

The Best Way To Know God's Will



Jack Michael

**THE BEST WAY
TO KNOW GOD'S WILL**

by
Jack Michael

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INTRODUCTION

God gets blamed for a lot of things he didn't do, and he doesn't get credit for a lot of things he does do!

This is true because most people don't know God. Therefore, in their attempts to explain him, they misrepresent him.

God is frequently misrepresented on television and in the movies. They usually portray God as mean, and almost always portray him as indifferent to our problems! The general attitude is reflected in the sarcastic question, "*Is anybody up there?*"

Furthermore, television and the movies normally portray God's servants as weak, dishonest, and inopportunistly meddling in people's lives.

And, they portray those who believe in God as ignorant, or wasting their time.

With television and movies consuming our time, and acting as our standard for understanding God, it's no wonder people don't know God.

Oddly enough, there are quite a few Christians who don't know God very well. They seem to get all confused about what God did, and did not do!

Is there a way that we can "*zero in*" on the character and nature of God, and therefore clearly see and understand his will and purposes?

The answer is YES, and that is the purpose of this book.

As you continue reading, I believe you will begin to see and understand God in a refreshing, new way. Being more specific, I am talking about: The Way, The Truth, and The Life.

And remember, God refers to himself as, I AM (Exodus 3:13-14 and John 8:58). Don't just see him as the God who used to be. Don't limit your understanding of him as the God who is going to be. He is I AM; he is available to help you right now.

The Bible frequently uses the word, BEHOLD, which means, "*Look and see, observe, take notice.*"

So, I am also saying to you, LOOK; SEE the will of God applying to TODAY'S circumstances in your life.

He is the God, "*...who does not change like shifting shadows.*" (James 1:17 NIV).

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." (2 Peter 1:2).

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Throughout the book, there are words or phrases enclosed in parentheses within a quoted portion of scripture. Although these words and phrases are not an actual part of the scripture, they are in fact, explanations or emphases derived from word studies of the scriptures.

**THE BEST WAY
TO KNOW GOD'S WILL**

CHAPTER ONE

Where Do We Look?

Most of us have struggled at one time or another, trying to figure out God's will on a particular matter.

Sometimes, it may seem like God is, "*Way up there; somewhere,*" and he has given us this big, black, complicated book known as the Bible. Now, somehow, we are supposed to search through this book, and try to determine the will of God on the issues of life.

It is easy to thumb through the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and discover all sorts of horrible things. Then, we start wondering if it was God's will for those things to happen?

Some of those atrocious stories in the Old Testament may have left you with the question in your mind, "*Just what is God really like?*"

Well, this type of problem doesn't exist in today's world only. Listen to what Jesus said to the Pharisees, supposedly the most religiously informed people of his day:

"...You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." (John 8:19).

Maybe you wonder why God doesn't clear up all this confusion about his will?

Perhaps he should leave Heaven for a little while, come down here to earth, lead us about by the hand, and show us his will firsthand.

If those are your thoughts, I have good news for you. God did leave Heaven for a little while. He came down to earth, people followed him about, and he showed them the will of God firsthand.

HIS NAME WAS JESUS!

Listen to this very clear explanation of what happened, taken from John 1:18, The Amplified Bible:

"No man has ever seen God at any time; the only unique Son (Jesus), the only begotten God, Who is in the bosom [that is, in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him – He has revealed Him, brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him, He has made Him known."

From the above scripture, listen again to how precisely Jesus Christ has revealed God to us:

- (1) He has declared Him,
- (2) He has revealed Him,
- (3) He has brought Him out where He can be seen,
- (4) He has interpreted Him,
- (5) He has made Him known.

Wonder no more about the will of God. Just open your Bible to the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and walk around with Jesus, listening to, and observing the will of God firsthand.

You see, the will of God, which was demonstrated through the earthly ministry of Jesus, is also God's will for you, right now, today.

Hebrews 13:8 reminds us:

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

When I first entered the ministry, I was on the staff of a large church in Honolulu, Hawaii. One of my responsibilities was to teach a *"New Christian's Training Class."*

Sometimes, those new believers would complain to me, *"Pastor Jack, I can't understand the Bible."* Then, I would discover that they were trying to read from the book of Leviticus.

So, I would instruct them to start out by reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Some of the more energetic students might ask, *"After that, what should we read next?"*

I would reply, *"After that, you should read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John!"*

Why did I do that? Because, the most important thing for those new Christians (*and for old Christians too*), was to become thoroughly acquainted with Jesus.

This is where to look. The best way to discover, and to understand, and to know God's will, is by looking at Jesus; listening to his words, and observing his actions.

"LOOKING UNTO JESUS, the author and finisher (or, originator and perfecter) of our faith...." (Hebrews 12:2).

CHAPTER TWO

If You Have Seen Me

Let me prove that the earthly ministry of Jesus is the best way to know God's will. Listen to these selective phrases from the first three verses of the book of Hebrews:

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...The Son is the...EXACT REPRESENTATION of His being...." (NIV).

From the Amplified Bible, let's magnify the fact that Jesus Christ is God's EXACT REPRESENTATION, "...*He is the perfect imprint and very image of [God's] nature....*"

Jesus was not somewhat like God; he was exactly like God. He was not like God some of the time; he was like God all the time. Therefore, he perfectly and precisely showed us the will of God.

Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, once said to him:

"...Lord, show us the Father— cause us to see the Father, that is all we ask; then we shall be satisfied. Jesus replied, have I been with all of you for so long a time and do you not recognize and know Me yet, Philip? Any one who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say then, show us the Father?" (John 14:8-9 AMP).

In John 10:30, Jesus narrowed things down, and made it even clearer. He said:

"I and My Father are one!"

So, we can listen to the words spoken by Jesus, and HEAR the will of God:

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should SAY and what I should SPEAK." (John 12:49).

We can observe the actions of Jesus, and SEE the will of God. Jesus said in John 5:19:

"...Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, THE SON ALSO DOES in like manner."

Jesus summed up the matter in John 6:38 by declaring:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

What did Jesus mean when he said, *"...I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will...?"*

Even though Jesus Christ was, is, and will always be God, he lowered himself and took on the likeness of man. In his earthly, physical form, he was just like us, created with his own free will.

His body and mind got tired and weary, just like ours. He got hungry, thirsty, and sleepy, just like us. He had the opportunity to be depressed, as we do.

In fact, the Bible says he was tempted with the same temptations that we face:

"...but was in all points tempted as we are, YET WITHOUT SIN." (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus chose to do the Father's exact will, rather than yield to the weakness of his own fleshly will.

As a result, we can now take a journey through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; listening carefully to the words of Jesus, and closely observing his actions. In the process, we can hear and see the will of God in action.

This is: **THE BEST WAY TO KNOW GOD'S WILL.**

Chapter Three

The Battle Between Truth And Tradition

"Beware lest anyone cheat you (plunder you, and take you captive) through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." (Colossians 2:8).

According to the above scripture, there are certain things that can hinder you from being established in the faith. As a result, you could be cheated out of the blessings (*promises and provisions*) of God's word.

Those things that could cheat you are:

- (1) Philosophy,
- (2) Empty deceit,
- (3) The tradition of men, and,
- (4) The basic principles of the world.

In this chapter, we'll be focusing upon
THE TRADITION OF MEN.

Tradition is defined as: *"The handing down of information, beliefs, or customs by word of mouth, or by example from one generation to the next generation, without written instruction."*

Traditions are not always bad. Sometimes, good things are handed down from one generation to the next.

