

Why I believe . . .

**A very brief rationale for my faith in a few
treasured beliefs**

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My Personal Testimony

For Further Study

Preface

Dear Family Member:

I believe more than ever before that the end of the current age is near, and Jesus is coming to establish a kingdom of glory. The Bible tells us that no man knows the day or the hour, but it also tells us that we can know when it is near by the signs of the times. I have been wrong about this before. In the 1970s, I was convinced that the decade would not reach completion. Nevertheless, my faith has not waned, but has only grown stronger, given the insanity in the world today.

Being a believer, it is my responsibility to warn all who are not aware of the saving grace of Jesus that the end is near. However, I failed at that, not wanting to pressure my family and friends about religion. I am still reluctant to do that. Nevertheless, I cannot be silent. Therefore, I have written this book as a testimony of my strongest beliefs. We all need to be ready for the second coming of Jesus. I need to be faithful in my duties to warn others.

In this book, I have not tried to present rigorous proofs of all important religious beliefs. I am presenting just enough to make selected principles known. I am leaving it to the interested reader to investigate more thoroughly and rigorously. One's faith must rest on their own knowledge, not someone else's. There are many important doctrinal issues that I have not covered at all. The ones I choose are the ones most precious to me. Other people may have different opinions. Some topics that I left out are of critical importance. Those other doctrinal issues will be revealed in due time to those who seek God.

Similarly, I have not tried to incorporate all the "proof texts" for each of the 11 issues I discuss in this book. I want the book to be readable to someone who has not yet fallen in love with the Scriptures. Piling on text after text would be counterproductive to that goal. Therefore, I have offered enough to, perhaps, attract an interest, but not to the point of tedium.

My prayer is that the reader will be blessed by this introduction to basic Christianity and the Scriptures and be

inspired to delve deeper. The prophet, Jeremiah, states in chapter 29, verse 13, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

Steve Connor

1. There is a God

The existence of God can neither be proved nor disproved. We cannot even prove the existence of our own selves. The 17th Century French philosopher, Rene Descartes, said “*cogito ergo sum*” or “I think, therefore, I am.” Although, his famous statement has been much criticized, he had a point. If we are pondering our own existence, then we likely exist. However, I have seen quite a few articles suggesting that we might be a computer simulation, thinking but not really existing. To avoid bogging down in deep philosophy, let us settle on a postulate, *i.e.*, a statement that is taken to be true as a starting point for further reasoning. This postulate is “we exist.” That settled, does God exist?

One cannot use the Bible to establish the existence of God, because belief in the Bible’s authority on the subject depends on belief in God. Therefore, my arguments are from extra-biblical sources. (However, I will occasionally cite the Bible, not as proof, but to inform you what the Bible says on the subject.) Is there evidence (not proof) in this world and in our experiences for the existence of God? In the absence of proof, faith is required. The major question becomes, “Is our faith justified?”

Why do we need faith? Why can God not make an unmistakable demonstration of His existence? The answer to that question requires much more understanding of God and his dealings with humanity than can be presented in this first chapter. Let me just state that, based on my study and experience, faith is an essential component in God’s interactions with humanity. It is prescribed by God as a necessary condition to have a relationship

In the Old Testament, God made many dramatic demonstrations that would constitute proof of His existence. In very few instances did such proof change the thinking of those who were hardened against believing in God.

with Him. The Bible states this briefly, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek

Him” (Hebrews 11:6). So, let us move on to the evidences of God’s existence.

First, I believe that everyone who has ever laid in their driveway studying the stars on a clear night had the strong impression of the infinite, of a Creator. After growing up in this secular world, listening to news media, watching movies, and going to school under professors presenting philosophies as fact, our early impressions may have weakened. But think back to those times; they were powerful impressions on the mind regarding the existence of God.

Study of plants and animals, atomic structure, quantum mechanics, DNA coding for protein synthesis, the beauty and peace of a mountain stream or a sunset, all create in us a child-like wonder of creation. I believe all people, in quiet times, even atheists, often ponder their own origin and purpose, the meaning of eternity and infinity. It is my opinion that God speaks to people through the language of nature and even the experiences of life. The Bible confirms this, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). Furthermore, Ecclesiastes 3:11 explains that questions about God have been carefully placed into our minds, “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.” God has hard-wired into us a yearning for something beyond ourselves, a desire to seek Him, a sense that there is more meaning to life than what we seek in this world.

Second, have you ever had a close call and wondered why you were saved from some calamity? Perhaps good things have happened to you that cause you to wonder “why did I deserve that?” Such experiences of life often cause people to believe in divine Providence. God is in control of the universe. “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). He uses the experiences of life to speak to individuals. I believe these experiences are all designed for our good, whether or not they seem pleasant to us. Romans 8:28 states this concept, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” All things” include both the pleasant and the unpleasant.

Third, religion seems to be designed into human existence. Every culture in all recorded history has had some form of religion with divine rules to follow. Although some of these religious forms are highly perverted, there is a sufficient similarity in concepts and divine law that one must wonder why there are nearly universal principles of right and wrong. Did God author these concepts and place them in the human heart? Is conscience a design feature? What causes altruism? Thinking on these questions leads to belief in God.

My final argument in favor of God's existence comes from observation of the changed lives in those who surrender to His will. The natural tendency of people is to seek their own pleasure. People may modify their behavior to appear unselfish, but self-imposed restrictions on the pursuit of selfish goals can be selfish itself. People do not generally steal from each other because such behavior is not consistent with acceptance in society and acceptance is necessary for success in life. However, remove the social constraints (remember Hurricane Katrina) and such limitations often disintegrate. That is not to say that everyone becomes an animal in the absence of law and order, but the general tendency is there to some degree.

