

A NEW LIFE

OF PEACE WITH GOD

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God's message of salvation according to the Bible

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

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IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

For many Christians the answers to the following questions are obvious. However, for most Christians this is not necessarily true. There is uncertainty about these things in the hearts and minds of many believers. Non-Christians, who learn about these questions and the answers to them, will be in a better position to make important decisions about them. Perhaps some people who read this have already thought about these things and wondered about the answers to these questions. The questions are:

- How reliable is the Bible?
- What is the authority of the Bible?
- Can we get to know God through the Bible?
- If so, what does the Bible teach about God?
- What does the Bible teach about God's relationship with man?
- Is man at peace with God?
- If not, why not?
- Is reconciliation with God necessary?
- Can man be reconciled to God?
- If so, how?
- Is a new life of peace with God really possible?

This booklet is an attempt to provide decisive answers to these important questions.

Perhaps the reader is already a Bible-believer (true Christian) who knows the answers to these questions. By using this booklet as a 'review', believers can make sure that they know the correct answers to these questions and thus be strengthened in their faith during these times where, *"lawlessness will abound,"* and *"the love of many will grow cold."* (Mt. 24:12). It can also help to *"always be ready to give a defense (answer) to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you,"* (1 Pet. 3:15).

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1. THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible reveals the good news about a God of love as the one and only Creator-God, and His will for man. The Bible teaches that in God's actions and in His relationship with man, things happened, which separated man from this God of love. Yes, the bad news in the Bible is that the natural man is lost and alienated from God, dead in his sins, and doomed to an eternal damnation. According to the Bible, this is the condition of every person on earth, irrespective of how good he or she may be. Moreover, according to the Bible, there is absolutely nothing man can do from his side to restore the broken relationship with God. However, there is more good news in the Bible. God, from His side, made it possible for man's broken relationship with Him to be restored. Reconciliation with God is not only possible, but an absolute requirement for **a new life of peace with God**. Therefore, the Bible calls people to be reconciled to God. For instance, in the words of Paul in 2 Cor. 5:20b:

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

The Bible also teaches that God wants to restore the relationship, among others in Isaiah 1:18:

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (KJV).

Nevertheless, all this is meaningless if the Bible is simply a mortal (human) writing. That is exactly what Satan, and his ministers want man to believe. Through the ages and up until today much has been done to denounce the reliability of the Bible as the Word of God. Already in the garden of Eden, Satan through the serpent, caused doubt in the mind of man about the truth of God's word when he said: **"Has God indeed said, ..."** (Gen. 3:1) and **"You will not surely die."** (Gen. 3:4). Satan persists in using all his wiles to sow doubt in the hearts (minds) of people, especially believers, about the authenticity and reliability of the Bible as God's Word. The Bible teaches in 2 Cor. 11:14-15:

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

In like manner, there are highly educated theologians who pretend to be Christians, but who are in fact liberal unbelievers who leave no stone unturned in their quest to undermine the authority and reliability of the Bible as the Word of God. They are people, who study and know the Bible, but they have never met, nor do they know the God who made Himself known through the Bible. In schools, universities, and other places of education, the authority of the Bible is undermined in different ways,

not least of which is the teaching of evolution as a proven fact, while, except for evolution within species, a mere hypothesis that can never be proven. They find it easier to **believe** that something so tiny, hardly visible, or even invisible exploded (Big Bang theory), and that the universe with all its massive planets, galaxies as well as all the wonderful things on earth is the result of that explosion. Scientists can't explain what this 'something' is, how did it get there, and what caused it to explode. They just believe it – is that science? They find it more difficult to believe that an intelligent Being who always existed created all the wonderful things that exist.

There are also other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc, not to mention the vast array of cults, each with its own ideas and teachings based on its own writings, which contradict the Bible.

How can one be sure that the Bible is indeed God's (particular) inspired revelation to mankind? Scientific proof that the Bible is God's revelation is impossible. Although there are very strong and valid philosophical arguments to this effect, it is still not scientific proof. There is, however, enough reason for this author, as well as millions of other believers, to accept (recognise) the Bible as the authentic, inspired revelation of God. So much so that millions of believers were prepared to die for it. It still happens daily in certain countries and areas, that Bible-believing Christians are persecuted, martyred and killed, simply because they are Christians. Most of these martyrs had a choice, they could have chosen against the Bible and their Christian faith to save their lives, but they were so steadfast in their beliefs that they willingly paid the highest price. Among the first of these Christian martyrs were the apostles, who personally knew the Lord Jesus Christ, lived with Him, and were witness to His crucifixion and resurrection.

To acknowledge, or rather to recognise the Bible as God's revelation, is no blind leap of faith. The Bible is unique and there is no other antiquated writing that, when compared to the Bible, can come anywhere near as far as reliability and authenticity are concerned. Nobody can be forced to believe in the Bible, but if the following facts (from *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, and *In Defense of the Faith* by Dave Hunt) are taken into consideration, one should expect every intelligent person to, at the very least, seriously consider the Bible as the authentic revelation of God, and to execute a closer investigation thereof: -

- The Bible, as the revelation of God, was written in 66 books, over a period of more than 1 500 years, by more than 40 authors (including fishermen, herdsman, kings, doctors, etc.), on three different continents (Asia, Africa and Europe), in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), about numerous potentially controversial subjects, in perfect harmony and without contradictions regarding the Bible's message of the redemption of man.

- Of all the ancient manuscripts available today, the number of biblical manuscripts is overwhelmingly greater than those of secular manuscripts. There are about 24 600 manuscripts for the New Testament alone, some of which some date back to less than a century from the originals and many of the others to between 300 and 400 years. All the secular ancient manuscripts have less than 1 000 copies, and most of them have less than ten copies, while the time span between the originals and the copies are, in most cases, more than 1 000 years. This must mean that the biblical manuscripts are more reliable. It further means that if the Bible cannot be accepted as reliable, then neither can any other ancient secular manuscript.
- Over the centuries, all efforts by sceptics to discredit the reliability of the Bible have been unsuccessful. Many allegations about the so-called corruption of the Bible have been made, but nobody has been able to produce any credible evidence to prove their claims.
- Sceptics have used archaeology in an effort to disprove the Bible, but each time they themselves were proven wrong in their allegation, and the Bible true. One example is the fact that there was a time when there was no archaeological evidence for the existence of the Hittites, a powerful nation in the time of King David, which sceptics used to question the reliability of the Bible. To their dismay, evidence to the contrary began to pour in, so much so, that there is presently an entire museum devoted to Hittite relics in Ankara, Turkey. This is only one of many examples. As a result of the reliability of the archaeological record of the Bible, the Bible is used today by some archaeologists to locate ancient cities in Israel.
- The prophetic record of the Bible is impeccable. There are a lot of prophecies in the Bible concerning world events, as well as events concerning persons many years, decades and even centuries before the actual events took place, that were accurately fulfilled. These include prophecies about the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, a certainty that all the Biblical prophecies currently unfulfilled, will be fulfilled as prophesied. There is no other religious book that can claim such an impeccable prophetic record.
- Through the Bible, millions of people have been brought into contact with the living God who irrevocably changed their lives. They have, and some continue to, experience the joy and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, even in the midst of desperate circumstances and sometimes serious persecution.

