

Just Love

Who delivered us out of the power of darkness
and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.

Col 1:13

God's Plan in Both Testaments

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With thanks to the editors Ruth Hodge and Phyllis Crowley.

Scripture verses in this book are taken from various English translations and sometime are paraphrased by the author into simple English. Please check your Bible for further reference.

Preface

Inheritance, Image, Mission

Sharing the word of God with the students of Christian Faith Institute in Jos, northern Nigeria, is a fulfilling experience. Every time we do so Jesus is present to change lives: the word of God isn't *about* Jesus - Jesus *is* the word of God. Students enter the college excited, get challenged, struggle, sharpen each other, grow into new people, and go out rejoicing, spreading the gospel, planting churches, triumphing over persecution. God is transforming this part of the world through their lives.

They come from many backgrounds. In some classes I need a Hausa interpreter. Hausa is a Sahel trade language from the west coast of Africa to Sudan, used by millions of people, most of who are Muslims. Most of these students are converts from Islam. Some are from important families; some were activists who were instrumental in murderous attacks against Christians. How Jesus sovereignly and miraculously turned each of their lives around shows us again and again this is his work and we are highly honoured to have a part in their training.

Other students flow into the college from Francophone nations. When I lecture in the French speaking department again I need an interpreter. Lecturers and assistant staff speak all the languages we need. The diverse cultures in the college demonstrate unique aspects of God's glory and contribute to fellowship that enlarges us all. Their worship is expressive, spontaneous and comes from a depth of gratitude. It is a delight interacting with the students and staff, as our lives are moulded together in love.

The classes are an environment of concentrated learning. Students want to get to the bottom of things. Apart from facing death, Islamic converts face many direct challenges, including ridicule of their faith from people who turn over every stone in the scriptures looking for fault. Students want answers and questions are accepted as we attempt to deal with them thoroughly and honestly. A mere brush over won't help. We need biblical answers, not just a denominational stance, or even a Christian Faith Institute stance: we must explore the full scripture as it is.

We see students grow from their initial entry in the college. Many of these are from grass roots regions and need to learn literacy skills. This starts with their own language, then English (most of our research books are in English), then computer and internet skills, Hebrew, Greek and Arabic (for missions). Their initial questions are usually about the normal challenges to the gospel they previously learned from Islam, or about how the scriptures apply to their cultures.

Then they take on more issues, wanting to know the ins and outs of how scripture applies to Christian teachings from the past or today. They want to know what is right and wrong and why, and to do this while walking in love with each other, keeping their hearts on the life in the gospel. When they progress to the degree department they research more global issues and learn how to respond to them. They go out of the college full of grace and truth, prepared for powerful and solid ministry.

Just Love grew out of our class discussions, while teaching and responding to student's questions. The issues in it are global and we pray you also benefit from *Just Love*. The heart of the book is all Jesus has done for us. Our heart is to share this gospel with others.

There is continuity through the scriptures, from the Old to the New Testament. There is one Message: God's love seen in creation, our conscience, in scripture and in his Son. The purpose of God is to share his love and fellowship through creation and redemption. What a wonderful opportunity we have to be part of his eternal love program.

We could summarise the message of both Testaments as *Inheritance, Image and Mission*. God brought Israel out of Egypt, not because they had done anything good, but to show his nature, and to give them an *inheritance*: to be his own people. He gave them the law, which was holy and just, to mould them into his *image*, so that they might *show his praises to the nations*. God's design in calling Israel, was not because they were special in themselves, but because of his love for the world.

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession, for the whole earth is mine. And you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.. Ex 19:4-6

But the people did not have the heart to follow the Lord is his love program. God knew this before creation, but took us through these stages to show us his way, to prove his good purpose so we would have faith. The law and the prophets pointed us to the coming of Christ, to create in us a new heart so that we might share together in the fellowship of God's love.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may show the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Pet 2:9

In the New Testament we see the same love plan: *Inheritance, Image, Mission*. By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he calls us out of sin and the world, to an eternal inheritance in his Son. The position God has placed us in Christ is beyond anything we could imagine. This highlights his unfathomable love, especially since we were sinners.