There are some people who are so dedicated to serving God that they are willing to suffer for His cause. Think of missionaries serving in difficult places. Think of martyrs of the Dark Ages enduring horrible torture over their faith. What causes such people throughout history and across all cultures to sacrifice without any benefit to themselves in this world? Were these people born that way? No! Babies are born selfish and scream bloody murder when they do not get their way. What causes the crude and abusive man to become loving? Some power influenced their lives to sacrifice their own will for a greater purpose, changed them from selfish to self-sacrificing.

God is incessantly initiating contact with people through the wonders of His creation, through the experiences of life, through the nature of human consciousness, through the witness of people whose lives have been changed. He does it in a way to awaken faith in His existence without compelling them with absolute proof. This is how he cultivates the best in people, creating followers with whom He wants to spend eternity.

There is yet one more evidence for the existence of God – his explicit message to us – the Bible. The reason I trust the Bible is presented in Chapter 3.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ... You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11, 13)

2. God is Our Creator

It seems reasonable to think that if we acknowledge there is a God, we should acknowledge that He is our Creator as well. However, there is a large body of people who believe in God but believe that matter organized itself, becoming ever more complex, developing complicated organic chemicals, and eventually spontaneously generating life. This self-made life then went on to improve millennium after uncountable millennium to produce scientific inquiry capable of exploring the origin of life. Such a scenario requires a faith deeper and broader than belief in a creator. It also requires a belief in scientific phenomena that have never been observed.

There was a time when famous scientists such as Isaac Newton, Louis Pasteur, and James Clerk Maxwell, were unchallenged in their belief in a divine creation. However, many scientific advances that swept away superstition led some to think that every belief in heavenly things would also fall to human reasoning. New godless philosophies arose that attempted to explain the mysteries of life. Finally, the principle of uniformitarianism granted scientists millions of years with which to allow biological evolution to create life out of nothing. The new science seemed to relieve much of humanity from responsibility to a Creator God and His morality. The new freedom was gladly accepted and promoted. Now, anyone who challenges evolutionary science is branded ignorant and condemned to silence.

The Bible warns us about these developments:

- 1) Romans 1:20-22 states that God's character is sufficiently revealed by study of creation but people willfully reject that revelation, resulting in a darkening of their understanding of the world.
- 2) 2 Peter 3:3-6 states that in the last days the same types of people who scoff at religion reject three truths because of uniformitarianism. These truths are: a) the second coming of Jesus, b) the fact that the earth was created by the energy of God's word, and c) the fact that there was a world-wide flood. (The flood explains much of the geology we see today, which some interpret to require many millions of years to develop.)

Those that try to reconcile belief in God with unbelief in divine creation accept the contradictory stance of theistic evolution. This belief requires the survival of the fittest in which the strongest and most blood thirsty survive to pass along their genes, thus, driving the species to assume the supposedly superior characteristics of the survivor. Yet, Jesus teaches humility, self-sacrifice for the service of others, love, and compassion. Theistic evolution glorifies and rewards the survivor for using whatever means is necessary to achieve superiority over other members of the species. These two ways of living are contradictory. (Creationists do not deny that survival of the fittest works on a micro level within a species to change a species to adapt to changing environmental conditions. This is exhibited in bacteria resistance to antibiotics and Galapagos finches changing beak size and strength in response to climatic-induced changes in the food supply. However, there is no evidence of any changes from one species to another.)

In the year 2000, I wrote an entire book on this subject, *Science or Philosophy? A Perspective on the Evolution of Life*. If you already have the book, please read it. If you don't have it, I will try to get a copy for you. It is now out of print. Given the book is more thorough than I can be here, I won't spend any more time on this subject. Please read the book.

3. The Bible Can Be Trusted

In Chapter 1, we established that there is a God. If there is a God, and He has any interest at all in His creation (that would be us), it stands to reason that there is some way that He chooses to communicate with us. He could write in flaming letters in the sky. He could speak in a thundering voice. I see many reasons why He would want to be more subtle than those two methods. If He wants to be more subtle, perhaps

The Bible is the most direct and powerful means of communication with humanity, but there are other ways: nature, Providence in the experiences of life, and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

inspiring selected men to write for Him would be one such subtle method. However, to convince me that a literary work was, indeed, inspired of God, it would have to be beyond human wisdom and capacity. The Bible makes the claim to be the Word of God. The more I study it, the more I believe it to be beyond human wisdom and capacity.

So, do we trust the Bible because it claims to be the Word of God? Certainly not, that would be foolish. However, because it claims to be the Word of God, it would be unreasonable to refuse to examine its claims for truthfulness. Why make an *a priori* decision that it is not the Word of God, without some evaluation? If we do not trust the Bible, in what are we going to trust? Life does not present the answers to all questions. Some things require trust. Even science must have its axioms on which to build theories and laws. There is no person pure enough, selfless enough, smart enough, knowledgeable enough to trust, except in the most limited of circumstances. In whom or what are we going to trust?

Characteristics Expected of the Word of God

What characteristics would we hope to see in a true communication from God to His creatures? I see five things that would be important to me. I will comment briefly on each, but will not try to prove anything to you. One thing is clear from the Bible: God desires faith and is loath to provide proof. Proof from God would

be very compelling to the point of forcing His will on His creatures. He preserves free will – our right to choose our own path in life. Nevertheless, He yearns to inspire us to make choices for our lives that are not self-destructive and that will lead us to Him.