However, one type of tradition that is almost always bad is religious tradition, because it almost always clashes with the truth of God's word.

Unfortunately, many churches that call themselves Christian, embrace beliefs that are based upon religious tradition, rather than the truth of God's word.

In our opening scripture, the Apostle Paul warns us to beware of the tradition of men. He further emphasizes that what we believe, what we receive into our lives, and how we live, should be **ACCORDING TO CHRIST** (see Colossians 2:6-8).

In other words, our beliefs, our actions, our life of faith, should be based upon the teachings and examples set forth by Jesus, rather than religious tradition.

Religious tradition is dangerous. It can become powerful, and strongly influential in the minds of the people. Listen carefully to these next two statements:

(1) If religious tradition is allowed to flourish in the church, it will become (*in the minds of the people*) **EQUAL WITH THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD!**

(2) If religious tradition is not exposed and corrected, it will eventually **REPLACE TRUTH!**

In an upcoming chapter, I will share an illustration that proves the validity of those two statements.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders had the Old Testament scriptures available to them, but they had created, and propagated so many man-made, religious traditions, that much of God's word had become meaningless.

Frequently, Jesus would address this problem when speaking to the scribes and Pharisees. In Mark 7:8-9, he said:

"For laying aside the commandment of God, YOU HOLD THE TRADITION OF MEN – the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. And He said to them, all too well you reject the commandment of God, THAT YOU MAY KEEP YOUR TRADITION."

These Jewish religious leaders were violating the commandment of God which instructs us to honor our father and mother (see Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:2-3).

One way God expects us to honor our parents is to help them financially, if they need it.

The Pharisees and scribes, however, had created a tradition which allowed them to dedicate all their money to the temple, thereby releasing them from helping their needy parents.

It is questionable if they ever actually gave this so-called dedicated money to the temple. If they did, it's almost certain that they themselves eventually benefited from the money. Jesus explained the error of their ways:

"Making the word of God of no effect THROUGH YOUR TRADITION which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:13).

That phrase, "...OF NO EFFECT...", means: *"To be nullified, to become void or meaningless, and therefore, to be stripped of authority."*

Unfortunately, in many churches today, the word of God has also been made of no effect. It has become meaningless, and therefore stripped of authority, because of the exaltation of religious traditions.

As a result, God's people have been robbed of the benefits of God's grace. I'm speaking of blessings and benefits, which were clearly demonstrated to be God's will through the earthly ministry of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 warns us to take action against anything that would nullify the word of God in our lives:

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought TO MAKE IT OBEDIENT TO CHRIST." (NIV).

In some churches, religious tradition is so prevalent, the people don't know what to believe. I heard a humorous story, which unfortunately, all too often reflects the truth.

Two Christians were talking about a certain Bible subject. One of them asked, *"What do you believe?"* The other replied, *"I believe what my church believes."*

The first asked again, *"What does your church believe?"* The other answered, *"My church believes what I believe."*

The first asked a third time, *"So, what do you and your church believe?"* With a little agitation, the other replied, *"My church and I believe the same thing!"*

You may as well get prepared. As we continue in the upcoming chapters, I will be stepping upon some cherished religious traditions.

But together, let us lay aside religious traditions. Let us not be tricked by empty, powerless deceit. Let us be certain that what we believe, and what we receive into our lives, is according to the teachings and examples of Christ.

This is: THE BEST WAY TO KNOW GOD'S WILL.

Chapter Four

Is God In Control?

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, BUT YOU WERE NOT WILLING." (Matthew 23:37).

In the aftermath of a tragedy, or some type of disaster, I've heard religious people say, *"We know God is in control. He must have had a purpose for this."*

What a strange way of thinking. From the above scripture, it's rather obvious that when Jesus was here on the earth, he was not in control of everything.

The truth is, God is not in control of a lot of things for which he gets blamed.

During World War II, Hitler and Nazi Germany exterminated approximately six million innocent Jews. Assuredly, God was not in control of that holocaust, nor did he have a purpose for it.

Of course, God is ultimately in control of the final outcome of things. All the Bible prophecies are being fulfilled; the second coming of Jesus will occur; there will be a final judgement.

However, most of what happens in the world on a daily basis is not under God's control. All kinds of horrible, devastating, things happen every single day, and God has absolutely nothing to do with them!

1. SOMETIMES, DISASTERS OCCUR BECAUSE THIS WORLD (*the earth as well as the inhabitants*) IS UNDER A CURSE OF SIN. Romans 8:21-22 says:

"...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the WHOLE CREATION has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." (NIV).

2. SOMETIMES, DIFFICULT THINGS HAPPEN TO CHRISTIANS BECAUSE WE HAVE AN ADVERSARY.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (1 Peter 5:8-9).

3. SOMETIMES, TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN BECAUSE WE HUMAN BEINGS HAVE A FREE WILL.

Free will gives us the power to choose our own destiny. Not just eternal life, or eternal death decisions, but also the power to make daily choices. Unfortunately, the decisions people make are often motivated from evil rather than good.

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5).

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19).

To even suggest that everything which happens is under God's control is a serious indictment upon the character and nature of God!

Sometimes, Christians are hesitant to declare that God was in control of something, especially if it was something bad. So, they say, "*God allowed it.*"

Well, it's time to be straightforward and honest. Saying God allowed something is just a more polite way of saying God did it, and it was under his control.

Everything God allows is not his will. For example, God allows people to reject the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, and thus, go to hell. But, that is definitely not his will.

Technically, everything that happens to every individual, everyday, everywhere in the world, is allowed by God. However, most of what happens is not his will, nor does he have a purpose for it.

I have also heard Christians say, "*After we accept Jesus Christ, and become God's children, then everything God allows to happen in our lives is his will.*"

No, God will allow Christians to commit adultery, but that also is not his will.

I have heard others explain, "*Everything God allows to happen to his children must be his will, because if he did not want it to happen, he would intervene.*"

I disagree. Such reasoning does not line up with the earthly ministry of Jesus. Carefully notice the following incident which occurred when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane:

"Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the High Priest's servant, and cut off his right ear...." (John 18:10).

This was definitely not God's will. You do understand that Peter was not aiming for this guy's ear? Peter was aiming for his head, intending to kill him.

Yet, we would have to admit that God allowed it.

Furthermore, God was standing close by Peter, and he did not intervene.

The question is not: Is God in control?

The question is: Do you want God to be in control of your life?

If your answer to the second question is YES, listen carefully to the following:

FIRST: You must be willing for God to be in control. God created us with a free will, and he will not force himself upon us.

Rather than having the mentality that God is in control, and he allowed it, please understand that, **YOU MUST ALLOW IT.** You cannot be like those of whom Jesus spoke in our opening scripture:

"...How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, BUT YOU WERE NOT WILLING!" (Matthew 23:37).

SECOND: Somehow, we must be able to recognize what is, and what is not, God's will. Ephesians 5:17 says:

"...do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

I am convinced that the BEST WAY to understand God's will is to focus upon the earthly ministry of Jesus.

THIRD: You need to submit your life to God, and ASK HIM to be in control. Then, if you recognize something that is not his will, you have every right to resist it (see James 4:7).

If you practice these three things, God will gladly be in control.

Then, you won't be blaming God for all the bad things that happened in your life, assuming that he was in control.

You won't have to search for some unfounded explanation of why God allowed it.