The Bible claims to be the inspired revelation of the one and only true Creator-God to humanity; 2 Tim. 3:16:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God," (KJV).

We have this challenge in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in John 7:17:

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

This challenge is still valid. If anybody is willing to do the will of God, as set out in the Bible, he or she shall know that it is in fact from God.

Most people who do not accept the Bible as God's revelation to man, do so against their own conviction. They do realise that the Bible is in fact the Word of God, but they are not prepared to submit themselves to the moral standards of the Bible. They then look for reasons to convince themselves and others that the Bible is not reliable as the word of God. Thus, they try to appease their own conscience (mostly unsuccessfully), which after a time becomes insensitive if they persist with their efforts.

Just as the devil does everything in his power to discredit the Bible as God's revelation, he also leaves no stone unturned to deceive believers and to undermine their faith through false teachers and false prophets. They are people who often just slightly twist great biblical truths in order to deceive believers. Often these people are popular and eloquent preachers, who sometimes unwittingly, but often purposefully, preach false doctrines. The Lord Jesus warns thus in Mt. 7:15:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (KJV).

In Mt. 24:11 the Lord Jesus also warns that before His return:

"many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." (KJV).

The apostles also often warn against false prophets and teachers, see Acts 20:30; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:1 and 1 John 4:1. **For this reason it is every believer's own responsibility to come to know God through diligent and prayerful Bible study**, to ensure that they are not deceived by false teachers. The believer owes it to him-/herself, because only through the Bible and on your knees before God, with the help of God through His Holy Spirit, can the new life of peace with God be found.

Any serious student of the Bible will soon realise that the God of the Bible is in fact the one and only true Creator-God and that He is a God of love, and therefore there is hope for man who is dead in sin.

2. DEAD IN SIN

When one (every person before conversion) realises that he/she is separated from, and forsaken by this God of love as a result of sin, and that one is in a condition of spiritual death, it cannot be good news. It is a fact however, whether one believes it or not, because man has sinned against God.

2.1 What is Sin?

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

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (KJV).

In Mark 12:29-31 the Lord Jesus Christ summarises God's law as:

"..., 'The first of all the commandments is: 'HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'
This is the first commandment.

And the second, like it, is this: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' ***There is no other commandment greater than these."***

This means that God's law is love. Therefore, all unloving conduct, thoughts, and dispositions towards God and one's neighbour, are sin. (in Chapter three God's love is discussed in more detail)

Sin equals selfish behaviour, thoughts and dispositions, and this equals unloving behaviour, thoughts and dispositions towards God and neighbour. The first sin was man's unloving and selfish disobedience in an attempt to become as God. In the same way, every selfish and unloving conduct of every person since the fall of man is still a transgression of God's law and therefore, sin. Sin is selfishness, self-seeking and self-gratification; a supreme love of self, instead of love for God above all, and love for neighbour equal to love for self.

2.2 The Fall of Man

Because God is love, He created the first humans and placed them in wonderful surroundings where they lived with Him in a special relationship and experienced His special presence. God equipped man with a free will and commissioned him to rule.

Initially, man and his wife loved God and obeyed Him. But under the instigation of Satan, man disobeyed God's command (became unloving and selfish) and tried to become as God.

God forbade man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them that the day they eat of the fruit of this tree they will die (Gen. 2:17). Satan however convinced them that: ***"your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, ..."***, if they ate of the forbidden tree (Gen. 3:5). To them, it was a desirable possibility, and they ate of the fruit. (Gen. 3:6). This was a selfish and unloving deed towards God, not only because it was disobedience, but also because they wanted to become as God. The eating of the fruit of this tree was in essence an occult practise. It was an attempt to become as God and to achieve supernatural knowledge and power. For them it was about the upliftment of the self. Just as power-hungry people still, in our day and age, pursue power (endeavour to become as God) through occult practices, the first humans 'ate the forbidden fruit'. This sin did not only consist of the eating of the fruit, but the motive was a purposeful attempt to, through the means of the 'eating of this fruit', become as God. It was the first human sin. Man started to love himself more than he loved God and put his own interests above God.

In accordance with God's warning, man and his wife died a spiritual death the same day they sinned. They died because they were sent out of the Garden of Eden (God's special presence) into a world that was cursed by God (Gen. 3:17), a world that was under the power of the evil one. Since the Fall, man is alienated from God, dead in his sin, without hope and without God in the world. To be forsaken by God is death in biblical language. Paul writes in Col. 2:13:

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

See in connection with this also, among others, is Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-5 and 5:14. Paul describes this lost condition of the Ephesians before their conversion like this in Eph. 2:12:

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

Although they (man and his wife) did not physically die that same day, they were immediately transferred into a state of eternal death and damnation which, according to the Bible, is the condition of a person being alienated and separated from God - a death worse than physical death for the believer who is reconciled with God.

Because God is love, unloving behaviour, selfishness, which is sin, cannot exist in His special presence. Therefore, man cannot be reconciled to God if he has sin in his life. According to the Bible, sin always separates man from God. Even in His relationship with His covenant people, Israel, God warns in Isaiah 59:2:

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, that he will not hear." (KJV)

Man can in no way through his own efforts return to God's special presence or to a state of reconciliation with God. By his own efforts, man cannot return to God and be spiritually revived from this state of death in sin. This inability of man to return to God (new life) is symbolised by the cherubim with flaming swords, according to Gen. 3:24, guarding the garden (God's special presence) and keeping them away from the tree of life (new life).