1) *The Bible should be internally consistent.* I have heard all my life, and believed it much of my life, that the Bible contradicts itself. While the mind of God would necessarily be beyond our ability to grasp, making understanding the Bible challenging, even perplexing, the Bible should not contradict itself. In my opinion, based on decades of study, there are things in the Bible that, if examined cursorily, would lead to the opinion that there is contradiction. However, I have yet to see a supposed contradiction arise to the level of rejecting the Bible. The Bible is written by many authors over thousands of years. Sometimes incidents are described differently by different authors. But the differences are of the sort that we experience every day as various witnesses focus on various aspects of an event, from different viewpoints. The differences never amount to anything other than trivia, unimportant to the issues of life. Such apparent contradictions often easily resolve with more thought and study.

I find the consistency in the Bible amazing. The major themes taught in the Old Testament are taught in the New Testament (see discussion below on the Old Testament). The truths are consistent throughout. In my opinion, those who insist that the Bible contradicts itself are either those who seek to undermine the Bible or who are novices in reading the Bible. I challenge you to find out for yourself.

2) *To the extent that our knowledge of the world can be trusted, the Bible should be externally consistent with archaeology/history and science.* There are scores of things in the Bible that, at one time, were thought to be pure literature and not historical fact. However, in many of these cases, archaeology has caught up with the Bible and substantiated what the Bible said. One such case is the existence of King David, who had been thought to be legend. No amount of archaeology will prove the Bible to be true, but archaeology is more and more establishing faith in the Bible.

With respect to science, the Bible is not a scientific book. Nevertheless, except where the Bible is speaking symbolically or poetically, it does not contradict true science. Job 26:7 states that the

Earth is suspended in empty space. This is not what most ancient people believed. The belief that the earth was supported on the back of a turtle or Atlas or some such thing was common. Although the Bible states that the Sun rises and sets, that is the same language we use today for a phenomenon we know is different than what we say. Amazingly, many of the health laws given by God to the Israelites are consistent with modern science that would have been unknown in ancient times.

When it comes to God's creative acts, we should not limit God to our own understanding of science. Thirty years ago, science said that the Earth was undergoing global cooling. Now they say the Earth is undergoing global warming. Clearly, over history the Earth warms and cools under influences unrelated to human activity. Science comes to false conclusions all too easily. When science says God could not create the Earth in six literal days, we should be skeptical about limiting God.

3) *The Bible should give a sense of supernatural origin and divine protection.* The Bible, itself, makes the claim of supernatural origin. The Apostle Peter stated, "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Various authors such as Daniel, Isaiah, the Apostle John, and others claimed to have received visions giving them the information they recorded. However, do we trust the Bible to be accurate about itself? Is this circular reasoning?

For me, the strongest evidence that led me to finally trust the Bible were the prophecies of the Book of Daniel. These prophecies predicted events in amazing detail that were fulfilled hundreds and thousands of years later. Throughout the Bible, there are many detailed prophecies about the first coming of Jesus that were fulfilled. The Book of Revelation contains fulfilled prophecies about the condition and future of God's church throughout history. These and other prophecies give evidence as close to proof as it seems possible. It is not the purpose of this book to give a Bible study; that is for you to do yourself. Therefore, I will not try to teach these prophecies here.

As to divine protection, we have no original manuscripts with which to compare modern versions in our own language. However, the history of the Bible attests to the divine protection. For example, the Old Testament, written over a span of 1,000 years, was preserved

by the Hebrews who treated it with sacred care. The Old Testament was preserved by the Masoretes, who were Hebrew scholars with a systematic approach to copying the old manuscripts with meticulous care. This resulted in thousands of currently extant copies, produced from 500 AD to 1,000 AD, with nearly identical wording. In 1947, the Dead Sea scrolls were found containing all the Old Testament books, except Esther. These manuscripts date to the 2nd century BC and compare very well with the more recent Masoretic manuscripts. Finally, the Old Testament was translated to Greek in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC. These manuscripts also compare well with the Masoretic texts. This continuity over about 1,000 years gives faith in God's protection of the old manuscripts.

Although much newer, the New Testament also has no original manuscripts. There is greater variability in the old New Testament manuscripts than is found with the Old Testament. Nevertheless, scholars have been carefully studying the manuscripts to resolve the differences and correct mistakes such as copyists accidentally writing margin notes into the text.

4) *The Bible should answer the huge questions of life.* People are perplexed with questions such as:

- Where did we come from?
- Is there a God? What is He like?
- Why do we exist? What is our purpose?
- What happens when we die?
- Is there a right and wrong?
- Why do people suffer, even good people?
- What does the future hold? Is this as good as life will ever be?

The Bible provides intellectually satisfying answers to these questions. I will not try to provide those Bible answers here, because 1) it would fill an entire book and 2) you should study these out for yourself.

5) *The Bible should show, to the extent humans can grasp it, the mind of God.* Of course, humans cannot comprehend the mind of God (or He would not be God). He, Himself, tells us in Isaiah

55:8-9, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” However, if all we receive from Scriptures is something we could get from the world’s philosophers, then I would conclude the Bible is not the Word of God.

Indeed, there are many precepts in the Bible that are the opposite of human principles. God’s value system is vastly different than ours. Yet in the seeming contradictions to our human way of life, there are great blessings. For example, the Bible tells us:

- To achieve greatness and preeminence, we must humble ourselves and seek the betterment of others, putting ourselves last, like servants.
- To accumulate wealth, we must give it away.