You won't have to analyze God's so-called purpose for a tragedy or disaster that ruined your life.

Instead, because the Lord is truly in control, he will watch over his word to perform it in your life (Jeremiah 1:12 AMP). He will teach you, guide you, protect you, correct you, and bring about all the plans he has for your life.

Chapter Five

Acts of God

"For the Son of Man (Jesus) did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them...." (Luke 9:56).

Insurance companies, also the media, in their attempts to explain natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, or hurricanes, will frequently call them, *"An Act of God."*

Even Christians will sometimes refer to such things as, *"Acts of God."*

These things are not acts of God. When Jesus was here on the earth, I don't remember him causing any earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, or famine.

On the other hand, if we follow Jesus around through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and observe his actions, then we can see some real acts of God.

"And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing? Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still! And the wind ceased and there was a great calm." (Mark 4:37-39).

A number of times, I have ministered in the islands of Western Samoa. During a particular period of time, that nation was hit with a number of devastating hurricanes, or cyclones as they call them.

I overheard some of the Christians in Western Samoa trying to explain why God brought the storms. Some said God was trying to spiritually awaken Samoa. Others said it was the judgement of God.

However, the only example we have in the Bible is Jesus stopping a storm, not causing one!

I have even heard Christians say God sent the storm mentioned above in Mark, chapter four. If such was the case, then Jesus stood up in the boat, rebuked God, and commanded him to be still.

If another cyclone should approach the islands of Western Samoa, the Christians should call prayer meetings, and pray with spiritual authority that the storm would die at sea, or change direction. Jesus said:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, THE WORKS THAT I DO HE WILL DO ALSO; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." (John 14:12).

I realize that many Christians have not yet developed their faith and confidence in the Bible principle of spiritual authority, but at least they could gather together and pray a prayer of agreement, asking God to stop the storm. Jesus said in Matthew 18:19:

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, IT WILL BE DONE FOR THEM by My Father in heaven."

I have also heard people talking about nations, or regions that were experiencing severe famine. I have heard them try to explain that God caused the famine, saying it was his way of punishing the people.

What a strange way of thinking. Do you remember Jesus destroying crops, or taking food away from little children?

To the contrary, Jesus demonstrated that it is God's will for people to have more than enough to eat.

"Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way. Then His disciples said to Him, where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude? Jesus said to them, how many loaves do you have? And they said, Seven, and a few little fish. So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children." (Matthew 15:32-38).

Did you ever wonder what happened to those leftovers, "...seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left...?"

I don't know for sure, but very possibly, Jesus may have created a little extra, so that those with the longest journey ahead of them could take along a little snack.

Regardless, I feel certain that those seven large baskets of leftovers did not go to waste.

If you look closely at areas of the world where the land is experiencing famine, or the people are experiencing hunger, you will find a human cause.

In some areas, the people have cut down all the trees, literally turning fertile areas into unproductive deserts.

In others areas, people have decided that animal life is sacred, thereby denying the population a valuable source of protein.

In some cases, hunger and famine are caused by oppression. Governments withholding food from starving segments of the population, or those in power siphoning off the best products to sell at exorbitant prices on the black market.

Whatever the cause, famine is not an act of God, and it is not God's fault. However, Jesus instructed us to do something about famine, regardless of who the hungry people are:

"For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me...inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:35-36, 40).

In the book of Proverbs, God even tells us to feed our enemies, if they are hungry:

"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." (Proverbs 25:21).

Do you sincerely want to understand, and recognize what are, and what are not, acts of God? The answer is simple; look to Jesus as your example. Everything he did was an ACT OF GOD.

Chapter Six

God Is Not A Killer!

I have heard well meaning Christians make statements like, "*God took my baby,*" or "*God took my husband, or my wife!*"

Again, let us put aside the double talk, and be honest. Saying God **TOOK** someone is just a softer way of saying he killed them.

One grieving mother said God took her baby, because he wanted the baby to be with him. I am amazed at such reasoning. What kind of God do people think he is?

I believe God is also astonished with such reasoning. In Psalm 127:3, he says:

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward."

I must reemphasize that most people, including many Christians, don't know God very well. Therefore, they accuse him of all kinds of horrible things.

So, once again, we need to focus upon Jesus, who was, and still is, the best way to know God's will.

I don't remember Jesus killing babies, or young children!

I don't remember him killing men, and leaving wives without husbands, or children without fathers!

I don't remember Jesus killing anyone! To the contrary, let us recall a particular incident which occurred in the ministry of Jesus:

"And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to you, arise. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother." (Luke 7:12-15).

Rather than destroying life, Jesus, on a number of occasions, actually restored life to those who had already died.

Let me remind you again; Jesus Christ was the exact representation of God. He brought God out into the open, where he could be seen.

"Why then," you may ask, "do babies die? Why is life sometimes snatched away from people at the prime of their life?"

As I previously said, we are living in a fallen world. The world is under a curse of sin. Due to Adam's original sin, that curse was passed on to the entire human race:

"Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death as the result of sin, so death spread to all men, [no one being able to stop it or to escape its power] because all men sinned" (Romans 5:12 AMP).

Even though that scripture is primarily speaking of spiritual death, it is a fact that physical death, and other types of human suffering are also a consequence.

Some years ago, a man walked into a restaurant in California, and gunned down a number of innocent people, who were just trying to eat lunch. This killer said God told him to do it.

Let me strongly emphasize, *"The voice he heard, WAS NOT GOD'S VOICE!"*

I don't recall Jesus arming his disciples with swords and spears, and commanding them to slash their way through the market place, killing everyone in their path.

Once, when Jesus and his disciples were passing through Samaria, the people there did not welcome him:

"And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did? But He turned and rebuked them, and said, You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives BUT TO SAVE THEM...." (Luke 9:54-56).

Sometimes, Christians also ask, *"What causes such things as birth defects, mental retardation, and physical handicaps?"*

People of religious tradition like to use Exodus 4:11, and try to explain that God, in his great wisdom, choose these people to be special.

"So the Lord said to him, Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?"

Of course, God makes everything that is made. There is no other creator!

But, the Lord does not look around the world, and decide to give certain parents retarded or handicapped children, and then choose to give others normal children.

Actually, what God created was the capability for living beings to reproduce. Unfortunately, that process of reproduction is sometimes affected by the curse of sin.

But, praise God, Jesus demonstrated that the power of God is able to prevent, or even reverse the effects of the curse of sin!

If I was a young husband, and thus, the spiritual leader of my home, I would join with my wife in a prayer of agreement, and claim God's provisions for healthy children, both mentally and physically. Jesus said:

"...if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:19).

Only after we had thoroughly prayed, would we then come together sexually for the purpose of conceiving children.

"...all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God...blessed shall be THE FRUIT (or offspring) of your body...." (Deuteronomy 28:2, 4).

God is not the originator of death and destruction, suffering and torment. He is not in charge of such things as "crib death."

Psalm 68:19 says of the Lord:

"...Who daily loads us with benefits...."

Psalm 103 reminds us not to forget any of those benefits:

"Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."
(verses 3-5).

And, Jesus Christ, who still is the best way to know God's will, reminds us in John 10:10:

"The thief (Satan, or his agent) does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that THEY MAY HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY."

Chapter Seven

Jesus Healed Them All

"...great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all." (Matthew 12:15).

Healing is a subject that stirs up a lot of heated controversy in the body of Christ. That's odd, because healing was the most thoroughly demonstrated, clearly revealed thing Jesus did.