But as the law, though it is good and reflected God's love and nature, could not transform our heart, he gave his Spirit to convert us from within. His purpose is that by grace we overcome sin, the devil and the world, become settled in his wonderful love and fellowship in his church, and show his image to the world: *so that the world might know that he sent his Son*. He gives us his inheritance, this inheritance transforms us into his image, and his image is seen by the world. His image in us is his mission to the world. Through this, *God's people in Christ* is the fulfilment of his eternal purpose.

Despite the persecution, the staff, students and graduates of the Bible College, and the pastors of the associated churches and mission centres, all have an unflinching love for Muslims and desire to see them share in our fellowship. God said he will give Jesus the nations. This includes the nations around the Sahel and in the Middle East.

Introduction

Just Love

The title of this book can be read two ways. It might be said that the Beatle's song "All you need is love" has become the basis of more theology in our time than the Bible itself. God is said to be defined by love alone, meaning he will not judge and repentance is not necessary to our salvation in Christ. It is even taught by some Christians that all people will be saved. God is said to be *just love*, and has no other characteristics.

The scriptures say God is love. They also say God is holy and God is light. God's love is defined by all his characteristics. All his qualities come together to show a love that is true and holy. God's love is just. It does not sweep aside his integrity or hatred for sin and what sin does to people. His love for people means he will uphold justice at any price, even the price of sending his Son to die for our sin. So in scripture we have *just love*.

This book shares the scriptures to recapture the true character of God's love in sending Jesus Christ, contrasting this with Humanism. It responds to questions about God's love: not all have heard the gospel, the existence of evil, his election of his people to his church, Joshua's conquest of Canaan, the alleged ruthlessness of the Law of Moses, and Christians who "judge" those who live contrary to God's truth. The book discusses the role of love in pacifism and government, in the Law of Moses and the Sermon on the Mount.

The book aims to show continuity between the Old and New Testaments, meaning the God of both Testaments is the one and same God, with the same character of love. The book looks at the Law and the Prophets to show their fulfilment in Christ, helping us to have a clearer understanding of the one message of scripture: The Lord is our Shepherd, who in love came to lay down his life to transform our heart into his own image.

Finally, the book shows the conclusion to the coming and teachings of Jesus: to send us out with a love mission to the church and to the world through his message of resurrection. We particularly see this in regard to loving and reaching the Muslims.

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The Character of God

Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 John 4:7-12

Apostle of Love

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:8

John was writing about true worship. He said the love of God has clear marks in the lives of those who truly worship him. John is sometimes called the apostle of love. He wrote, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". (John 3:16) John also spoke extensively of the love of Jesus for his church.

A new commandment I give you, That you love one another as I have loved you.
(John 13:34, 15:12)

John presents God's love to us, not in a new-age/universalist vein, but in Jesus Christ. In John 3:16 he claims the world is perishing. He says whoever believes on Jesus Christ will not perish, but have eternal life. Even in John, the apostle of love, there is only one way not to perish: by believing through the Son of God.

When John wrote "God is love", he was shepherding the church in respect to false ministers who claimed to be from God, but did not have God's nature. He said we should look at the lives of these ministers, and our own lives, to see if God's love is working and reflected. "God's love" is a summary of the new life in the gospel. When we love God we also love his Son, and we love one another, and this love is seen in righteousness.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ in born of God; and everyone that loves him that gives birth, also loves him that is born by him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.
1 John 5:1-3

When we love the Father it follows we will love the Father's Son. We cannot say we love God while calling him a liar, rejecting his gospel about his Son. But this love also extends to all God's children. If we love the Father we also love one another. John claims this is part of true worship. Loving God's children would include forgiving them, but also maintaining honesty in our relationships: walking in the light. (1 John 1:7) This is part of how John defines love.