It is God’s plan that His ways of thinking are imparted to us as we read the Bible. We can be certain that in adjusting our lives to God’s values, life will be better. God tells us, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Evidence of Changed Lives

One of the great testimonies to the fact that the Bible can be trusted, is that over millennia, the Bible has proven to have power to change lives. This was also mentioned in Chapter 1 as evidence for the existence of God. People in hopeless situations have been rescued from ruin and degradation. Furthermore, many people have been so thoroughly convinced of the truth of the Bible that they have chosen to be burned at the stake or fed to lions before rejecting Bible truth. The disciples, themselves, many who were authors of the New Testament, were willing to die for their faith.

Spiritual Things are Spiritually Discerned

There are Bible scholars who are skeptics. The power of the Scriptures has not worked on their lives because they treat the Bible as an intellectual exercise only. They do not seek the power of the Word to change their lives. Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth

states, “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). However, those who read with open minds, searching for God and His ways, will begin to see the true spiritual nature of the Bible. Jeremiah 29:13 says, “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

I challenge you to study the Scriptures and you will find out for yourself that it is internally and externally consistent, of supernatural origin, answers your greatest questions about life, and reveals the mind of God. There is always room for doubt, but spiritual things are spiritually discerned. You will know for certain of the veracity of the Bible.

What about the Old Testament?

Many people think that the Old Testament is not to be trusted because it is infected with ancient Middle Eastern culture, making it much too like the other large Middle Eastern-sourced religious work, the Quran. However, I find the Old Testament to be fully consistent with the New Testament and fully competent to lead anyone to a saving relationship with our Creator. In fact, I love the Old Testament because of its great intellectual depth, subtlety, and consistent presentation of Jesus. I have often wondered if I would choose it, if I could only have one Testament.

The New Testament, in many verses by various authors (one example: John 1:1-3, 14), makes it clear that Jesus (see Chapter 4) was the Creator described in the Old Testament. Therefore:

- The God who spoke the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament is the same God who spoke the world into existence in the Old Testament.
- The God who dealt so tenderly with the prostitute Mary Magdalene in the New Testament is the same God who wrote “Thou shalt not commit adultery” with His finger on Mt. Sinai, as described in the Old Testament.
- The God who laid down His life on the cross in the New Testament is the same God who inspired Isaiah

of the Old Testament to write Isaiah 53 telling how the innocent Lamb of God would lay down His life for the guilty.

If Jesus, the Word, is the author of the Old Testament and the New Testament, what are we to think if the Old and New Testaments give completely different pictures of God and His plan for this world? Either:

- He made a mistake during Old Testament time and corrected it in New Testament times.
- He is just playing a cosmic game.
- The Old Testament is a Semitic cultural invention but the New Testament is the Word of God.

Some people have an incomplete understanding of God's plans and mistakenly conclude that the Old and New Testaments are inconsistent. Before placing the blame on God, I would look to see if I, myself, have made an error. A first question that might be asked by a seeker of truth is, "Do New Testament writers consider the Old Testament to be the Word of God and consistent with the message they are teaching?"

There are numerous times that New Testament writers refer to the "Scriptures" in a positive, trusting way. This includes multiple writers or speakers (including the words of Jesus). When the New Testament refers to Scriptures, it means the Old Testament. A few examples:

- Jesus in Matthew 22:29 – Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.'"
- Luke describing Jesus in Luke 24:27 – "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

- John quoting Jesus in John 5:39 – “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”
- Luke describing Paul in Acts 17:2 – “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”
- Paul endorsing Scriptures in Romans 15:4 – “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”
- Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15 – “from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”
- Paul to Timothy endorsing all the Old Testament in 2 Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”

If the New Testament writers, including Jesus, thought the Old Testament was infected with Semitic cultural ideas or was in any way inadequate for presenting God’s purposes, they did not give any hint of it. The Semites did not write the Old Testament; Jesus, himself, was the author. Semitic culture was the raw material with which He chose to work, but the principles were God’s principles and the manifestation of those principles were methods of His choosing. So, I don’t think people can blame Semites for the Old Testament; they can only blame Jesus.

I have complete confidence in God’s plans, His love, and His Word – both Old and New Testament. As an analytical person, I do not have an ignorant, believe-as-your-parents religion. I have studied the truth and found it to be good. While I do not have every answer, I trust Him so thoroughly that, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

4. Jesus is the Son of God

Before this point, I have tried to not mention Jesus unless it was necessary to make a point. Now, we will establish that Jesus is the Son of God and refer to Him more freely in subsequent chapters. Also, given we have established, in Chapter 3, that the Bible can be trusted, I will use the Bible to support my belief.

Christianity is classified as a monotheistic religion, but there is a nuance: the Bible is clear that there are three persons in the Godhead. This seems paradoxical to some and is a source of derision against Christians by some religions. How are we to understand that this is monotheism?

First, a caution: God is infinitely greater than we are; we should not expect to be able to fully understand the concept of the Trinity. However, the easiest way for me to visualize it is that the Godhead is one God existing in three separate and distinct persons, each with a special sphere of influence and responsibility. These members of the Godhead are 1) the Father, 2) the Son (Jesus), and 3) the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the Bible says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The New Testament says the same thing in several places. A full discussion of the Trinity is beyond our scope for this chapter, so, we will now focus on the Son, Jesus.

Something that not all Christians seem to realize is that Jesus preexisted Bethlehem and, in fact, was the principal agent of creation. John 1:1-3 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” The use of the phrase “In the beginning” is a trigger designed to send us thinking about Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The original Hebrew word for God in Genesis Chapter 1 is plural. Later in Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Notice, again, the use of the plural: “Us” and “Our.” It is clear that more than one member of the Godhead was involved in creation and that Jesus was one of the “Our.” [The Holy Spirit was also involved, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).]

Just in case John's readers did not get the message, he clarifies in John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus, the one who became flesh, was the one through whom all things were made. He has glory equal to that of the Father. Consider also, Colossians 1:16, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." Again, "[God] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2).