It is a fact that Jesus never turned anyone away, if they came in faith requesting healing. In every situation, except one, the Bible strongly indicates that Jesus healed everyone present who needed healing.

That one exception was in his own hometown:

"...He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them." (Mark 6:5).

The next verse tells us why he could heal only a few:

"And He marveled because of their unbelief...." (Mark 6:6).

Obviously, Jesus is not the problem. The Bible says he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We are the problem. Many Christians, who say they believe in healing, have not taken the time to develop their faith and confidence in God's word on this subject.

Unfortunately, a great many Christians have been wrongly, and strongly influenced against healing by religious tradition.

The clearest revelation of God's will on this matter is found in Mark 1:40-41:

"...a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, IF YOU ARE WILLING, You can make me clean. Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, I AM WILLING; be cleansed."

Despite this clarity of God's will, if you ask Christians if they believe God will heal them, most would reply, "*Well, I don't know, I hope so.*"

On the other hand, if you were to ask Christians if they believe God will forgive their sins, everyone would answer with a definite, enthusiastic, "*Yes!*" No one would say, "*I hope so.*"

I wonder why Christians do not have the same confidence in healing as they do in forgiveness?

I grew up in a small, conservative type church that was bound by a lot of religious tradition. We believed in being born again, for which I am thankful. After that, we were not very practical. We mostly believed in acquiring the knowledge of the Bible, rather than experiencing the power of the Bible.

One of the things we did not believe in was healing. We did not believe the gifts of the Holy Spirit were for today's church. We thought such things had passed away, or had been withdrawn by God.

I don't recall the exact dates, but when I was a child, a healing evangelist set up a revival tent on the fair grounds in my home town. Of course, nobody from our church went to the meetings, but I can remember people criticizing the evangelist, and saying that healing was of the devil.

On the other hand, if you got sick, the people in my church said it was of God. He evidently had some kind of purpose for us being sick. Perhaps he was using sickness to teach us something, or maybe he was trying to make us more humble?

Well, it's time to focus once again on the earthly ministry of Jesus. He taught his disciples a lot of things during his time here on the earth. He also corrected them quite frequently, which caused them to become more humble.

However, I don't recall Jesus making his disciples sick. He didn't even make Judas Iscariot sick!

One day, I discovered a passage of scripture that changed my life:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who HEALS all your diseases." (Psalm 103:2-3).

My childhood church fiercely believed God would forgive all your iniquities. But, please notice; God's benefit,

WHO HEALS ALL YOUR DISEASES,

is in the same scripture, and even in the same sentence as,

WHO FORGIVES ALL YOUR INIQUITIES.

We were deceived by wrong teaching, which was based upon the tradition of men. As a result, we actually forgot one of God's benefits!

Also, as an unfortunate result, people in my childhood church died, who could have been healed.

Interestingly, just after I discovered this benefit of healing, the devil tried to steal it from me. He dispatched one of those well meaning, but misled Christians, who said, "*Now, Brother Jack, you don't understand that scripture. It is not talking about the healing of physical diseases, but rather, the healing of our sin condition when we get saved.*"

I was depressed about the situation for a few days, then God impressed upon me to read the scripture again. It says: "*...who heals ALL your diseases!*" Do you know what ALL means?

In chapter three, I shared that religious tradition, if allowed to flourish in the church, will become (*in the minds of the people*) equal with truth.

Furthermore, if religious tradition is not exposed, and corrected, it will eventually replace truth.

This is what happened in my childhood church. We had Jesus making people sick, and the devil healing people.

But, for the truth, listen to this scripture on the following page from Acts 10:38:

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

In my childhood church, if our doctrine on healing was correct, one would have to figure out a time in church history where Jesus and the devil switched roles!

Well, thank God, Jesus and the devil did not switch roles. Satan is still the thief, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and Jesus is still the good shepherd, who came to give us abundant life!

Do you need healing? Listen to what Luke recorded about the ministry of Jesus:

"But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those WHO HAD NEED of healing." (Luke 9:11).

Cleanse your mind of religious tradition and doubt. Listen to the words of Jesus; observe his actions. Notice that he turned no one away who came in faith. So, reach out in faith, and pray! Jesus said:

"...whatever things you ask, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." (Mark 11:24).

Chapter Eight

God Does Not Hate Women!

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither MALE NOR FEMALE; for you are all one in Christ Jesus...for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him." (Galatians 3:28 and Romans 10:12).

With the rise of women's rights movements around the world, certain misguided, hard line feminists have wrongly declared that the Bible is a male dominated, male chauvinist book; therefore concluding that God hates women.

They back up their complaints with so-called, vitally important issues such as:

- (1) The Bible is written in the male gender,
- (2) Jesus chose men as disciples, and,
- (3) Eve is blamed for the fall of mankind.

So, we once again need to focus upon the earthly ministry of Jesus, and see what God really thinks about women.

Jesus set the example by initiating a conversation with a Samaritan woman. His disciples had gone into the city to buy food, and when they returned, the Bible says:

"...they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, What do You seek? or, Why are You talking with her?" (John 4:27).

In that culture, if you had any business to conduct, you talked with the men. You especially did not talk to a married woman, and if a woman was single, you talked with her father.

However, Jesus ignored their customs and traditions, and not only talked with the woman, but ministered to her.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. Very possibly, she was totally naked, because they said she was caught in the very act.

They set this woman in their midst, under the gaze of all those men. Then, they demanded to know what Jesus was going to do about the situation. The Law of Moses said she could be stoned.

Strangely, whenever adultery or fornication is committed, it's almost always the woman who is blamed. If a child is born out of wedlock, it's the girl's fault.

Where was the man? Why didn't they drag him before Jesus? Obviously, this woman did not commit adultery by herself.

So, Jesus responded to the situation:

"...he who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." (John 8:7).

After they all left, being convicted by their own conscience (*probably because of the same sin*), Jesus said to the woman:

"...where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you? She said, no one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8:10-11).

Rather than hating women, Jesus is the great liberator of women. Yes, It's true that God has set the husband as head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23). In God's order, someone must be in charge, but God never meant for wives to be oppressed.

I read about a Muslim, tribal people in Africa where the cattle are more important, and of greater value than the wives!

So, to all those women who claim the God of the Bible hates the female race, I invite them to investigate other religions. There, they will find some real oppression.

To the contrary, Jesus had a bunch of women who followed him, and helped with his ministry:

"And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities — Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and MANY OTHERS who provided for Him from their substance." (Luke 8:2-3).

Did you notice what the women were doing? They were supporting the ministry of Jesus, financially.

That is a sharp contrast to one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, *"...he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it."* (John 12:6).

I wonder if the disciples ever grumbled or complained, and asked, *"Who invited all these women to follow Jesus?"*

It is interesting that Jesus had to issue a personal invitation to the men, while the women apparently came along uninvited. I guess they just wanted to serve God.

I also find it enlightening that Jesus did not say, *"All you women go on back home where you belong."* Instead, he welcomed their participation.

And, do you remember what happened when Jesus was crucified? There were all these women at the cross (John 19:25-27).

I regret to report that all the disciples, except John – those who had previously proclaimed that they were willing to die with Jesus – had fled, and were now in hiding!

God seems to have a special, unique care for the female race. In Isaiah 54:5, as God was dealing with the nation of Israel, yet dealing with individuals as well, he said:

"For your Maker is YOUR HUSBAND, the Lord of hosts is His name...."