This passage of John also tells us what the love of God is. It is not just a feeling. It is the keeping of his commandments. John says we know we love God's family when we keep God's commandments. This would be the same with our immediate family. If we love our family we will keep God's commandments, for this is the best protection, care and leadership we can give to those we love. If we walk in a lie, we do not love others.

There is robustness to God's love. It means that we follow the Lord, which in turn means we keep his commandments. If we do not keep his commandments we do not love him. "If you love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) When Jesus laid down his life he said, "That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father has given me commandment, even so I do". (John 14:31)

Keeping his commandments does not mean ticking boxes in a legalistic way. It comes from a heart that has been touched by the love of Christ and which seeks to follow the example Jesus gave to us. Keeping the commandments is not a condition we must meet for God to love us, but a result of his love: a result of receiving his faith and being born again.

By this we know God's love, because he laid down his life for us: and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 1 John 3:16

God's love is selfless. It reaches out to others in a redemptive way, forgiving and restoring. God's love is rugged: there is personal cost involved. This is seen in the cross of Christ and his sufferings. We do not celebrate receiving God's love without also following his example. So John said if we have love we will share our goods with those in Christ. (1 John 3:17)

God's love means a commitment to truth. "This is the message... that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) If we are truly in God's love we will walk in truth. A message of the "love of God" that is not united with truth is not from God. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 4)

The purpose of God's love coming to us is that we are transformed to keep his word, i.e. walk in and obey his truth. This is the true love of God. John said these things are the marks of the love of God coming to us in Jesus Christ: "But whoever keeps his word, in him the love of God is truly perfected (brought to completion); by this we know that we are in him". (1 John 2:5)

John was saying the worship of God is not mere sentiment; the love of God is not mere emotion. We know we have received God's love when we keep his word. There is an objective measure to his love working in our life, which is his truth seen in us, and in what we do in our daily life. It is making the right decisions: that which is honest, pure, of good report, virtuous. (Phil 4:8)

John said the love of God is contrary to the love of the world: "Do not love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him". (1 John 2:15) When we love the world we value its affirmation more than God's affirmation. When we love the things in the world we put them ahead of truth, ahead of God and ahead of what is best for other people.

Love starts with God, not with us: "Here is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins". (1 John 4:10) By loving us first he brings us to love him and

transforms the way we live our lives: "We love him because he first loved us". (1 John 4:19) Maybe this is what returning to our "first love" means. When we first meet Jesus we realise we are saved by grace, because he loved us first. Remembering this keeps us from self-righteousness.

The love of God is the most impacting thing to ever happen to us. It turns our world upside down, affects our values, transforms our heart, and all the choices we make. When this happens the world will think we have gone nuts. Keep loving them. This is when we know the love of God has come to us.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. John 15:9-16

The Character of God

If we take God's love alone, apart from all of God's attributes, we get a skewed idea about both love and God. The scriptures speak of God as being loving, merciful, just, righteous, compassionate and wrathful in judgement. They speak of both his goodness and his severity. If we take "love" alone, and do not see these other characteristics as a part of what true love is, we get a wrong concept of love. It is important for us to understand the true or full character of God.

It's like anything in the scriptures: if we just take a part of what the scriptures say on a certain topic, we get a lopsided view of it. So Paul said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man (or woman) of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for all good works". (2 Tim 3:16-17) To be fully furnished in our knowledge of God we take all scripture says about him.

Reproof and correction form part of God's love, because as Paul said above, these are profitable for us as God fashions us into his image. Discipline, though it seems grievous, is part of God's love for us. God has designed it for our benefit, because without it we would be untaught and bring ourselves to irreversible harm. Love has to be "strong enough" to ensure it does what is needed. Impotent "love" is not love, but is in fact uncaring.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Heb 12:6-8

Love has backbone, related to the guidance of God's people. Psalm 23 tells us an attribute of our Good Shepherd, as he leads us into green pastures, is that his rod and staff comfort us. This is the aim of discipline. It produces a change of path that leads to peace and prosperity (wholeness) in God. This is the purpose of godly discipline in children and why it is important for their future well being. It is contrary to "love" to undermine biblical discipline.

