jesus Himself. This really is He in us and us in Him. What an immense privilege!

God's grace was experienced even under the Old Covenant. Ezra expressed his thanks to God (Ezra 9:8) and David acknowledged it. (Psalm 84:11) Zechariah prophesied that grace would be poured out on the house of Israel (Zechariah 12:10) but it was not until Jesus came that the fullness of His grace would be possible. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)

10. MAN'S SURRENDER

"The Lord reigns for ever; He has established His throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness". (Psalm 9:7&8)

If we are determined to be what God has always intended, we must seek God with all our hearts.

Many people have believed a lie of the devil that God will make us do things we do not want to do, but this is untrue. He has given us gifts and abilities, responsibilities and hopes. These reside in our inmost beings. We decide on our training at His inner wooing. Sometimes influential people in our lives try to direct us even against our own wishes, but if we have decided to trust God "all things work together for good for those that love Him" (Romans 8:28) and God also

knows the end from the beginning. This is where childlike trust comes in. We have to keep on remembering that our attitude is what counts with God. When we are young we have boundless energy and enthusiasm but have not acquired the wisdom that experience brings.

Submission to God is not fatalism. We are always free to come to God in prayer and ask questions but we need to wait on His answers. God really does know best for us and we need to develop our relationship with Him so that we sense His guidance always. In spite of the godlessness and unbelief in the world, all the pronouncements that defy His standards and decrees, those who put their trust in Him will prosper, (Proverbs 28:25) will be kept safe, (Proverbs 29:25) will never be shaken (Psalm 125:1) and will never be put to shame. (Psalm 25:3) These are promises of God who always keeps His Word so we can expect that putting our trust in our God is a good thing to do. This is what "surrender" really means. Our opinions and the opinions of others must be in line with God's Word.

Our surrender does depend on how we know and have received God's love. Only love given and received can have this level of trust. It is very difficult for those who have been "scared" into God's Kingdom by the fear of God's wrath and hell's fire to understand God's love because they have not met that love in God's representative. Preaching hellfire does not represent Jesus' sacrificial love, kindness and patience at all. Even the Old Covenant does not preach hellfire. Jesus' death was to save us from this. In past times this was the preacher's message, so many people turned away from God to their own "god" who was more to their liking.

Jesus condemned the "people" who caused "little ones" to sin. (Luke 17:1&2, Mark 9:42) Those who preached such a message are answerable to God if they have turned people away from God who loves and cares for all people. The message from the days following the Resurrection should always have been that "God loved the world so much that he sent His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should NOT perish"...not to condemn people but to save them. (John 3:16&17) People need to understand that, although there will be a final judgment, the punishment decreed was reserved only for the devil and those who follow him.

When we have received the righteousness that Jesus gives as a gift to His brothers and sisters, God's judgment is that we are righteous in His sight. This is a commendation, a not guilty verdict and God will have a smile on His countenance. When this fact is made known, people are far more likely to risk surrender to a God who is so gracious. God said a long time ago through David, "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him". (Psalm 34:8) God really does want people to have a good experience of Him through His representatives; "God making His appeal through us". (2 Corinthians 5:20) He really does want the world reconciled to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:19) This love and grace when experienced can persuade people to open their hearts to God. When His love and grace really flow in and the peace of God is also experienced there is enough trust to make surrender possible.

11. GOD HAS HIS HOLY PEOPLE

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and convinces of righteousness and judgment. On the day of Pentecost the fire of God fell, not to burn people up but to empower the disciples to be the people of God. The Old Testament taught that our God is a consuming fire. This fire actually burns only dross.

Malachi writes, "Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire...to purify them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men and women who will bring offerings in righteousness".

(Malachi 3:2&3) Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)

Why does judgment begin with the family of God? (1 Peter 4:17) If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned. (1 Corinthians 11:31&32) When we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit every day He is most faithful and will convict us so that we can bring our lives into line with God's Word by surrendering our iniquities at the Cross. Every time we do this the Holy Spirit cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Gradually we do not have that tendency to that iniquity any more. We are being changed to be more Christlike.

Without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14) We have been chosen to be in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:4) God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. (Hebrews 12:10)

For the writers, we wanted so much to be holy unto the Lord, and we experienced that God also wanted us to radiate His goodness so that we attracted people to Him. The Bible warns that this discipline

is not pleasant but produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:13) The result really is worth the commitment, and all the opposition from sinful men (Hebrews 12:3) that the Lord seems to use to refine us pales into insignificance compared to the joy of God's presence and fellowship as He treats us as partners in His work. There are those who undervalue, demean, overween, and even slander and threaten, but Jesus has endured worse and we remember this so we do not grow weary or lose heart. We know the power of the gospel and we know that God is always working, that He is in control. As long as we do our assigned part His work will be completed.