2.3 Power of the Evil One

In this state of spiritual death, death in sin, alienated from God without hope in the world, mankind lives, and their children are born. Every person born in this world is, like his/her parents (before conversion and being reborn), by nature lost, dead in sin and on his/her way to an eternity without God.

This world wherein man lives, was in such chaos after the Fall, that the first person born here was so self-centred and envious that he killed his own brother. Cain kills Abel according to Gen. 4. But what is Cain's problem with his younger brother? Abel's offering was acceptable to God (Gen. 4:4) but Cain's was not (Gen. 4:5). Cain is too self-seeking, he wants to serve God in his own way, for the benefits it could have for him. We read about Cain in 1 John 3:12: ***"his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."*** This was only the beginning of the trouble after the Fall.

The world was so absolutely wicked that after about 1 500 years, God was **grieved in his heart** and sorry that He had made man on earth (Gen. 6:6). It was clear that man wanted to do his own thing (own will), against God's will. In all this time, since the Fall, the Bible mentions only three people, Abel, Enoch (Gen.5:24) and Noah, who walked with God. God found Noah to be a righteous man according to Gen. 6:8, 9. He decided to wipe mankind from the face of the earth and save only the righteous Noah (and his family, for his sake). It took about 400 years after the flood for God to find in Abram somebody obedient and righteous whom He could use. When one reads in the Old Testament about all the wickedness in the world, and how God even had problems with His chosen nation, Israel, because of their tendency to sin and disobedience, it becomes clear that the world is indeed in the power of the evil one. How strong is the grasp of the evil one on the world if God's chosen people do not even want to obey Him? According to Isaiah 65:2 the Lord God said:

“I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts;” (KJV).

In the New Testament, the world is still in the power of the evil one. On three occasions, the Lord Jesus referred to Satan as the prince (ruler) of this world. Read about it in John 12:31; 14:30 and 16:11. The Lord Jesus also taught His disciples to pray:

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Mt. 6:10. (KJV).

God’s will is mainly not done on earth, because earth is in the power of the evil one. That is why the Lord Jesus found it necessary to teach His disciples to pray that God’s will be done on earth. The Lord Jesus also taught his disciples in verse 13 to pray “... ***deliver us from the evil one.***” This prayer would not have been necessary if the evil one was no threat to His disciples.

Also in His prayer for His disciples in John 17, the Lord Jesus clearly distinguishes between this world and His disciples, as if their citizenship is somewhere else. His prayer according to verse 14 & 16 is that:

“they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world”

In verse 15 His prayer is:

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one”

The fact is that His disciples’ citizenship is in the Kingdom of God (under His rule), while they still live in this world. That is why the Lord Jesus found it necessary to pray for their protection against the evil one.

When Satan, according to Luke 4, tempted the Lord Jesus and wanted to be worshipped by Jesus he claimed, according to verses 5 & 6, that all authority over the world was given to him. The Lord did not dispute it, but only answered that according to Scripture, God alone should be worshipped.

It is clear from the Bible that the apostles knew that the world was in the power of the evil one. Paul explains in Acts 26:18 that the Lord Jesus commanded him, regarding the gentiles:

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

Concerning believers Paul says in Col. 1:13:

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

Paul clearly distinguishes between the darkness of this world and the Kingdom of Jesus (the rule of God).

In 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul writes about people who refuse to believe the gospel, that they are those:

“whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”

Satan does not blind these people by supernatural means, but through lies and deception he succeeds in getting people to concentrate to such an extent on self and self-gratification, that they cannot see the glory of Christ.

The citizenship of the true Christian-believer is in the Kingdom of God (under His rule) through His Holy Spirit. That is how Paul sees it according to Phil. 3:20:

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

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

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

While seeing themselves as part of a heavenly country (Kingdom of God – see verse 16), which they desired. According to Heb. 13:14 believers say:

“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”

The city to come is nothing but the physical Kingdom of God that will be established in future. According to 1 Pet. 1:17 & 2:11 it is also clear that believers are seen as strangers and pilgrims in this world which is in the power of the evil one.

The apostle John has no doubt whatsoever that the world is in the power of the evil one. He writes in 1 John 5:19:

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

According to the Lord Jesus, in Mark 4:15,

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

In 2 Cor. 11:14-15 Paul warns that:

“Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness,”

Some Christian believers and even Christian theologians deny the fact that believers are vulnerable to attacks from satanic forces. But the apostle Paul differs from them. He warns believers against attacks from these satanic forces and to “wrestle” against these powers in order to overcome them. From Eph. 6:11 he encourages believers to ***“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”*** In Eph. 6:12-17 he explains the armour of God and how to use it:

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

According to 1 Thess. 2:18, Paul and company wanted to go to the Thessalonians,

“but Satan hindered us (them).”

In James 4:7 believers are commanded to:

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

Another warning for believers in 1 Pet. 5:8 is:

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

Can there still be any doubt that this world where mankind lives is in the power of the evil one (Satan)? Satan’s power is however, not supernatural but primarily through the will of man who voluntarily, like Adam and Eve, still submits to his lies and deception for the sake of supposed personal benefit.

To be dead in sin, in a world that is under the power of the evil one should be experienced by everyone as really bad news. But there is very good news in the Bible. God wants to redeem natural man from this state of death in sin, because **God is love**

3. GOD IS LOVE

3.1 Some of God's natural attributes.

God is **Eternal**. He is without beginning or end. He exists outside of time. He created time. God was before time began, and He is already at the end of time. That is why the Bible says in Rev. 1:8:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

See also Ps. 90:2; Jes. 41:4; 48:12; 57:15; Heb. 1:8.

God is **Omnipresent** (Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:24). Nothing, not even a thought, escapes God's observation. He is however, not always and at all places present in the same way, because He is sometimes present in a special way, when his presence is consciously experienced. It is however extraordinary, something that is experienced very seldom and only in extraordinary circumstances. It is something that should not be pursued in this life by Christians, but should be left to the will and judgement of God, as pursuing God's special presence can open the door for deceiving spirits.

God is **Omniscient** (Ps. 139:4; Heb. 4:13; 1 Joh. 3:20) He knows everything, even everything that is going to happen in the future.

God is **Omnipotent** (Job. 42:2; Ps. 115:3; Jes. 14:24 & 27; Mt. 19:26). He can do everything that needs to be done according to His just will and judgement. However, God cannot do anything that goes against His own moral attributes. He cannot for instance, do anything unjust or unloving.