God's characteristics are many. Isaiah 9:6 says his name is wonderful, counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, the Prince of peace. Rev 19:11 calls him faithful and true and in righteousness he makes war. Here war is part of his character, when it is by his judgement appropriate for goodness to prevail. Ex 34:6-7 describes him as merciful, gracious, patient, abounding in goodness and truth, forgiving transgression and sin, but by no means forgiving the guilty, but punishing iniquity upon generations who disobey him. It is wrong to take one of these attributes and deny the other.

Moses beautifully describes him:

He is the Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he. Deut 32:4

This verse reflects his different attributes. Together these describe his love in its full measure. Humanism fails to understand God's love in regard to the full truth. Love without truth is not love: "whom I love in the truth". (2 John 1)

Call to Repentance

John sets love in the context of redemption, meaning a transformation of our life. God loves the sinner, meaning he calls us to repentance and life. John said faith, or the love that God brings to us through Jesus, without this transformation, is inconsistent with the character of God:

This then is the message ... that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:5-7

God's love is seen in an uncompromising manner. He lives in light, meaning no trace of dishonesty or anything hidden in darkness. With God there is no variableness or shadow of turning. (James 1:17) He is perfectly upright, with no hint of corruption or deception. God's love is not to be taken for granted, where Jesus isn't transforming us into his image, or we are misrepresenting God's characteristics, his person, and his love.

John's message is that we can't separate God's love from the rest of his image. We cannot take one of his characteristics without the others. If we do we have lied. We cannot take God's love without taking repentance. Without repentance we remain outside God's love.

In Jesus all of God's characteristics meet together and are satisfied and fulfilled:

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
Ps 85:10

It is only in Jesus, full of both grace and truth, that this union between justice and mercy comes to our lives and cultures. (John 1:16) God's saving love meets us in Jesus. Outside of Jesus there is no hope of this love being known. Outside of Jesus truth speaks against us, without mercy to appease it; and righteousness judges us, without atonement to bring peace. In Jesus' atonement God's love and justice are brought together.

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 5:1

We sometimes see both justice and mercy even in human government. At its best it is merciful and patient with human weakness, but in the end it punishes and curtails wickedness. Not to do so would be contrary to integrity and an abandonment of the well being of others.

Any mercy that ultimately fails in regard to justice also fails in meeting the qualities of love. Love is reflected in judgement, as well as in mercy. Any notion of love that erodes another characteristic of God diminishes God and attempts to refashion him in our own image.

We must resist redefining God in terms of cultural view. If, with an inaccurate emphasis on "love", we undermine the biblical concept of "the fear of God" and the role it plays in our lives, we have done ourselves and others a great disservice. This is not love.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb 10:31

The fear of God does not only mean to respect God. It also means to fear punishment for unrepentant sin. Denying this fear leads to a familiarity with Godly things, which is unsafe for individuals and for our societies. The above text from Hebrews is speaking to believers and warning them about becoming familiar with and then turning away from God's revealed truth.

The fear of the Lord is reconciled with his love for us. When you fear the fire you keep your hand away from it. This fear comes from a God who loves us. The purpose of the fear of the Lord is our safety. In our zeal to express the love of God, we should not shy away from warnings about consequences of shunning his call to safety. These consequences are very real.

For if we sin wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins. Heb 10:26

The scripture itself does not shy away from all the truth: neither then should we. It is not love to deny the consequences of sin. It is love to warn each other of them, and to turn away from sin.

Those Who Haven't Heard

What about those who haven't heard the gospel? Does God love them?

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day to day utters speech and night to night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world... Ps 19:1-4

There is no person in the world that does not have a witness that God exists, and in this all men are without excuse (Rom 1:20). From this witness in creation, every person alive can call upon God to reveal himself. God will respond and ensure they have the knowledge of the gospel.