God created women. He is aware that they have special emotional needs. In the personal relationship that women can have with Jesus Christ as their Lord, there is the power to meet those emotional needs.

There is nothing immoral about this; God is simply saying to the single woman, to the widowed, to the divorced, and to the unfulfilled, *"Put your faith in me! Trust me to provide for those special needs: the need for security, the need for stability, and the need for approval."*

Satan, on the other hand, convinces women that God hates them. He does not want women to be secure and stable; he wants them to be emotional disasters.

Once, Jesus was visiting the home of a woman named, Martha. The Bible says:

"And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." (Luke 10:39).

Martha was anxious and distracted by all the preparations, and in Luke 10:40-42, she approached Jesus, and asked:

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me! Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better...." (NIV).

Jesus was not suggesting that serving was wrong, but Mary was after that security and stability that comes from sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening to his word.

Oh, by the way, we can't totally blame Eve for the fall of the human race. After all, she was deceived (*or tricked*). Adam, on the other hand, was not deceived. He just deliberately chose to disobey God!

Chapter Nine

God's Will Is Restoration

Jesus Christ is the God of restoration. Another preacher said it this way, "*God is the God of a second chance.*"

In many areas of so-called Christianity, there is a great lack of restoration. If someone falls into sin, or makes a mistake, there is no second chance.

Most everyone agrees that forgiveness of sin is available from God when someone falls. Beyond that, however, those who have made mistakes are often ostracized, criticized, rejected, shunned, driven out of the ministry, or expelled from their church.

Years ago, when I was in the United States Marine Corps, one of our neighbors in the military housing was a very spiritually frustrated, young wife and mother.

She had gone through a divorce, and had remarried another man. As a consequence, she was told by her priest that there was no hope for her.

She faithfully attended church, but was denied the privilege to receive communion. According to the teaching she had received thus far in her life, if one did not partake of communion, they were damned to hell.

I asked why she bothered to attend the church services? According to her priest, she was doomed anyway.

She had a bewildered look on her face. *"I don't know,"* she answered, *"I guess I'm just hoping something might change."*

I am pleased to tell you that something did change. She discovered from the Bible that God would forgive her, even though man would not forgive her.

Subsequently, she was also restored to a place of fellowship within the body of Christ through the ministry of a good, local church.

She told me later, *"I never knew those verses were in the Bible about forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration. My priest never showed me anything from the Bible. I just accepted his word that there was no hope for me, and I was doomed to hell."*

Jesus set the example for the ministry of restoration early in his ministry. While he and his disciples were passing through Samaria, he ministered to a woman who had been married five times, and she was currently living with a man to whom she was not married (see John 4:5-26).

In many churches today, the people would say, *"No way God could use such a wicked woman. Forgive her, yes, but God could never use her."*

Interestingly, John 4:39 says:

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, He told me all that I ever did."

Let us also consider the impulsiveness of Peter. He boldly declared that he would never deny Jesus, and was in fact, ready to die with him:

"...Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble...Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You! And so said all the disciples." (Matthew 26:33, 35).

Shortly thereafter, Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus, even swearing as much with an oath, and calling down curses upon himself. (Matthew 26:69-75).

Jesus had good cause to dump Peter. Why would he want to use a lying coward to preach the gospel?

But remember, Jesus is the God of restoration.

After Jesus was buried, certain women came to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. By that time, Jesus had risen, and an angel was sitting inside the empty tomb. He said to the women:

"...You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples— AND PETER— that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him...." (Mark 16:6-7).

On the day of Pentecost, after those 120 disciples of Jesus had been baptized with the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up, and preached a powerful sermon. So powerful and effective, that 3,000 people received Jesus as their Savior.

Jesus not only forgave Peter, he also restored him to his place as an apostle, and minister of the gospel.

There are too many men (*and women*) that were once ministers of the gospel, who are now doing other things, because they made a mistake.

Maybe they fell into the sin of sexual immorality. Perhaps they went through a divorce. Some may have lost the trust of people due to mismanaging money.

Regardless, restoration is still available through Jesus Christ; not just forgiveness, then being doomed to a life of mediocrity, unable to fulfill their potential in Christ.

Of course, for restoration to take place, there must be genuine repentance. There might be a requirement to submit oneself to spiritual discipline. Also, there could be a necessity to relocate, and start over, due to a loss of credibility.

But, be assured, God needs all of the laborers whom he has called. Satan may have tripped some of them, but God stands ready to forgive, and restore.

I can almost hear the frustration in the voice of Jesus when he said:

"...The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38).

There are those who are not ministers, but just regular Christians, who need to be restored back into fellowship.

Maybe they also fell into sin. Perhaps a young lady had an abortion. Regardless, there is both forgiveness, and restoration through Jesus Christ.

Once, when Jesus was teaching in parables, he said:

"...If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Matthew 18:12-14).

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Galatia, explained the scriptural principle of restoration:

"Brethren, if any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual – who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit – SHOULD SET HIM RIGHT AND RESTORE AND REINSTATE HIM, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also." (Galatians 6:1 AMP).

Many of those who need restoration; whether to a place of ministry, or just to a place of fellowship; also need healing of emotional hurts, which they experienced during their so-called fall from grace.

Figuratively, it has been sadly stated that the body of Christ is the only group of people who slay their wounded, rather than binding them up.

Sometimes, Christians are so deeply hurt, that bitterness is the most dominant emotion in their life. They say things like, *"So long as I live, I will never again set foot in that church, or any other church."*

Former ministers of the gospel, who were once powerful preachers of the word, are now so bitter and resentful, that they vow to never serve God again.

Some years ago, I met a Canadian man in the Kingdom of Tonga, an island nation in the South Pacific. He told me he had attended Bible school, and was once a Baptist preacher. You could hear sarcasm and bitterness in his voice as he described his past.

He had moved to Tonga, married a young, island girl, and was operating a little souvenir shop where he made island style jewelry and crafts.

Several times, I wanted to talk with him about the things of God, but he showed no interest. I heard that he and a companion got caught in a hurricane while sailing to American Samoa for supplies. As far as I know, no trace was ever found of them.

Let me repeat what Jesus said; **THE LABORERS ARE FEW.** I am certain that God does not want to lose any of them.

To the brokenhearted, I remind you, Jesus is in the business of healing as well as restoration. From Luke 4:18, He said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; HE HAS SENT ME TO HEAL THE BROKENHEARTED...."

Remember, Jesus is THE BEST WAY TO KNOW GOD'S WILL. We can clearly see from his earthly ministry that God's will is restoration. Not just forgiveness, not just cleansing of sin, but restoration.

Once, as Jesus was praying, he said:

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name (speaking of his disciples). Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition...." (John 17:12).

I believe Jesus grieved over that one loss, who was Judas Iscariot.

In conclusion, listen to the heart of God spoken through the Psalmist David:

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand." (Psalm 37:23-24).

Chapter Ten

Wars, and Other Politics

"And when you hear of wars and insurrections – disturbances, disorder and confusion – do not become alarmed and panic-stricken and terrified; for all this must take place first, but the end will not [come] immediately." (Luke 21:9 AMP).

Throughout the ages, rulers and other politicians have sought to employ the name of God. Wars have been waged, political compromises have been wrought, people have been oppressed; all in the name of Jesus Christ, and supposedly for his cause.

Most notable were the Crusades that were waged to free Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslims during the Middle Ages.