God is also **Immutable** (Jes. 41:4; Heb. 1:11, 12 & 13:8; Jak. 1:17), a change in the nature of God is impossible because He is perfect, no change is necessary.

3.2 Some of God's moral attributes.

God is **just, merciful, good, patient** and **holy**. All these attributes of God are incorporated and inherent in God's supreme attribute, to wit His love, which will be discussed next. When the perfection of God's love is fully understood, it is in itself, proof of God's existence and the reliability of the Bible. Such a perfect love could not have been invented by so many different authors, in different places at different times, and in such perfect harmony, other than under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. (See: The Authority of the Bible above)

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

When the reader fully understands God's love as discussed below, he/she will realise why his love can be seen as his supreme moral attribute, which includes all his other attributes. Without any exceptions, love is always just. Love is also merciful, good, patient, devoted (consecrated, holy) – it cares.

The Bible clearly depicts the God of the Bible as a God of love. Num. 14:18:

"The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy (loving kindness),".

However, He is not only a God who loves, He is more than that – He is love. God's love is obvious throughout the Bible but in 1 John 4:8 & 16, it is distinctly declared that God is love: v. 8:

"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

and v. 16:

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

That is the reason why God's law is love. His law, which is love because He Himself is love, can for that reason never change. Love is the universal moral law of God, which rests upon His character. It will always exist: 1 Cor. 13:8:

"Love never fails (ends)."

God's instruction to His nation, Israel, is:

"you shall love your neighbor as yourself:" (Lev. 19:18).

That includes strangers:

"The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself;" (Lev. 19:34).

That means that God Himself loves all people, no matter who they are. God will never expect more from man than what He Himself is and is willing to do. The Lord Jesus said that man must even love his enemies, according to Mt. 5:44 and Luke 6:27. That means that God Himself also loves His enemies. Natural man is, as a result of sin, an enemy of God, but because God loves mankind He wants to save them. The

fact that God wants to save man, and His plan for man's salvation, will be discussed later.

The question can now be asked: Why does God punish man if He is love? The answer to the question is that God punishes man exactly for that reason, because He is love. Love can never be unjust, and justice requires that sin must be punished. (See Ex. 34:7).

God's love is perfect and, therefore, man with his limited ability will never be able to fully understand or describe it. However, it is clear, that God's love is a **perfect benevolence** towards all people. God desires the wellbeing of man. **(Please note that things can only go really well with man when he is in the right relationship with God, because it is eternal and not temporary like earthly prosperity)**. The fact that everything does not always go well with man is not God's fault, and it is not even always God's punishment, but more often it is the result of sin (own and other's).

The entire Bible is, in essence, about God's endeavours to reconcile obstinate and sinful man in a **just and loving way** with Himself. God knows that reconciling man with Himself is the only way to save man from eternal death and damnation, wherein man finds himself because of sin. God wants to save man because He is love. That is why God has a plan to save man. His plan is **good news** and becomes clear when studying the Bible.

4. GOOD NEWS

4.1 Redemption

Because God is love and omnipotent, He does everything He deems necessary, within this world (which is in the power of Satan), in accordance with His righteous will and judgement. For this reason, there is still hope for man who is dead in his sins. God wants to deliver man from his sin and enable him to be reconciled to God. Only God has this power. There is no way man, in his own strength, can return to God and be reconciled to Him.

4.2 Peace with God for man

God wants to save man because He is love but love includes righteousness. God is just, therefore, He can and will redeem man to a new life of peace with Him, only in a righteous way. He cannot just excuse sin and forgive man, because His righteousness demands punishment for sin. According to Ex. 34:7 God forgives sin, but never leaves sin unpunished. That is why God said in Num. 14:18:

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

That is just, because where sin is not punished there is chaos, and people suffer because of the selfishness (sin) of others. Right from the beginning, God concerns Himself with man. Approximately 400 years after the flood, God calls Abra(ha)m. God has a plan for Abraham. He wants to prepare a nation for Himself – a nation through which He could bless all the families (peoples) of the earth (see Gen. 12:3). Through this nation, He could bring about His plan of redemption for man by sending His perfect Offering for man’s sin to the world. By the use of covenants (wilful agreements) with Abraham and his descendants, God deals with Israel – this was sometimes very difficult because of the unreliability of His nation. At the destined time, God’s Blessing for all people emerges. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, appears as the perfect sacrifice to save man from sin and to pay the price for man’s reconciliation with God. Regeneration (new life) is now possible for man.

Punishment for sin is necessary because God is righteous and He decreed that blood makes atonement for the life (Lev. 17:11). This verse also says that the life (soul) is in the blood, which means that the life is poured out when the blood is poured out. We also read in Heb. 9:22b: “... ***without shedding of blood there is no remission.*** By his own life (blood), man cannot atone for his sins, because his life would be sufficient only for his first sin and then he would have nothing to offer for his subsequent sins. But all sin must be punished. The only way is that there must be a perfect, blameless,

sinless offering to atone for man's sins. God alone can provide this perfect sacrifice, sufficient for man's sin and a new life of peace with Him. Rom. 3:25: (Jesus) ***Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*** (KJV)

God so loved the lost sinner that He, Himself, paid the price for his salvation. John 3:16:

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

The Lord Jesus Christ is this perfect offering, born in Israel as a Jew. He came forth from God as a human being, to be the perfect sacrifice, which made it possible for man to be reconciled to God. 1 John 4:10:

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

The apostle Paul refers to this as evidence of God's love in Rom. 5:8:

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

The Lord Jesus is the sacrifice for man's sins, for which no other sacrifice is sufficient or acceptable. The apostle Peter verifies this in 1 Pet. 2:24

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

Paul agrees in Eph.1:7:

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

So also, the author of the letter to the Hebrews in Heb. 10:14:

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

God's redemption is available for all people. That is what Paul teaches in 1 Tim. 2:3, 4:

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

The apostle Peter agreed with this when he wrote in 2 Peter 3:9:

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

God knows that not all people are interested in being reconciled to Him. This is why the Lord Jesus said according to Mt. 7:14:

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

In Luke 13:24 He said:

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

The fact that God knows that not all people would want to accept His gift of salvation, does not lessen or change His love: He wants all to repent and be saved anyway. He really cares for the true wellbeing of all people, and for this reason, makes provision for all people.