Down through the ages the knowledge of God has always been spread through the world's civilizations. Before the flood, during Abraham's time, during Israel's day, and in the first millennium of the church, the gospel went out to the whole populated world, and today it is in reach of every person – God is able to get the knowledge of his gospel to any person by his perfect intervention.

In the Old Testament we see even Gentile nations were held to account by God by his prophets. These nations all had revelation of God and they all knew better than the atrocities they were committing.

The scripture says God's judgement depends on our knowledge. Acts 17:30 says God winked at former ignorance, which means he forebears to a degree where there is lack of knowledge. "To whom much is given much is expected", is a principle of God's judgement (Luke 12:48, see also Rom 2:4, 3:25). God is fair in judgement. Judgement also takes into consideration a person's circumstances. We expect human judges to do this, as fairness is a principle of God enshrined in Moses' Law.

Cornelius was a "God-fearer", meaning he had the knowledge of God to a point, but not knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ. (Acts 10) He may correspond to people who seek to serve God sincerely through the religions of the world. God responded to Cornelius and led him to the knowledge of Jesus.

People repenting with partial knowledge of God can be seen in so many cases, such as with Nineveh. These were not God's covenant people, and did not hear the preaching of Christ, but only that of Jonah calling them to believe the coming judgement and repent from sin. Jesus said it would be more favourable for them in the final judgement than for those who had heard the word of God more completely who did not repent. (Matt 12:41) Jesus said the same of the Queen of Sheba.

Reading mission books such as *Bruchko* (Bruce Olson) and *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Don Richardson), we see God left a witness of himself in many cultures (if not all cultures) to his coming salvation through his Son. Each of these cultures seems to have had true, as well as false prophets, and there has always existed some knowledge of the truth in all cultures. Don Richardson traces this through civilizations from Bible times to our present day.

If we look closely in the biblical record we see this in the nations outside of Israel. Balaam was a prophet of the true God and he spoke eloquently of the coming Messiah, though he did fall into sin. Job wasn't an Israelite and he had Messianic revelation. There were many such prophets and priests God spoke to in scripture. Abraham was only one of them. This shows us two things: God is the final judge in all these matters; and all cultures are ripe now (ready) for the gospel. (John 4:35-38)

In that all cultures had true prophets, I do not mean true in all details of the knowledge of God, but at least a witness to the true God and grieving as to their present darkness. This witness is from God's grace. He does not "leave himself without a witness". (Acts 14:17)

Jesus said whoever gives a child or a prophet a drink of water because of him, will not lose their reward (Matt 10:42). This could relate to the last judgement where the sheep and goats from the Gentile nations are separated, on the basis of their response to him through his servants (Matt 25:37-39). This would be a faith response, though many were unaware they were responding to Jesus. Abraham's belief was: shall not the judge of *all the earth* do that which is right. (Gen 18:25)

In the same way James speaks of fruitless religion. Someone who professes faith is judged by their works not to have faith, while someone who does not profess faith is judged by their works to have faith. (James 2:18, see also Matt 7:23). This is not "salvation by works", but it reveals the nature of faith. According to James God will judge whether faith exists according to its outcome, not according to whether there has been a nominal acceptance of the gospel. Jesus, Paul and Daniel all spoke of the resurrection and judgement in this way: "they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation". (John 5:29, Rom 2:6-11, Dan 12:2)

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath... For there is no respect of persons with God. Rom 2:6-11

A part of this "doing good" is obeying the gospel when we hear it and spreading the good news of God's offer of repentance, and cancellation of sins, to all others. (Luke 24:47) This is not salvation by works, whereby we seek self-justification while denying God's mercy and truth through Christ. If we deny the gospel we call God a liar. Doing good is the fruit of his grace, which grace we receive freely, and by which grace we repent from our former life style.

I am not saying that God saves through natural theology, such as human cultures, philosophers, reflection on nature, or conscience: for all of these have been fully corrupted by sin (Rom 1:21-22, 25, 3:10-12). Only the scripture and the life of Christ are inspired revelations of God. Christ is the *logos*, meaning the message of God. God's message through creation and through his written word is confirmed in the person of Christ. If we deny him we have denied God's witness.