Another thing many Christians do not get is that Jesus is the principal subject of the Old Testament. Many stories have literal significance for the time but are prophetic or allegorical about Jesus. Many Old Testament characters are "types" (that is, representations) of Jesus. Almost every object in the Old Testament sanctuary represents Jesus, most importantly, the sacrificial Lamb: "The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29). Also, He was the sanctuary High Priest, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus stated that the Old Testament was full of revelations about the Son of God, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

What role does Jesus have in our lives? Here are four functions:

- Substitute as the sacrificial Lamb that paid the penalty for our sins. "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).
- Substitute who lived the perfect life that was legally imputed to us that we might be judged righteous. "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” (Galatians 2:20).

- High Priest that offers the merits of His blood in the heavenly sanctuary as an atonement for our sins. “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). See also Hebrews 4:15, above.
- Savior who comes a second time to give us eternal life. “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

A study of the role of Jesus in our salvation could fill a book. I suggest you start with the Book of John.

5. There is a Real, Ongoing War between Christ and Satan

Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation...” (John 16:33). This issue is perplexing to many Christians and may be a stumbling block to those who would be Christians. However, the Scriptures are clear on the point: understanding is best achieved within the context of the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan.

The conflict opens on the stage of Earth in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis Chapter 3, we see the serpent who was “more subtle than any beast of the field” questioning God’s command, “thou shalt not eat of it,” *i.e.*, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In spite of God’s clear instructions (we will examine the reason for the prohibition later), the serpent argued three points of worldly sophistry. First, it was good for food, second, it was pleasant to the eyes, and third, it was desired to make one wise. The serpent misrepresented God as withholding a higher plane of existence from humankind (“your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods”).

Who is this deceiver who misrepresents God as evil and evil as good? What is the history of the relationship between the serpent and God that causes him to war against God, trying to pervert His marvelous new creation? What conflicts made these two such enemies? The answer is partially found in the most clear terms in Revelation Chapter 12. Verse 7 says, “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Although we won’t encumber this presentation with the supporting evidence, Michael is Christ. The text interprets itself when it tells us that the dragon is “that old serpent called the Devil and Satan.” Thus, one can conclude that before the Garden of Eden, Satan was in heaven and had a following of angels. There was some conflict, a disagreement of cosmic magnitude, that resulted in Satan being cast to Earth along with his angel following. The enmity resulting from the conflict and Satan’s defeat resulted in a war against what God loved most - his new creation, humankind.

The Bible does not give all the details of the origins of the heavenly conflict, but we are provided a glimpse into the situation in Isaiah.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cast down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: ... I will be like the most high (Isaiah 14:12).

Most commentators agree that Lucifer is Satan's original name in heaven, before he was cast down to the Earth. Although a created being himself (as we will see), Lucifer desired to be like God. He apparently campaigned for greater status, taking for himself the prerogatives of God. He was able to convince a large number of angels to follow his twisted thinking.

Again, in Ezekiel 28:15, "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. ... thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground." Lucifer, "the anointed cherub that covereth" (v. 14), became proud and desired to be like God. When his misrepresentations about God were unmasked in heaven, he was cast down to Earth. At first, God limited Satan's access to humanity to the vicinity of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God desired that his people only know good, so he warned them to stay away from the tree. No doubt, he explained some of the history of Lucifer and asked them to be faithful while providing the rich blessings of His garden and daily presence for humankind to enjoy.

However, there was a cancer in the universe. Sin had been born as a result of the misuse of free will instilled in all of the angels, including Lucifer. God did not desire automatons. Everyone must have a choice to obey or disobey. Satan chose to disobey. God could not just eliminate the cancer. That would have invalidated His free-will design, and it might have validated some of Lucifer's misrepresentations. Therefore, God needed a plan to fully reveal the

rotteness of sin such that his created beings would forever turn from it and serve Him, of their own free will, with love.

Therefore, Satan was provided a forum to work out the principles of his kingdom. God did not just turn over the human race to Satan. He provided a test - a very trivial test. Can humans obey God because they love Him, not fully understanding all the implications of God's requirements? The tree was not essential for food or their happiness and God asked them to stay away. But there, Satan deceived Eve with arguments more clever than she had anticipated. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

In God's great love, he did not execute the death sentence immediately. Adam and Eve began to die that day, but they would live for many hundreds of years. But on the very day they sinned, a way was provided for them to eventually have eternal life. Only a hint was given at first: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). The rest of Scriptures amplify the plan of salvation by which the holy requirements of God's laws can be maintained while the penalty for our failure is paid in full by Christ himself. Satan continues to misrepresent the plan of salvation, claiming that Christ's death on the cross did away with the law, where in reality, Christ's death establishes the immutability of God's law. If the law could be done away with, Christ would not have had to die, paying our penalty. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

Therefore, when we see tragedy strike God's people, one of two reasons is behind it. First, God has set up a world of cause and effect. If it were not so, there would be chaos and no one would learn from their mistakes. Therefore, when someone gets careless and falls off a building, unless God intervenes in a miraculous way, the consequences await at the bottom regardless of the individual's standing before God. Therefore, bad things happen to good people due to cause and effect to maintain order in the universe. Similarly, good things happen to "bad people." He makes "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good" and sends "rain on the just and on the unjust"

(Matthew 5:45), demonstrating His good will to all in hope that they will be saved.