Everyone who call themselves a Christian should be seeking after holiness because God's plan requires people who imitate Jesus, Who is holy. We are required to shine like stars in this crooked and depraved generation. (Philippians 2:15) Our lives of holiness stand out from the crowd. We are supposed to be noticeably different. We do not point fingers of criticism at those who do not know the power of the gospel, telling them they are sinners. The glory of Jesus in us should convict them and it does.

There is a song we used to sing when we were young Christians. Some of the words are –

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord,
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends, in thy conduct, His likeness shall see.
Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;

In joy or in sorrow still follow thy Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.
Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul;
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above. (W D Langstaff)

These words inspired us a long time ago and God has been truly faithful in His training of us.

12. CLOSER TO GOD'S IDEAL

When we have aspired and committed to the holiness that God has designed us to be and are seen to be faithful witnesses of the glory that Jesus wants us to exhibit, (John 17:22) God begins to use us for His miracles in the same way as He did miracles through Jesus. Jesus was only doing this ministry for 3 years, although His whole life was preparation for these 3 years. This is quite an enigma because even Jesus had 30 years of what could be called a normal life before His intense time of ministry, demonstrating what the Son of Man should do in the power of the Holy Spirit. There were highlights during those 30 years, but the Bible is strangely silent about His everyday life.

It is very reasonable to expect, then, that it will be the same for us His brothers (and sisters). (Hebrews 2:11) We do not even begin our life in the Kingdom of God until we are born from above (by the Holy Spirit). (John 3:3) Then we have a long learning period, to be trained in righteous living. It is not that God will not use us during that time because He really wants us to know and experience His power and

authority. (Ephesians 1:19) As we have written in our book, *"To Obey is Better than Sacrifice"*, God would rather we learn from His Word than by the "school of hard knocks". We are so blessed to have His Word available to us because it says about itself, "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) Jesus knew the Scriptures so well and we need to also.

Paul has good advice. "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14) We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9) It was not until Paul and Peter were born by the Spirit of God that they understood and were able to make the commitment required to do God's work.

This seems to be something the modern established church has lost sight of. Jesus did not want the church to be an "ivory tower" that people run into and then hide, serving and supporting a pastor and patronising or finger-pointing the "lost". It has moved away from God's ideal. "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light." (Luke 8:16) What was written to the church in Ephesus is very applicable. "You have forsaken your first love. Repent...If you do not I will come and remove your lampstand". (Revelation 2:4&5) This church has lost much respect and credibility in the world because of

the perceived hypocrisy. People are still searching for Jesus but they do not always find Him within the walls of the church where the people practise only religious rituals and ceremonies which are only meaningful to the initiated.

God's plan, God's ideal, God's purpose has always been the same. "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1:28) We bear fruit by drawing on the Living water and spiritual food that God provides so that we are attractive to the hungry. They can taste and see that God is good and desire to "attach" to the Vine. When we spread good there is less impact from evil, and Satan's power is subdued. (Romans 12:21)

Jesus said a most extraordinary thing. "Anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12) He told the 12 and then the 70 to drive out demons and to cure diseases, to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1) (Luke 10:9) Jesus was full of joy when they were successful because this gave the Father pleasure. (Luke 10:21) Is the "lampstand" shining like this today? This is our challenge in the 21st century.

13. WHAT JUDGMENT WAS ALWAYS FOR – THE FINAL JUDGMENT

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil (unclean) spirit. All the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth

committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins". (Revelation 18:2-4)

Babylon is this earth's (or the world's) system. It is the total opposite of God's ways and it never gets better but is a downward spiral until destruction. "Mighty is the Lord God who judges her." (Revelation 18:8)

Why is Babylon typecast as a woman? This seems harsh and difficult and has caused an attitude in the church and the world against woman. We are really back to chapter one of this book and the warnings God gave from the beginning. God sees the end from the beginning and what will happen when we go our own way (through the devil's influence). The book of Revelation has a story of all the ugliness that evil in the world will bring to pass, so that God must eventually make an end for the sake of His family. "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) We will say again that repentance is to change our allegiance, our direction and our mindset. Do not dally with the devil and his ideas (our minds set on what the sinful nature desires) but seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (set our minds on what the Spirit desires). (Romans 8:5) Judgment begins with the family of God. (1 Peter 4:17) This is the challenge to choose good or evil. Are we for God or are we compromised? "Those who are not with Me are against Me". (Matthew 12:30) The messengers to the churches warn that Jesus has a few things against them; (Revelation 2:4; 2:14; 2:20) losing our first love, holding to some false teachings, tolerating immorality. Choose, choose, and choose right before it is too late!