The main reason why some people do not want to be saved, is because self and self-gratification take priority in their life. They do not want to submit themselves to the moral demands of the Christian life. Those who do want to be saved, but are not successful (see Luke 13:24), are people who try in their own selfish ways, like Cain, to be accepted by God. Their motives are wrong – they are all about self and self-gratification. They are people who want the best of this world and the best of the world to come. People often go to church because they want ***“teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”*** (2 Tim. 4:3 NIV). They want to hear that God will bless them with worldly wealth and health. People also, sometimes want to enjoy good popular music that is not real praise and worship of God. However, it also includes people who are not willing to go and find out from the Bible, who God is and what He has done for man.

The fact that God made provision for all people to be saved and to be reconciled to Him, does not mean that everybody is automatically saved. This gift of salvation and a new life with God is only given to those who believe it and accept it. **Man must choose** because man is equipped with the God-given ability to choose.

4.3 Man's ability to choose (free will)

From the Bible it is clear that mankind has the ability to make choices and that God expects man to choose. Some theologians wrestle with the problem of free will. It seems as though they are stuck with the presupposition that God can only know what people will do in future if He Himself had determined and decreed it. They cannot believe that God can know in advance what every person will decide and do, even before the person himself knows what he is going to decide and do. Some serious and true Christians, through the ages up until today, taught and still teach that God cannot know things in advance, which He did not determine and decree Himself. For man it is incomprehensible, but if we believe the Bible, then we must also believe that it is possible for God, because that is what the Bible teaches.

In the Bible God often warns people to do certain things or not to do certain things. This clearly indicates that those people were able to choose whether to obey God's commands or not. As early as Gen. 4:7, after the Fall, God warned Cain thus:

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

Cain did not obey God and sinned. If he did not have the ability to choose, God would not have warned him against sin. There are many examples in the Bible where God rewarded people for obedience and punished people for disobedience. How just would it be if a God of love decreed that a person is disobedient and then punishes him for it?

If everything that happens in this life was decreed and determined by God, as some believers erroneously teach, it would mean that every human action and everything that ever happens was predetermined and decreed by God. It would further mean that man could not be held responsible for wrong selfish deeds (sin), because they did not have any choice (will) therein. Man would not be able to do right nor wrong, because everything would have been predetermined by God. Heroes of faith, as depicted in Scripture (see Heb. 11) would have been impossible. Abraham was one of these heroes of faith, Gen. 15:6:

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

It would not have made sense for God to account righteousness to Abram (Abraham) if God Himself had manipulated his will in order to make it possible for him to believe - if he had no choice in this at all.

It is the same with a relationship. It can never be meaningful or real if it is not voluntary. Enforced relationships are meaningless. This is true not only for

relationships between people, but also for relationships between God and man. God seeks meaningful relationships. According to John 4:23, God seeks worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. To worship God in spirit means to worship Him with your whole heart and soul and in full surrender to Him. You must want to do it, your will must be involved. The will is also involved when God is worshipped in truth. It is about the motivation (reason) for worship. It means that God is worshipped for who He is and not for any dubious or self-seeking reason. It is still a choice.

For the purpose of this discussion, free will merely means the ability to choose. It does not mean total libertarianism or the sovereignty of man at all. Man can have the will to do many things, but it is not always possible for him to do what he wants to do. One of those things is that man is unable to do anything to reconcile himself with God. Therefore, God from His side, involves Himself with man, because He wants to redeem man from his lost state and give him a new life of peace with Himself.

5. TIME TO MAKE A DECISION?

In view of this discussion, anyone who has read up to this point and has not yet made a choice in this connection must now decide what he/she is going to do. In the first place, you must decide whether you believe that the Bible is in fact the revelation of the true Creator-God and His will for man. If you are honest, you will acknowledge that it is the truth. Unfortunately, some people will never be convinced, only because they do not want to be convinced.

Those who do recognise the Bible as God's revelation, and who realise that the true God is a God of love and that He wants to save you from your situation of being dead in sin and reconcile you to Him by providing the sacrifice for your sins, you must decide whether you want to accept this gift of God. Are you prepared (willing) to lay down the old self-life and to deny yourself for the sake of this new life, or is the cost too high for you? If you do want to accept this gift of salvation and the new life of peace with God, it is done in prayer. God must then be trusted to enable you, through His Holy Spirit, to live this new life.

5.1 Accept God's gift of peace with Him

It must be realised that this reconciliation with God (salvation and deliverance from sin), is a gift from God, a favour that can never be earned. It is God's endowment (free gift) to man because He is love. Eph. 2:8, 9:

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

Rom. 6:23:

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

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

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

That means, to believe that the gift of reconciliation with God, made possible by the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, was also for you. It is indeed a gift from God to man, out of love, something that **man must believe and accept in order to possess.**

This gift of God is free. Nobody needs to do anything, nor can do anything to earn it. It is available to all who learn about it, believe it and accept it. A gift in the true sense of the word can never be earned because it is not remuneration. As with any other gift, this gift of God must be accepted. If it is not accepted, it never becomes yours and you will never be able to enjoy the benefits of it, notwithstanding the intention of the giver. There is no merit in accepting a gift. To accept a gift can never be a contribution to the earning of a gift. That is also how it is with God's gift. According to the Bible, faith, in contrast with works, is the only way to accept God's gift of salvation. (See Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 3; Phil. 3:9). That means that faith is not a work whereby man can earn God's gift of salvation. The benefits of this gift of God, to those who accept it, are forgiveness for and deliverance from sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life with Him – a new life of peace with God.

Any gift one receives brings with it some responsibility for the receiver, however modest the required action may be. If it is not cared for, or not used for its correct purpose, one can suffer loss. One can lose it altogether, or at the very least, lose the proper use or benefit of it. There is therefore, always some cost involved when receiving a gift. The cost may vary from insignificant actions to a lot of effort – and it may even require money in the case of big gifts. For instance, when a woman gets flowers, she cares for them; if somebody gets a bicycle or a car he cares for it and maintains it, sometimes at high cost (fuel, service, tyres, etc).

To receive this gift of God means to become a follower (disciple) of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are also responsibilities or a price (cost) that goes with it. The Lord Jesus, who made this gift possible, said these responsibilities carry a cost that must be counted in advance. In Luke 14:28-30 He says:

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

This is the cost, explained by the Lord Jesus in Luke 9:23: **"If anyone desires to come after Me** (want to be My disciple), **let him deny himself** (stop to regard his own interests above God's), **and take up his cross daily** (prepared to die to self, like Jesus did when He took up His cross to die), **and follow Me** (be My disciple)." See also Mt. 16:24 and Mark 8:34.