Secondly, and more important to the theme of this discussion, bad things happen to good people during the course of the conflict between Christ and Satan. A window on the spiritual world and how it is involved in human suffering is opened to us in the book of Job. Verse six of Chapter 1 states, “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.” Although we don’t know the particulars of this meeting, it is logical to think that perhaps the sons of God are the representatives of the worlds God has created. Adam, sometimes described as the son of God, would have been Earth’s representative, but his sin eliminated him from the councils of heaven. Apparently, Satan, claiming to represent the humankind that he had conquered, was allowed to attend. Satan (verses 9-11) makes the charge that the only reason Job lives for God is because God protects and blesses Job. As events unfold from there, we see God allowing Satan to cause Job’s suffering to test and perhaps purify Job.

Notice that Satan does the attack, but God is in control and allows things to happen for the fulfillment of his infinite purposes. One of God’s purposes is to reveal the sickness of Satan’s way of government. Another is to purify and prepare a people fit for eternal life. “All things work together for good for them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Nothing can happen to us that God does not know about and allows for our best good. Even the most terrible suffering can result in good on a cosmic scale, in a way we cannot discern because of our limited spiritual insights.

Sometimes God elects to deliver His people from the trials. The three Hebrew young men thrown into the fiery furnace were delivered from pain and destruction but not from the mental trauma. But Jesus himself was in the furnace with them to sustain their faith (Daniel 4:25). Other times, there is no deliverance, but Jesus himself is still there praying to the Father on our behalf. With regard to trials Peter was to undergo, Jesus said, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31, 32). Note that Jesus did not pray to deliver Peter

from the trial but that Peter might be sustained through the trial. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with thee” (Isaiah 43:2).

It is obviously in God’s purposes to use trials as His instruments of instruction. Man was created in the image of God. But when man sinned, the image of God was replaced with the image of Satan. Mankind is inherently selfish. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Man needed a different instructor than was originally planned. “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Genesis 3:18). God didn’t curse the ground in a fit of rage, but in His infinite and loving wisdom, provided for mankind just what the sickness of sin needed: trials and tribulation.

If we understand this great controversy between Christ and Satan, we can have faith that all things do indeed work together for good and we, like Paul and Peter, can rejoice in trials and sorrows:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4:12, 13)

6. God Loves Us

One of the most difficult things for me to accept is that God loves us. The Bible emphasizes the love of God perhaps more than any other concept. Thus, I can accept it intellectually, but making it a reality in my life is much more difficult. It sometimes seems to me like humans loving an amoeba or something.

In order to grasp the idea, I think about why we were created in the first place. It certainly was not for slave labor or any such thing. I believe that God wanted us for fellowship; that is why He created us in His image. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). Being in the image of God would mean a lot more than any physical resemblance, which I suspect is minimal to none. I think it means we have the ability to think, to plan, to do, and to even create (procreate). We were made with an ability to appreciate God, a spiritual nature in tune with that of the Father. We were also made with a social nature that would enjoy communion with God. Consequently, God loves us.

The relationship with God was broken after mankind rebelled against Him, but His love remained, as evidenced by the plan launched to redeem mankind back to the original state. It is the extent of this plan of salvation that testifies of the love of God. As I read the Bible, I can see that all the resources of heaven are engaged in our salvation and that it is the primary focus of divine activity until the end result is achieved. The ultimate demonstration of the love of God is that He humiliated Himself to live as a human, suffer reproach, and die the death that was ours.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8.)

The Apostle Paul said, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or

nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom 8:35). The answer to that is no one, nothing, even if I have trouble understanding it.

7. It Matters How We Live

There is a belief among some Christians that the Old Testament is about obedience and that the New Testament is about love and forgiveness (see Chapter 3), meaning we do not have to be concerned about obedience. However, that is far from true. There is ample evidence from the Old Testament that God is loving and forgiving. The sacrifices of lambs in the Old Testament are an object lesson teaching the ancient Hebrews about the saving grace of the yet future Lamb of God. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Furthermore, in the New Testament, Jesus tells us, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). We are told in the last days that God’s people will “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). There are well over 100 verses in the New Testament that describe obedience as a walk: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:6).

There is compelling evidence that it matters to God how we live. He knows our weaknesses, but wants us to surrender our will to His power to change our lives. Sometimes this can be a great struggle. It is hard enough for me to resist the sin of gluttony. Imagine the struggle for something more intense. However, if we resist and fail, He has a remedy:

- 1 John 2:1 – My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
- 1 John 1:8-9 – If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As important as obedience is to our spiritual life, obedience is not why God saves us. Salvation is a gift from God, based on the

substitutionary death of Jesus. It is by faith alone. We obey because we are saved, not saved because we obey.

8. It Matters What We Believe

Salvation does not so much depend on what we know but who we know. Knowledge does not save us; accepting the death of Jesus to substitute for our own deserved death saves us. There are examples in the Bible of people who knew next to nothing about God and His ways, but were saved. For example, a pagan harlot in the city of Jericho was saved by faith in that she perceived that the God of Israel was the true God. At great risk, she acted to help God's people. "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31).

In Romans 2:14, 15, the Apostle Paul explicitly tells us that there are situations where those who know little about God live in accordance to the light they have and receive acceptance. On the other hand, Jesus tells (Matthew 5:20) about Pharisees, who are experts on God's law but do not measure up. While important, knowledge does not save us.

It is God's will that everyone be saved, "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" (2 Peter 3:9). However, He can only trust those who surrender to Him to possess eternal life. Accordingly, it is more a matter of the heart than the brain. "And you will seek Me and find *Me*, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

But there is a different side of this argument. Knowledge of God's will gives us many advantages. It protects us from making horrific mistakes. It improves the quality of our lives. Most importantly, it saves us from Satan's deceptions and gives us insights into God's character so that we can learn to be more like Him and to fellowship with Him. (Consider 2 Timothy 2:15 and 2 Peter 1:4-7.)