By the way, one should be cautious about referring to Israel as a HOLY LAND. Bible prophecies have been fulfilled there, and will continue to be fulfilled, but there are no spiritual or mystical qualities which would qualify the various religious sites as objects of worship! Jesus said:

"...You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve." (Matthew 4:10).

Getting back to our subject; in recent history, so-called Christians struggled for years against various sects of Muslims for control of Lebanon.

For decades there has been immense hatred, and almost a constant state of warfare between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

I submit to you that God is not involved with such conflicts. He did not cause them, he does not sanction them, and he does not appreciate the use of his name in them.

I further submit to you, that those who perpetrate such conflicts are not Christians. A genuine Christian is someone who has received Jesus Christ as Savior, and now, they are following after the example, and lifestyle set forth by Jesus.

During the time that Christ was here on the earth, Rome had conquered, and was oppressing Israel. Despite that fact, Jesus did not recruit a band of followers to overthrow the government. He was concerned with changing people's hearts, rather than gaining revenge, or recovering lost territory.

One of the disciples selected by Jesus was Simon, the Zealot (see Luke 6:15). A zealot, in those days, was committed to overthrowing the local, Roman installed government.

Had Jesus not selected this man as a disciple, he undoubtedly would have ended up in a war, waged in the name of God, to free Israel from Roman rule.

Instead, the influence Jesus had upon Simon turned him from an anti-government radical, and a potential destroyer of life, to one who was zealous for God.

Maybe God is not as concerned about politics as some so-called Christian zealots would have us believe?

Jesus never taught about overthrowing governments, seceding from governments, or even defying governments.

Jesus never held a political rally. He never organized a political protest.

Neither did he show preferential treatment to, nor fear of government officials. Once, the Pharisees warned Jesus to get away from Jerusalem, for Herod intended to kill him. His response:

"...Go and tell that fox [sly and crafty, skulking and cowardly], Behold, I drive out demons and perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish (complete) My course." (Luke 13:32 AMP).

At the same time, Jesus never taught his followers to disobey laws imposed by the government, though some were unjust.

Once, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. His answer clearly reflected his priorities. He took a coin that bore Caesar's image and inscription, and replied:

"...Render (or pay) therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21).

Yet, despite his lack of involvement in politics, there is one commandment which came forth from the mouth of Jesus, that supersedes every law of man. From Mark 16:15, Jesus said:

"...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Obviously, Jesus was more concerned about saving the PEOPLE of Israel, than he was about saving the NATION of Israel. Let us be careful to establish our priorities along the same lines!

Of course, government and politics are a part of every society, so it is to our benefit to elect godly officials.

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan." (Proverbs 29:2).

But, let us not forget that our primary responsibility is preaching the gospel to every creature, rather than protecting the so-called rights of every creature.

Unfortunately, wars and conflicts seem to eventually touch every society.

Oddly enough, America, which was founded in part by godly people seeking religious freedom, ultimately gained that freedom by war.

I wonder if some of those American Revolutionaries believed they were waging war in the name of Jesus Christ, and for his cause?

It is inevitable that wars will continue. Do not be deceived by a false, euphoric fantasy that someday, as people learn to love and respect one another, there will be peace on earth.

I believe our opening scripture reveals that there will be no peace on earth until Jesus himself returns, for it is he who will establish, and maintain the peace.

In conclusion, if God calls you to be a politician, serve with all your might. God desires a voice for his standards in every segment of society, including government.

If you willingly, or unwillingly find yourself in the armed forces, even in the midst of war, serve your country honorably.

Remember, if you are a child of God, you can trust in the Lord for protection and safety, even on the battlefield.

"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep (or guard) you IN ALL YOUR WAYS." (Psalm 91:11).

Furthermore, as Jesus commanded, let each of us continue to be SALT and LIGHT in the midst of a decaying society (see Matthew 5:13-16).

And, as 1 Timothy 2:1-4 instructs us, let us not neglect to regularly and fervently pray for those in authority.

But remember, keep your focus in the right direction, and your priorities in line with those of Christ himself. The blood that Jesus shed upon the cross was not for the preservation of the American way of life, nor the preservation of any other society. It was for the salvation of people's souls!

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." (Hebrews 13:14).

Chapter Eleven

A Word About Scripture Interpretation

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:20-21).

In the Bible, you can find some difficult passages of scripture. Difficult to interpret, and difficult to understand.

Because these passages are difficult to understand, quite often, it is also difficult to determine the will of God when dealing with these scriptures.

So, we are faced with a problem. We need something, or perhaps SOMEONE, to serve as a focal point; a standard to help us accurately interpret, and clearly understand the Bible, especially when we come across those difficult passages.

Without question, Jesus Christ is the best standard, or focal point to assist us in this matter. In chapter two, we learned that he was the EXACT REPRESENTATION of God (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The earthly ministry of Jesus perfectly revealed the character and nature of our Heavenly Father. His words and actions provide us with a standard which cannot be refuted.

With these thoughts in mind, let's look at a difficult portion of scripture.

First, we will look at this passage from the standpoint of religious tradition. Then, we will examine it from the standpoint of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

I am referring to the portion of scripture in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, that speaks of an experience in the Apostle Paul's ministry, which has come to be known as: PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH.

"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." (2 Corinthians 12:7).

I have heard quite a few interpretations of this scripture. Some are speculative; some are just personal opinion.

Unfortunately, the explanations I have heard usually portray God as the cause of suffering, and a God who is unwilling to deliver his people from trouble.

Religious tradition has suggested that Paul's thorn in the flesh was an incurable eye disease. This explanation comes from people speculating about several, obscure scriptures in the book of Galatians (see chapter 4, verses 13-15).

But notice, the above verse of scripture (2 Corinthians 12:7), specifically says the thorn in the flesh was, A MESSENGER OF SATAN.

That word, MESSENGER, is the Greek word, "*Angelos*," or ANGEL. The thorn in the flesh was an angel of Satan. In other words, A DEMON SPIRIT.

Religious tradition also tells us that it was God himself who gave this thorn in the flesh to Paul, supposedly because he was proud about having received an abundance of revelations.

But, notice once again, the Bible says the thorn in the flesh was an ANGEL OF SATAN, not an angel of God.

Religious tradition further tells us that God refused to remove this thorn in the flesh from the Apostle Paul's life. Thus, a man-made doctrine was created, that it's not always God's will to heal people.

In 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, Paul said:

"Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...."

Well, first of all, I have good news for you. When Paul pleaded with the Lord that this thorn in the flesh might depart from him, God did not answer, NO!

Listen again to God's answer, "...MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...."

God's grace is not just a higher level of tolerance, enabling us to endure suffering. God's grace is his favor upon our lives; his benefits and provisions for our every need. We're talking about salvation, deliverance, healing, protection, power, peace, etc.

Imagine that you were crying out to the Lord, asking for forgiveness and cleansing of sin. Then, imagine that God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Would God be saying, NO? Would he be saying, *"Sorry, but you'll have to keep the sin?"*

No, God would be saying, *"My grace is sufficient for the forgiveness and cleansing, and REMOVAL of your sin!"*

In the same way, God was reminding Paul that his grace was also sufficient to eliminate this thorn in the flesh. You see, one such provision of God's grace is the authority to get rid of demon spirits.

To prove this point, let us now examine the thorn in the flesh in light of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Remember, the thorn in the flesh was an angel of Satan, sent to buffet Paul (*to strike him with blow after blow*).