One can never bring about one's own salvation and reconciliation with God by doing good deeds. When you have accepted this gift of God however, you become His disciple, His child, His follower – and then you must fulfil the responsibilities connected with this gift. If you do not fulfil them, you do not take care of your gift, and then you cannot enjoy the full value and benefits of this wonderful gift. One then

has reason to wonder whether such a person has really accepted (believed) the gift. The Lord Jesus said in connection with this in Mt. 7:21:

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

In James 2:20, the apostle James had this to say:

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

If you say you believe but your behaviour is not in harmony with that, your faith is, according to James, a dead faith. A dead faith does not lead to salvation.

Everybody who considers accepting this gift of God must seriously think about the consequences of it. Count the cost and decide whether you really want it. The cost is, among others, the old life. One cannot live this new life of reconciliation with God and at the same time continue with the old life of sin. **Remember however, that this new life is not lived in one's own power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit of God.**

Once one has counted the cost and decided to accept this precious gift of God, it is done in prayer. Prayer is the way in which we talk to God. The following things should be discussed with God in prayer:

- Confess (acknowledge) to God your sins and your need for redemption. He forgives all your sins, irrespective of how serious they are, because the Lord Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for all sin. God wants to set things right between you and Him. That is why He said, according to Isaiah 1:18:

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

- Tell God that you accept His gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus and thank Him for the fact that the Lord Jesus paid the price for your sins on the cross, allowing you to be redeemed and reconciled to Him. You accept this gift from God's hand as you would accept any other gift. Eph. 2: 8, 9:

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

- Surrender to Him. Give yourself, everything you are and possess, to Him. Tell Him that from now on you do not live for yourself any longer, but for Him. That He, from now on, has the first place in your life, above your own interests. That you

are now a follower (disciple) of the Lord Jesus and that you deny yourself, Satan, and the world.

- Thank God that He, without your merit, through the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, enabled you to return from eternal death to a new life of reconciliation and peace with Him.
- Declare your dependence on God to enable you, by His Holy Spirit, to live this new life to His honour.

Everyone who accepts this gift now has the indescribable privilege to be a child of God as promised in John 1:12:

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

The meaning and consequences of this step will now be discussed, and with it, the believer's responsibilities as an integral part of this new life.

6. THE NEW LIFE

A new Christian-believer ought to become part of the body (Church) of Christ, which consists of all true believers, through water baptism. By his baptism, the new believer attests to the world and Satan, with fellow believers as witnesses, that he has died to the world and the old self-life of sin, and that he now begins the new life in Christ. Paul says about this in Rom. 6:4:

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

To find a congregation or community of Christian-believers that function on biblical principles and in biblical love, is not always easy. The new believer, who is not part of such a congregation yet, should seriously pray and trust the Spirit of God to lead him to such a community. Persist in prayer and faith that the Lord will provide. Unfortunately, in virtually all congregations, even in those who do function on biblical principles, there are ‘Christians’ who attend church just for ‘in case’, people who are not really convinced about the faith that they are supposed to profess. There are also believers within whom the love of God does not always reign, where envy, pride and all sorts of wrong attitudes often lead to strife amongst these believers. The new believer must be mindful of such negative things (remember that we live in a world under the power of the evil one), and pray that the true love of God will reign in his own heart to the glory of God and to the building up of the body of Christ on earth.

Every believer must also realise that everybody should take responsibility for him-/herself. Therefore, every believer ought to do as the people of Berea in the New Testament did when Paul preached to them. According to Acts 17:11:

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

Please search the Bible prayerfully and with a sincere heart. Make sure that what you are taught in sermons, lectures, books, tracts, etc, is in harmony with the message of the Bible. Do not just accept every teaching that comes your way, regardless of how fluent or convincing the teacher, preacher or author may be. Test everything you are taught against the Bible, including everything that is taught in this booklet. Be, first and foremost, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be vigilant and always be sure, through prayerful study of the Bible and trust in the Holy Spirit, that the road you are led on by your spiritual leader, is the road that leads to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although this life of faith is not difficult (see 1 John 5:3), there are many obstacles in the way of the believer. Satan will do everything in his power to get you to doubt. Therefore, in order to grow in faith, every new believer needs to be ministered to, **in love**, by fellow-believers. It is the duty and responsibility of every believer to use his spiritual gifts to minister **in love** to fellow-believers for the building up of the body of Christ (church). You can read in Rom. 12:1-8 about the new life in Christ and how believers should use their spiritual gifts to the benefit of the church. Read also about the spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12 (whole chapter) as well as Eph. 4, to understand how believers ought to minister to each other **in love**, in order to build up the body (church). A living community of believers, where they serve each other **in love** to the building up of the body, is the place where believers are truly strengthened in their faith.

It is important to keep in mind that the responsibilities in connection with this gift of salvation from God are the inevitable result or consequence of the acceptance of it, and not the reason for salvation. It is not through works that man can be saved. It is not even possible through works, to make the slightest contribution to your salvation.

6.1 New Birth

To be reconciled to God means to begin a new life. Because of the Lord Jesus' crucifixion in your place, and for your sins, you are now in a new living relationship with the living God. You are no longer alienated from God and abandoned by Him. Paul describes this change thus in 2 Cor. 5:17:

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

Through His Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus is now in you as you are in Him. This is His encouragement to believers in John 15:4:

“Abide in Me, and I in you.”

According to the Lord Jesus, this new life is to be born again. It is a spiritual birth, a spiritual revival of a person who was spiritually dead in sin: He says in John 3:3:

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

In verses 14-15, the Lord likens Himself to the brazen (bronze) serpent Moses made in the desert:

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

Moses needed to lift up the brazen serpent in the wilderness in order for the Israelites, who were dying because they were bitten by snakes, to look at it and live (Num. 21:8, 9). They had the expectation of being healed (live) by looking at the snake. Likewise, in faith and expectancy of a new (eternal) life, man must look at the Lord Jesus Christ. The Israelites in the desert were dying and could do nothing to be healed (to live). God made it possible for them to live through the uplifting of the snake by Moses, but it was imperative that they should look at the snake. Those who did not look at the snake died. Likewise, natural man is dead in his sins because of the snake (Satan's deceit). Only those who look to Christ in faith, to be saved from the eternal death wherein they find themselves, receive the new life of peace with God. God is still the Giver of the new life; man receives it only through faith. Those who do not look to Christ for new life (to be born again) stay in their eternal death because of sin.