My advice is to learn all you can about God's ways. Not only will you find it intellectually satisfying, your life will be enriched and you will be closer to God. Failure to do so indicates a lack of interest in God's ways and inconsistent with the admonition in Jeremiah 29:13 that we have quoted several times. If we do not seek for God, how can He save us?

9. Jesus Is Coming Again

As we discussed in Chapter 5, there is a lot of misery in the world. Many people yearn for relief; some cannot deal with life and choose to end it. Even of those who appear successful, many have only a façade of happiness. Others are oblivious, not letting themselves have deep thoughts that could lead to dissatisfaction. I do not believe that anyone realizes how miserable this life is (in spite of many joys along the way), given that this is all we know. Paul said, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2:9). Paul also recognized that everything suffers the effects of sin in this world, “For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain” (Romans 8:22).

There really is something better. Jesus promised,

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:1-3)

Billy Graham made the triumphant phrase famous, “Jesus is coming again!” We should rejoice at that. This is, perhaps, the grandest theme of all the Bible.

When, after His resurrection, Jesus ascended from Earth to return to heaven, angels told the watching disciples,

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into

heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

There are many such promises. The second coming is even foretold in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, ancient Hebrews often mixed up the promises of the glorious second coming with those of His humble first coming.

So, why is Jesus coming again? It is to be the culmination of the plan of salvation. It brings to a halt all the misery and ushers in an eternal life of joy. “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). Those who died in the faith of Jesus (including those in Old Testament times who accepted the promise of salvation) will be resurrected. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Those faithful who are living will also join Jesus, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And, thus, we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At that time we become immortal, “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15: 52-53)

Jesus warns us that there will be false second comings,

Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Matthew 24:23-27)

Therefore, it is important that we understand how he will be coming.

We have seen that in Matthew 24, Jesus describes His coming as lightning flashing across the sky. In Acts 1, above, we saw that Jesus will come in like manner as He ascended, that is, with a cloud of angels. In 1 Corinthians 15, above, we saw that a trumpet will sound and the archangel will shout. The second coming will not be a secret event.

Now when will Jesus be coming? That is a study that requires a very large amount of background information. However, the most important point is “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt 24:36). Nevertheless, Jesus says we can know when it is near. Given how insane the world has become in the last few years, I believe it is very soon. It is more important to be ready than to know when He is coming.

10. God Has a True Church

At His ascension, Jesus left on this Earth a glorious gift, essentially a physical thing, that many Christians take for granted – the church. The church is the mechanism by which salvation is brought to humanity and through which heavenly principles are taught. Without the church, the proclamation of the gospel might proceed as an individual effort, without benefit of pooled resources or organized effort, inefficiently advancing the cause of God.

In God's infinite wisdom, He foresaw a method of reaching a fallen race, a method that embraces the principle of "laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). The union of the divine and human in the Son of Man (wholly God and wholly Man) is mirrored by the union of the divine and human in the Word of God (inspired by God, penned by men). In similar fashion, God chooses to work through the very ones he is trying to save to reach yet other sinners. Therefore, we see in the institution of the church, the same divine pattern uniting the divine and the human. Such an understanding of the church should cause us to give careful consideration to our relationship to the church.

God's Word provides ample instruction on the nature and mission of the church and uses intriguing imagery to impart principles on how we should relate to the church. Three examples of this imagery with respect to the church are (1) the body of Christ, (2) the bride of Christ, and (3) the temple of the Holy Spirit. Imagery is a powerful communication tool that Jesus often employed when making a critical point. If God selects imagery to make a point, it must be important; we should pay particular attention.

The Body of Christ: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:27). See also Ephesians 1:22,23, Ephesians 4:4-6, 11, 12, 16. The picture of the church as a body, with Christ as its Head, teaches profound principles in a mere millisecond of thought. In any body, the head, the center of thought and self-awareness, controls the body. As the various parts of a healthy body should only respond to reasoned stimuli from the head, the church should not attempt to function independently from its Head. As an organic body serves no purpose without a head, so the church serves no purpose without its Head. Therefore, it follows that the Christian church exists to serve the cosmic purposes of our Creator,

Jesus Christ. One of those purposes is the proclamation of the gospel message.

The Bride of Christ: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). See also Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 21:2. Jesus and the church are betrothed to each other. Accordingly, Jesus loves the church. He loves her so much that he gave himself for her - even though His beloved is not entirely clean. The fact that the church needs sanctification and cleansing does not disqualify it from being the recipient of Jesus’ love. Rather than reject his bride for her faults, he is actively working with the church to make it a “glorious church, not have spot or wrinkle.”

Temple of the Holy Spirit: “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. ... Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:9, 16). See also Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-6, 2 Corinthians 6:16,17. Any building of quality must be designed such that all the parts are compatible and the function of the building may be achieved. Various building trades organizations have developed detailed specifications that architects and engineers follow when designing a building. The building contractor constructs the building in accordance with the plans, often under the supervision of the architect-engineering firm, which ensures conformance to the plans. In something as complex and important as building construction, very little is left to chance.

Similarly, God’s building, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, His church, is carefully designed and constructed, “being jointed together” with infinite skill and interest. The foundation, especially the cornerstone, is most carefully laid. In accordance with plans drawn up before the foundation of the world, God constructed this building for a noble purpose - to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

Because “the temple of God is holy,” we are not to defile it by treating it with disrespect. Our behavior within the institution of the church, even the attention we give the physical structure, and especially our conversation about it should reflect the honor due it as God’s house. Although the church may disappoint us, it is an object of Christ’s supreme regard. We can honor it by paying our tithe,

serving faithfully in offices for which we are selected, praying for its success, respecting its members, and living in accordance with its principles.