When Jesus trained his disciples, he did not say to them, *"Plead with me to stop those demonic attacks you will encounter."* Instead, Jesus instructed them to exercise authority over Satan and demons:

"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name. And He said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:17-19).

Notice carefully what Jesus said to his disciples, "...I GIVE YOU THE AUTHORITY to trample on serpents and scorpions...."

It was Paul's responsibility to get rid of the thorn in the flesh. Just as Jesus had previously trained his original disciples, and the additional 70, he had equally equipped Paul with authority over, ALL THE POWER OF THE ENEMY.

I will never forget my first experience in dealing with demonic power. It was a first-hand opportunity to prove that Jesus has indeed given us authority over all the power of the enemy.

A woman who was demon possessed was brought to my office. I was asked to cast the evil spirits out of her.

I was completely inexperienced, but I just began in the only way I knew to begin. I looked at that woman, and said, "*Satan, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ....*"

I was not exactly certain of what I was going to say next, but it didn't matter. As soon as I said the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, those demons went wild. It was just like one of those encounters with demons we read about in the Bible.

My flesh was feeling fear, intimidation, and weak all over. At the same time, I was amazed at the power I had over these evil spirits. They obeyed me, simply because I was using the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, God's grace is sufficient! His strength is definitely made perfect in our weaknesses. I can testify with Paul:

"...Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities (literally, weaknesses), that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

While we're at it, Let's also deal with those other religious traditions.

FIRST: God gave Paul the thorn in the flesh, because he was proud about having received an abundance of revelations.

God's answer, *"...My grace is sufficient for you..."*, rules out that possibility. God's answer obviously indicates that his grace was not only sufficient for Paul, but also AVAILABLE to him. James 4:6 says:

"...God resists the proud, but GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

Paul said an angel of Satan was sent to buffet him, *"...lest I be exalted above measure."* Literally, that means, *"To raise oneself over, excessively."*

That sounds like pride, but in reality, I believe Paul was given the revelations that he might raise himself over the contention of the Jews, the "leaven" of the Pharisees, the wiles of the devil, or anything else that sought to hinder the gospel.

These revelations likely pertained to the majesty of God, but also to the power of the gospel. Almost certainly, some of Paul's revelations are now available to us in the Epistles (see Galatians 1:11-17).

Obviously, it was Satan who gave Paul the thorn. He wanted to shut Paul's mouth, and hinder him from preaching the gospel.

So, exactly what kind of buffeting did this angel of Satan employ? I believe Paul explains it to us in the previous chapter:

"...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

SECOND: The religious tradition which is most damaging is the one that incorrectly uses the thorn in the flesh to suggest that it's not always God's will to heal the sick.

Listen very carefully; If you have been taught that healing is not always God's will, you can be assured that Satan will try to convince you, that you are one of those for whom it is not God's will.

Now, let me prove from the Bible, that this explanation of Paul's thorn in the flesh is incorrect. In Psalm 89:34, God reveals a part of his character and nature:

"My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips."

God's word does not change. People change, church doctrines have been known to change, but God's word remains the same. With that in mind, let's recall the scriptures from Psalm 103:2-3:

"...forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, WHO HEALS ALL YOUR DISEASES."

If the thorn in the flesh was a disease, and Paul prayed for healing, and God said NO; then God altered the word that had previously gone out of his lips.

Fortunately, the word of God does not change, and Hebrews 13:8 reminds us that Jesus also does not change:

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Getting back to our original purpose for this chapter, Jesus is the best way to know God's will. He is our best focal point, or standard to assist us in the interpretation of the scriptures.

And, listen to this; in the future, when you come across those difficult portions of scripture, please remember, **JESUS WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED.** John 1:2 says:

"He was in the beginning with God."

Go to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Search diligently into the earthly ministry of Jesus. Almost definitely, something he did, or something he said will provide you with understanding for that difficult passage of scripture. Remember, Jesus said to the Pharisees:

"...You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." (John 8:19).

But, to his disciples, and to us, he said:

*"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on **YOU KNOW HIM and HAVE SEEN HIM.**" (John 14:7).*

Chapter Twelve

The Judgement Of God

In the first eleven chapters, we have repeatedly observed the grace and mercy of God being richly manifested through the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

We have listened to Jesus teach the truth. We have watched him heal the sick, raise the dead, feed the hungry, command storms to be silent, and deliver people from destruction.

Through Jesus, we have observed the very character and nature of God, and in the process, we have discovered his will on many important issues of life.

Yet, I'm sure there are still questions in your mind. *"What about such things as the Genesis flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? And, what about those times in the Old Testament when the Lord commanded his people to engage in war against other nations?"*

Were such events acts of God, and if so, do they not also reflect the character and nature of God?

The answer, of course, is yes. Those times and events did reflect the character and nature of God, BUT IN JUDGEMENT.

God's wrath, and ultimately his judgement are also a part of his character and nature, but a reluctant part:

"For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life...." (Psalm 30:5).

In theological terminology, the age in which we are now living is often referred to as: *"The dispensation of grace."*

Dispensation is not so much a period of time, as it is a mode, or manner in which God deals with mankind. Currently, that mode is grace, because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Thus, the judgement of God is being held back, temporarily.

However, another time of God's judgement is drawing nearer. Please do not be deceived about this matter. 2 Timothy 4:1 identifies the time of this judgement:

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead AT HIS APPEARING and His kingdom."

Certain aspects of the judgement of God are ongoing, thus constantly at work in the world:

"For the wrath of God IS REVEALED from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18).

This is what I would call the INDIRECT judgement of God. Specifically, reaping the consequences of disobeying the laws, or principles of God's word.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." (Galatians 6:7).

I believe there are also rare occasions, even in this dispensation of God's grace, when the DIRECT judgement of God halts the schemes of men; especially if those schemes are aimed at destroying the work of God.

Such was the case in Acts, chapter 5, verses 1-11, when Ananias and Sapphira agreed together to test the Spirit of God.

Perhaps you are thinking, "*The judgement of God was necessary in that case, because Ananias and Sapphira were being used by Satan in an attempt to undermine the integrity of the EARLY church.*"

Let me say it a bit stronger, "*Ananias and Sapphira were being used by Satan in an attempt to undermine the integrity of the ONLY church!*"

Satan was trying to destroy the church at its inception. The swift, direct judgement of God was indeed necessary at that time.

However, what I am speaking about in this chapter is an imminent, DIRECT judgement, when every human being will literally stand before God.

This judgement will be executed by the same Lord Jesus Christ, whose words and actions previously helped us recognize the will of God. Revelation 19:11-16 describes his return:

"...I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness HE JUDGES and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called The Word of God.

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

This time when Jesus comes, there will be no crucifixion. No one will spit on him; no one will pluck the beard from his face. This time, he's coming for judgement!

Christians will face God in judgement:

"...we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ...each of us shall give account of himself to God." (from Romans 14:10, 12).

This judgement of believers will not be one of condemnation. Thankfully, our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus.

Yet, I strongly suggest that you take this judgement seriously. The judgement seat of Christ will be an important time of accountability; a time of receiving, or failing to receive rewards, according to the work we have done for the kingdom of God.

Fearfully, there is also a judgement for those who reject God, and reject his Son, Jesus as their Savior. Revelation 20:11-15 describes this judgement:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, SMALL and GREAT, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

Did you notice what the scriptures say, *"...I saw the dead, SMALL and GREAT, standing before God...?"*

Those who are great in this world: the rich, the famous, the beautiful, the athletic, the popular, the talented, the influential; they will all stand before God in judgement.

Kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers will give an account of how they governed.

People who cunningly lived behind a shroud of fantasy will be unmasked. The real person will be revealed.

Those who appeared respectable on the outside, but actually lived clandestine lives of corruption, will be uncovered.

Those who claimed to be servants of God, but were not, will answer to the very God whose name they used to mislead and defraud others.

People who literally dedicated their life to fighting against God, and desperately trying to disprove his existence, will stand before their creator in shame.

Those who were unjustly acquitted for crimes they committed will not be judged by a flawed system of justice. This time, they will face the Lord, the righteous Judge.

There will be no arrogant, or defiant people screaming that their constitutional rights have been violated.

There will be no manipulative lawyers persuading the judge, or altering the outcome through so-called technicalities in the law. This judgement will be characterized by truth.

And, there will be no question as to, "*What is truth?*" Everyone will literally be judged by words which proceeded from the mouth of Jesus.

Listen carefully to the following scriptures; words which were directly spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ:

"...if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him— THE WORD THAT I HAVE SPOKEN WILL JUDGE HIM in the last day." (John 12:47-48).

Sadly, there will be no grace at this judgement.

Chapter Thirteen

Be Reconciled To God

*"...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: **BE RECONCILED TO GOD.**" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20 NIV).*

It is essential that you understand the following fact. Ultimately, **JESUS CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD TO DIE!**

Jesus was not just a good person who did some wonderful, humanitarian things, but unfortunately lost favor with the political and religious powers, and then unwillingly lost his life.

In John 10:18, Jesus himself speaks, concerning his own life:

"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

Throughout this book, we have gained a clearer understanding of God's will by listening to the words of Jesus, and by observing his actions.

We have also come to realize that God is a good God, who desires to teach us his ways, heal our sicknesses, provide for our needs, and deliver us from trouble.

However, if we fail to understand the ultimate purpose for which Jesus came into this world, then we have missed the most essential part of God's will.

Again, Jesus himself, during his earthly ministry, spoke these familiar words:

"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." (John 3:16).

The ULTIMATE PURPOSE for which Jesus Christ came into this world, was to die for our sins, that we might be reconciled to God.

To make sure that our understanding is accurate, let's pause here, and look at a few definitions.

SIN - A missing of the mark. As it applies to man's relationship to God, sin is disobedience of, or a violation of God laws or commandments.

RECONCILIATION - To change from enmity (*or hatred*) to friendship.

Next, let's consider a biblical fact about sin, and on the following page, a fact of reality about mankind prior to reconciliation with God.

According to the Bible, sin separates us from God, and no matter how hard we strive for spiritual enlightenment, or spiritual attainment, we cannot meet up to God's standards:

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2).

"For all have sinned and FALL SHORT of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

Before a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, they are at war with God. They hate God, they hate the Bible, they hate God's laws and commandments, they hate Christians, they hate churches, they even hate emblems that represent Christianity.

This is why reconciliation is needed between God and man.

I have good news; God has taken the initiative in this matter, and offered his hand of friendship. He did so by sending Jesus to die for our sins, so that the separation between God and man can be erased.

Now, we humans are responsible to change our attitude of hatred toward God, and accept the provision he has made.

Romans 6:23 says:

"For the wages of sin (what we earn, and what is due us) is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God could have required us to pay for our own sins, but because of his great love, he came himself in the person of Jesus Christ, and paid the price for our sins.

That is the gift of God spoken of in the above scripture. The death of Jesus for the forgiveness, and cleansing of our sins.

In his death, Jesus literally shed his blood for us. For reconciliation to occur, one must accept this provision. Only the blood of Jesus can wash away sin.

From Ephesians 1:7, and Revelation 1:5, we read about the importance of the blood of Jesus:

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

...To Him (Jesus) who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

God's forgiveness, the cleansing of sin, reconciliation with God, and subsequently, eternal life in God's presence is free. However, you must accept this free gift. It will not be forced upon you.

This is why the Apostle Paul, from our opening scriptures, pleads with the human race, **"...BE RECONCILED TO GOD!"**

Otherwise, you will pay for your own sins, by your own death, and as a result, be eternally separated from God.

Now, listen carefully to these words:

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that EVERY TONGUE SHOULD CONFESS that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11).

You can bow your knee to the Lord Jesus Christ right now. You can confess (*or acknowledge*) him as Lord, right now.

Under these circumstances, Jesus will become your Savior. His blood, shed upon the cross, will become the cleansing agent for your sins, and you will be reconciled to God.

On the other hand, if you reject Jesus Christ, you will still bow your knee to him. You will still confess that he is Lord, but under entirely different circumstances.

You will do so with Jesus Christ as your Judge, not as your Savior!

So, like the Apostle Paul, I also implore you, **BE RECONCILED TO GOD.**

You can enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, right now.

On the following page is a prayer of reconciliation. If you are serious about this matter, then open your heart, and open your mouth, and pray this prayer.

Heavenly Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ. I come to be reconciled to you.

Heavenly Father, I choose to be reconciled to you. I no longer want to be at war with you.

Thank you for sending Jesus into this world to die for my sins. Thank you for the blood that he shed upon the cross, which now makes available to me, forgiveness, and cleansing.

Heavenly Father, as the scriptures declare, I also believe that you raised Jesus from the dead. He is alive now, and he can come to dwell within me by his Spirit.

Lord Jesus, I receive you as my Savior. I accept your death upon the cross, and the blood which you shed, as sufficient for the forgiveness and cleansing of my sins.

Beginning now, and for the rest of my life, I declare that Jesus Christ is my Lord.

I thank you, Lord Jesus, that I am now born again. I thank you that I am now reconciled to God.

Amen.

Other books by Jack Michael include:

The Christ Conspiracy (*novel*)

Deception In The End Times

Will God Supply All Your Needs?

Bearing Fruit In Old Age

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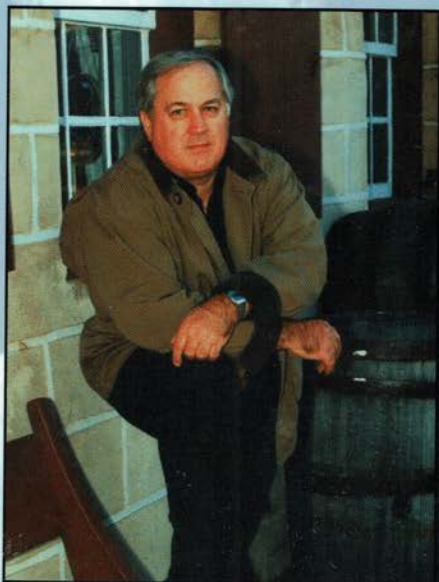
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Have you ever had wishful thoughts that God would leave Heaven for a little while, come down to earth, lead us about by the hand, and show us His will firsthand?

...If so, there is good news for you in this book! God did leave Heaven for a little while. He came down to earth, people followed Him about, and He showed them the will of God firsthand. **HIS NAME WAS JESUS!**



Jack Michael is a foundation builder. His ministry can best be described by 1 Corinthians 3:10: "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it..." As a Bible teacher, his teaching has been described as clear, understandable, and practical. As an author, his books and writings have been described as easily readable, yet firmly conveying the message of God. As a missionary, God has given Jack a unique vision to minister to the diverse peoples who inhabit the islands of the world.

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