This new life comes through God. (John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 5:1, etc.). He gave it. God makes this new birth possible through His Holy Spirit. Man can have the will to do many things, but it is not always possible to do what you want to do. The new life in Christ is one of the things man cannot do, even if he tries. No man can live this new life in his own strength. When a person hears the message, believes it, and decides to accept the gift, he has done nothing to earn it; there is nothing to boast about. He has only done what anyone does when accepting a gift which is presented to him without any effort (any merit) from his side.

This means that this new life replaces the old life of sin. Man cannot continue with the old sinful life while simultaneously living this new life. In Rom. 6:6-8, Paul says that the old man was crucified and died with Christ. In this new life that came from God, the self can no longer take precedence. The born again life is no longer about self, but about Him. He is now first in my life. Anyone who calls himself a believer, but wants to continue with the old life, or even worse, refuses to give up the old life in order to receive the new life, does not really believe. He did not count the cost. A little prayer wherein the Lord Jesus is 'accepted' is not enough. There needs to be a willingness to accept this new life from God in the place of the old life. Only then is it a living faith that can save.

6.2 Surrender

This means nothing less than an absolute surrender. A born again person does not belong to himself any longer, he belongs to God. He is of God and is now a child of God. Gal. 3:26, 27

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

The new life means to live in full for Christ and not for self any longer. 2 Cor. 5:15

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

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

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

That means to be saved from sin. Rom. 6:18:

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

To be saved from sin means a turn away from a life of sin to a new life, under the guidance of the Spirit of God. It is a new life and no real born-again believer would willingly continue with his old life of sin.

6.3 Holiness

What does it mean to be holy? Does it mean that one must identify all the grave sins in your life and stop committing them? When can one be called holy? To be holy does not mean to pretend to be pious and be censorious with other believers, while still living for self. That is nothing but hypocrisy. To be holy means to be consecrated (to be set apart) unto God. It means a total, absolute surrender to God, as discussed above. One is not even close to being holy when you only do away with the conspicuous and serious sins in your life while still living for self. The new life is a holy life, and to surrender to God means to be totally consecrated and set apart unto Him.

Holiness is important to God, that is why the Bible demands it: 1Pet. 1:15, 16.

“but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

See also Lev. 11:44, 45. In Mt. 5:48 the Lord Jesus said:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”
(KJV).

Heb. 12:14 demands a holy life:

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”.

So does 1 Th. 4:3:

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

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to live holy lives in 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1. In Eph. 4:24 his counsel to the Ephesians is:

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

James 1:4 expects believers to be perfect and complete through patience (love). In his first letter the apostle John requires a holy life. He does not use the word ‘holy’ but he clearly teaches that somebody who is born of God does not sin (act unloving). See 1 John 3:6-10, or rather, read the whole book of 1 John.

6.4 God’s love in believers

Because God is love, He dearly wants to see love in man in general, but particularly in believers. That is why love is the essence of His law. The Lord Jesus summarises the law of God this way in the commandment of love, in Mt. 22:37-39:

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

As quoted above the Lord Jesus taught that one must love your neighbour as yourself. See also Mark 12: 31 & 33 and Luke 10:27. Unfortunately there are Christian teachers who, probably without having fully considered it, disagree with the Lord Jesus by teaching that people must learn to love themselves to be able to fulfil the Lord’s instruction. That will mean that the Lord Jesus did not know that all people on earth love themselves anyway, regardless of their circumstances. To

despise yourself or feel inferior and unhappy because of your life failures is in fact proof of selflove. Why would a person who does not love him-/herself care about failures and problems in life? Even to commit suicide is proof of selflove. Why would a person without any love for self be so extremely unhappy if things go seriously wrong in life? It will furthermore mean that the second part of God's law, to love your neighbour as yourself is not applicable to a person who has not learned to love him- or herself.

The apostle Paul confirms that love is the fulfilment of the law when he writes in Rom. 13:10:

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

and in Gal. 5:14:

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

To live this biblical love towards God and neighbour is to live God's law in practise. It is possible. Although man cannot, in this life, perfectly love as God can, He enables believers to love because He gives it to believers according to Rom. 5:5:

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

For that reason, God expects believers to live this love in practise.

Because it is God's commandment and wish for His people, it is also love for God and proof of one's love for Him when one loves his neighbour. If a man loves God, he will obey His commandments, that is why the apostle John writes in 1 John 5:2-3:

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

That is what the Lord Jesus also taught according to John 14:15:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." and verse 21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." as well as in verse 23: "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching." (NIV).

This is why God expects believers to live this love in practice.

Does God expect the believer to be emotionally attracted to everybody he/she meets? Is the love that God expects from believers a feeling or emotion of “I like you” towards a person’s neighbour? Will that not be impossible? Your neighbour, according to the Bible, includes not only strangers you meet, but also your enemies. The Lord Jesus said, according to Mt. 5:44:

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

Already in the Old Testament, God’s command to His nation was in Deut. 10:19:

“Therefore love the stranger,”

In order to be able to live this love that God is and expects from believers, it is important to understand what it means.

Nobody can just be ordered to feel attracted to a stranger he has just met, not to mention his enemy who wants to harm him. Is God then unreasonable to expect man to do the impossible? Certainly not! The Bible clearly teaches that God is righteous and that a God of love will never do unrighteous things.

God knows that man has no direct control over his emotions, and because He is just, He will never expect somebody to do the impossible. He is also aware that the love man knows as a feeling (attracted towards somebody), is an emotion (a secondary reaction), and that we do not have direct control over it. It is the same with feelings of fear, joy, grief, etc. They are all feelings activated by something that happened to us, or developed in a relationship. Nobody can just decide to experience fear, joy or sadness. They are all emotions initiated, usually by something beyond the person’s control.

Therefore, God does not expect the believer to like everybody or to feel attracted to everybody. He knows it is impossible. God Himself, who according to the Bible, loves (perfect benevolence towards) all people equally, likes some people more than others. David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). Although David was not perfect and had sinned against God several times, for which he repented and was punished, God liked him. God did not like Esau (Mal. 1:3). God loved both equally because He desired the wellbeing of both, but He liked the one more than He liked the other because of their dispositions, decisions and conduct, which He knew even before they were born.