The final judgment is called the second death. (Revelation 20:14) Leaving this world is only our first death and everyone comes before the Throne of God for this final judgment which leads to the punishment; the sentence of the second death, the lake of fire where the devil and his minions have been sent. The second death is not "rest" but permanent conscious torment. God's justice is perfect but this second death is not designed for people. This is absolutely the last thing that God wants because He is infinitely merciful.

There are books. The first is the Lamb's Book of Life. Those whose names are in this book have an Advocate who stands with them and vouches for their righteousness (which has been imputed to them as a gift from God and has been treasured and nurtured). Jesus, the Lamb of God, will recognise His own. He told many parables about the Kingdom of God and explained most of them to His disciples so that they could write for us to read and learn from. He says He knows His sheep. (John 10:27) He also says, "not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 7:21) The double "LORD" indicates a personal relationship but if the words are not followed by action they are a lie. Jesus is saying that there must be a personal relationship with Him. Everything that is necessary to know about being in the Lamb's Book of Life has been written down as spoken by Jesus and all those whose names are there have made a choice to believe and receive when the Holy Spirit wooed them.

The greatest tragedy in the history of the church is how Jesus and the Father have been portrayed. When "hell" has been emphasised and people are taught to fear God rather than stand in awe of a mighty, gracious and merciful God who sacrificed His only Son to

save the world from the results of their sins, it has turned people away. This infinitely caring Father, who will not countenance evil but will burn it up when He comes in contact with it, wants us to be clean and blameless, filled with His Spirit and clothed with His glory. This is why He dealt with the sin problem, making it possible for us to become holy. The "works" we do in His Name are our "credit".

The other books are the deeds of all those who are at the Great White Throne. Paul says each man's work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. (1 Corinthians 3:13) Paul says that dead works will be burnt. Jesus said we are chosen to bear fruit – fruit that will last. (John 15:16) Paul says that prophecies will cease and knowledge will pass away but love never fails and all that will remain is faith, hope and love. (1 Corinthians 13:8&13)

God is love and the devil is full of hatred so he must be destroyed. This is God's declared plan and His final judgment. We do need to know this so that we can make our choice. God says that in Heaven there will be no sexual immorality, none who practise falsehood, none who practise sorcery and none who worship other gods. (Revelation 22:15) All this is written so that we know God's standard and God's heart, but we defy it to our peril. The writer to the Hebrews says, "it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God". (Hebrews 10:31)

14. GOD'S IDEAL, SPOKEN SO LONG AGO, BECOMES A REALITY

So we conclude that God must judge the world in the end because sin spoiled it. He had created it with such joy and satisfaction in His heart. In His eyes everything was perfect and He had a family He could fellowship with, nurture and teach and His family would be in His likeness. The vision of Heaven given to the Apostle, John, was glorious. There is no need of sun and moon because the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. (Revelation 21:32)

We do not know how long we must wait for this time because God is so patient and the gospel must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. (Matthew 24:14)

Yet Jesus' preaching makes it plain that the Kingdom of Heaven is near (2000 years ago). (Matthew 4:17) We enter the Kingdom of God when we are born from above by the Holy Spirit. (John 3:5) Jesus taught much about the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. He is to be King by the Father's appointment as He testified to Pilate. (Luke 23:3) He prophesied that the Kingdom of God is forcefully advancing from that day. (Matthew 11:12)

Those who have been born by the Holy Spirit are already perfect in God's sight because He sees us through the transformation that His Son has given us, imputed righteousness, although we work out our salvation through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit by conforming to His will.

God's ideal is men and women representing Himself and ruling this world. This happens when we willingly cooperate with Him just as

Jesus did. Jesus did only what the Father willed. Only a personal relationship with God and absolute obedience can produce exactly what the Father wills. As more and more people surrender their lives to Him His Kingdom spreads. The fragrance of Christ (the Anointed One and His anointing) and His purity, love and joy are in the atmosphere. God's people are to shine like stars, (Philippians 2:15) to show the glory that Jesus has given us (John 17:22) so that God can appeal to those who are not yet born into His family. (2 Corinthians 5:20) We have this treasure in frail vessels (jars of clay) to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Christianity was never meant to be a religion but a way of life. Jesus said He came to give **life**. Paul says we are dead (in our transgressions and sins) until we are made alive. (Ephesians 2:1&5) The vision of Ezekiel makes it plain that without the Breath of God people are just bodies (Ezekiel 37:8-10) but with the Breath of God they are alive and active. Christian living is holy living and is clearly outlined in Colossians, chapter 3. Although we "work out our salvation" by deliberate obedience to His will, God helps us to complete our "perfection", by surrendering our own will to His. When we obey there is no judgment, but only His "well done". We are learning from Him, step by step, all the days of our life.

Christianity is the greatest adventure anyone can have!