I have described the true church. The Book of Revelation contrasts a pure or true church with a corrupt, false church. The true church “follows the Lamb wherever He goes” (Revelation 14:4) and “keep the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). The false church, called Babylon, has professed believers, but it has false doctrines, blasphemes God, and uses the power of government to force false worship (Revelation 13, 17, 18). Thankfully, in the last days, God calls His true believers out of Babylon.

11. Worship of God Is Important to Us and to God

Given the Bible does not define worship, it is a little difficult for us to define it. Nevertheless, there are plenty of Bible statements about worship that give us a sense of what it means. Worship can be both an individual activity and a more formal, communal function. King David said in Psalms:

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. (Psalms 95:6-7)

In this statement we see the need to recognize His lordship by humbling ourselves before Him. Is it necessary to bow down or kneel? I do not know; that could have been a cultural feature. Nevertheless, it is clear we should have a reverent and humble attitude before the Creator of the universe. It is common in Christianity for worshipers to kneel during prayer, but not for other aspects of worship.

Again, the Psalmist says:

Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. (Ps 96:8-9)

We see the element of praise that David so often mentions in his writings. It was part of the Law of Moses to bring a sacrificial offering to worship. Even today, we bring tithes and offerings to worship. We should also bring the offering of our own bodies (in a spiritual sense) and our will.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that

you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

The issue of worship is repeated, perhaps, hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It was the single greatest issue of obedience between God and His people. Two of the 10 Commandments are explicitly about worship. The Old Testament sanctuary, with its many types of services and offerings, were about worship. One of the most climactic events in the Old Testament, Elijah on Mount Carmel, was about worship (1 Kings 18).

The prophet Isaiah (Chapter 6) was taken to the sanctuary in heaven, where God's throne is. Here, by beholding God, he experienced true worship where he suddenly recognized his true nature. Then, his character was reformed. So, in those verses we see the primary purpose of worship. It is not because God is a narcissist, needing attention. It is by beholding God and communing with Him, connecting with Him at a very deep spiritual level, that we are changed. We see God and connect with His mind, resulting in recognition of our great need. We surrender to His will, and He cleanses us, writing His law on our hearts. Indeed, the Apostle Paul says that we are changed as we behold God (2 Corinthians 3:18).

My Personal Testimony

I was raised in a family that was moral, in which I learned moral principles that have served me well throughout my life. I was taught a few things about Jesus, but was also infused with Eastern religious ideas that focused on saving ourselves from ruin by self-improvement. The idea of a personal God was not prominent. Belief in the Bible was not emphasized; other religious works of Eastern religions were just as valuable. As long as a person attempted to grow the divine spark within us, everything was fine. It was a spiritual life, but focused on self-effort, mostly unconnected to what God has done for us. I do not regret what I learned, but I also missed out on a great depth of religious experience.

I was exposed to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God when I wanted to marry someone who would not marry me unless I was a Christian. I was 19 years old. Her pastor, a godly man, spent a lot of time with me teaching Bible principles. At the completion of weeks of instruction, he asked me what I thought. I said that what I was just taught was intellectually satisfying, internally consistent, and uplifting. However, I also said that it was all based on belief in the Bible, something I was unprepared to accept.

I tried again when I was a soldier at Fort Lewis, Washington. I called the local pastor asking to be baptized. Again, this was not from conviction but because I wanted to get married. He insisted that I attend evangelistic meetings then being held. In these meetings, I learned the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. I learned about salvation through Jesus. I learned of the love of God and the glorious plan He has to build our characters and give us a life of joy and satisfaction lasting for eternity. The night the cross was discussed, my resistance was broken, and I surrendered my heart to Jesus. (By the way, she married me!)

In subsequent times, I have not always been as faithful as I should have been. Sometimes my faith has been weak, the surrender of my will to His inadequate. Nevertheless, He has not let go of His hold on me. Today, I am more earnest than ever in surrendering to His will, in seeking the righteousness of Jesus, in desiring to know His ways and do His will. I believe the end is very near, so, I am very much hoping to live to see Jesus' coming. It is possible that the second

coming is more in the future than I think, but I want everything to happen in accordance with His time table.

Living the Christian life has been the greatest blessing. It has saved me from disastrously bad decisions. It has blessed me with a richer life, full of positive experiences. I have had better health and greater prosperity. I have had better children, who are continuing to be a blessing to this day. (Most people have mountains of heartache with their children.) I have had a better marriage. I have enjoyed seeing God's Providences working in my life. Christianity has given me a more peaceful life. Even my older years are more enriched. In more recent times I have finally started to overcome lack of patience and discontent (still a way to go, I am afraid).

Perhaps best of all, I have the blessed hope that the culmination of the plan of salvation is near and we will be given an eternity of experiences such that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2:9). Jesus is coming again! I pray that my family can receive all the same benefits.

For Further Study

The following resources may be useful to you for deeper study.

- A complete Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament – Any version will do, except some of the strange versions like ones produced by feminists or homosexuals. My opinion is that the King James Bible or the New King James Bible is the best, but it really does not matter, unless you are a Bible scholar.
- The best book ever on the mechanics of salvation is *Steps to Christ*, by E. G. White.
- The best book on the life of Christ is *Desire of Ages*, by E. G. White.
- I have been helped by the following websites:

<https://www.bibleprophecytruth.com/>
<http://www.bibleinfo.com/en>
<https://www.amazingfacts.org/>
<http://timeline.biblehistory.com/home>

Also, type any verse or Bible chapter citation into a search engine and select Bible Gateway.