God’s love, His perfect benevolence, His desire for the wellbeing of all people, including His enemies, is an inherent part or attribute of God. That is how He wanted to be and decided to be. That is why biblical love as described here is, in the case of man, also a decision and a disposition, something which he can control. This is the

reason why God can expect this love from the believer, without being unjust. If a person wants to live this love God will enable him with the power of the Holy Spirit.

For the believer, this benevolent disposition (love) is a choice to act benevolently in all circumstances and in interaction with all people, including those people one does not like, as well as one's enemies. It entails seeing God's interests as more important than one's own, and viewing a neighbour's interests as equally important to one's own, and to act according to the requirements of the situation. This biblical love is an unselfish (disinterested) benevolence. It is never done for personal gain, honour, or praise. Paul describes this disposition in Phil. 2:3, 4:

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

Even a good deed done for selfish reasons is sin. Paul describes it thus in 1 Cor. 13:3:

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."

Biblical love (God's law) means to do everything possible (under the circumstances) to the benefit of one's neighbour, and nothing to his detriment. This is how the Lord Jesus describes it in Mt. 7:12:

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

There are two lessons to be learned concerning this biblical love, from the parable of the Good Samaritan, as told by the Lord Jesus according to Luke 10:25-37. Firstly, what love is, and secondly, who one's neighbour is towards whom this love must be practised. The Samaritan would most probably have despised the injured Jew because the Samaritans' relationship with the Jews was very poor. By taking care of the injured Jew and helping him, the Samaritan displayed biblical love towards somebody who was probably his enemy. He helped this injured person despite his negative feelings towards him. The injured person was somebody he met, who was in desperate need of help, and whom he was able to help. These were his criteria, he understood that his neighbour is anybody he meets, and that he himself is that person's neighbour. Therefore, he does what he would want to be done to him if he was in a similar situation. He implements the 'golden' rule that the Lord Jesus taught in Luke 6: 26b & 31.

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

Biblical love is not only words of encouragement or even just a prayer for someone in need. The apostle John writes in 1 John 3:18:

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” (KJV).

It means that if you are a Christian you need to live this love. If this love, which is in essence practical unselfish benevolence, was lived by every single person on earth, this world would be a paradise. Nobody would ever be wronged. There would be no fear in this world. That is probably why the apostle John wrote in his first letter (4:18):

“there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:” (KJV).

The apostle Paul expands on this in 1 Cor. 13:4-7:

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

One can write the most beautiful things, think the most beautiful things, say the most beautiful things, pray the most beautiful things, preach the most beautiful things, but if you do not have this love within you and do not live it, you gain nothing. If you are impatient, unkind, envious, boastful, self-seeking, keeping record of other's wrongs etc, then you do not live this biblical love. Then you are nothing and you gain nothing, however wonderful a person you may otherwise be.

A holy life is to practically live God's law of love. This entails viewing God's interests as more important than your own, viewing your neighbour's interests as just as important as your own, and acting accordingly when the situation requires it. It is to be separated for God. A new life in Christ can be nothing but a life separated for Him. How can man be reconciled to God and still live for self?

Unfortunately, Christians on average find it very difficult, if not impossible, to be holy by living this love in practice. They realise how easy it is to think, say and do wrong (unloving) things, and then they have the tendency to believe that it is impossible. Moreover, it can be a handy excuse, especially if one's spiritual leader (Rev. Past. etc.), from the pulpit gives one the assurance that it is impossible. But Christ expects from us, holy, consecrated, set apart lives of love for God and neighbour. Is He unreasonable to expect something from us which He knows is impossible? No! He expects it from us because He knows that there is help available. From where shall our help come?

7. POWER FROM ON HIGH

The psalmist asks in Ps. 121:1: ***"I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?"*** He knows the answer and gives it himself: ***"My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth"*** (NIV).

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

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

The Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, Helper, and Counsellor; to teach us, to lead us and to equip us with power (John 14 & 16 & Acts. 1:8). We have no excuse, if we are willing and believe Him, He will empower us through His Holy Spirit. If He empowers us and we continuously and consciously depend on Him, we will be able to live this new life. Our new (born again) life is from God through His Holy Spirit, and that is the only way we will ever be able to live this life – through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and never in our own strength.

Just as you have received salvation through faith in Christ, you must also, through faith, receive the power from the Holy Spirit to enable you to live this new life. Paul puts it like this in Col. 2:6,7:

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

Paul declares his complete dependence on Christ through His Holy Spirit in Phil. 4:13:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me",

and in Gal. 2:20:

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

as well as in Gal. 5:16:

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

If one is a born-again believer, the Spirit of God lives in you and will give you the power to live this new life. Rom. 8:8,9 states:

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

If you have read 1 John, as was recommended earlier, you would have read this wonderful truth, 1 John 5:4,5:

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

Please also read about this in 1 John 3:6-11.

We have no excuse, the power from above is available to us if we really want it.

“He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3-4).

Please remember that the ‘requirement of the law’ is nothing more than to live this biblical love, as described, in practice.

Shall God enable us to live a holy life if we really want to? We find this answer in 2 Pet.1:3:

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

Paul says in 1 Th. 5:23,24:

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

Believe that in Christ you are dead to sin (superior self-love). Rom. 6:11:

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

Believe that you, as a child of God, are guided by the Spirit of God. Rom. 8:14:

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

Believe also that the love of God is poured out into your heart, as promised in Rom. 5:5:

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

The new disciple (Christian believer) is somebody who lives in holiness (total consecration to God), and no longer sins. 1 John 3:6:

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

Unfortunately, the Self in us as believers which always wants to be first, remains a problem. Even in devoted followers of the Lord Jesus it continues to be a problem that needs to be resisted with power from on High. Therefore, if we, in a moment of weakness, do sin, there is this consolation in 1 John 1:9:

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

The Lord Jesus knows about mankind's weakness and tendency to sin. He therefore taught His disciples, among other things, also to pray: ***And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:*** (Mt. 6:12, 13 KJV).

This promise of forgiveness should never be wilfully used to commit sin just because forgiveness is available.

This new life, which is a life of complete peace and joy in the Lord, irrespective of circumstances, will be possible if we can (decide to) say with Paul:

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