The gospel is God's only means of salvation, whereby we can be justly accepted by God. The gospel must be preached for the glory of God; for the salvation of sinners; for the expansion of his kingdom; for blessing to all nations; and because Jesus commanded it. The name of Jesus is the only name under heaven given to man by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). There is no other way to the Father but by him (John 14:6). Faith comes only by hearing the gospel (Rom 1:16, 10:17). If we reject the gospel we will die in our sins and come under his judgement. (Mark 16:16)

So then, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (the gospel). But I say, have they not all heard? Yes truly, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. Rom 10:17-18

What About Evil?

The question is often asked, if God is love why did he either allow or create evil. We could answer this by saying that God didn't create evil, but that evil comes from Satan. This isn't a good enough

answer, because God allowed it and in that sense he willed it. God is the only ultimate power in the universe, so something exists only because in the end God willed it to be so.

I do not believe in dualism: the idea that there are two powers in the universe striving together. There is only one power: God's power (John 19:11). Everything exists and does what it does only by God's permission, because he wills it to be that way. So if God wills something, which at first glance seems odd to us, we have to ask, why in God's wisdom he did so.

The answer seems to be that God wills that his creation be given liberty. He is not a dictator. Love, by its nature, requires us to have a choice, and not to follow God by compulsion. And since love means we be given liberty, there must a choice, or an option. So what we see today, for the present, is the result of a God of love giving choice to his creation, even though God knew his creation would abuse that choice.

Some might say God shouldn't have done this if he knew the result. But if God didn't give this choice then they would say God should have given us choice. So clearly it is not God who is at fault, but our own dissatisfaction with things, whatever they are.

Evil has come as a result of free choice. Evil is not a creation. Evil is simply the fruit of choosing to follow self, rather than to follow what is good. Evil is a fruit, or the consequence of serving self-interests. We see it in family life and in national life. It is the fruit of corruption, and corruption is denying the truth to serve selfish ends.

Is 45:7 says God creates evil. This is not speaking of moral evil. It is declaring God's judgement against Babylon, and the evil it is pronouncing is the destruction of the empire. That is clear in the context of Isaiah. God is saying in Isaiah that he raises up a nation or a leader and he brings them down; that he orders the affairs of nations, turning on the light, or turning it off.

Satan presumably was the first to choose not to accept the truth. The Bible doesn't specifically state this. Isaiah 14 speaks of one falling from grace, but this is referring to the king of Babylon. Likewise, Ezekiel 28 is speaking of the King of Tyre. Other passages in scripture which do speak of Satan falling are speaking of the cross of Christ and the New Covenant, not of his fall before creation.

We could presume though by the king of Babylon's temptation, and by the nature of the temptation of Eve and Adam, as well as Jesus' temptation, that this was the nature of Satan's sin, which he sought to pass onto others: he chose self-exaltation. In the Garden, he spread this to Eve and Adam, by suggesting that God's ways were not fair and they should seek their own justice their own way. The issue here wasn't God's justice, but this was a mask for their self exaltation.

We see God's liberty extending to Adam in the Garden. He gave everything to man in creation and allowed him full access to it all, but held back only one tree, in order to provide Adam the choice. Adam had a choice whether to serve God or not to. This choice was given because God loved him. You always give liberty to those you love. I am not suggesting this be given too early to children, when they can harm themselves. Adam was an adult in creation and knew the implications of his choice.

If God knew the outcome of this choice, why did he go ahead with creation? Because he saw to the end of it: his fellowship with his redeemed from among all nations. He wanted good and evil so his creation would have a choice, to follow him from love, from conscience, by mature decision, by choosing right as he chose right, to be like him in his image, and not by coercion.

Whom having not seen, you love; in whom you do not presently see, you rejoice... 1

Pet 1:8

Love works fully by faith. If the full glory of God was shown to us it would impede free choice. But if we can see the glory of God by faith (that which is visible to the conscience, but not visible to the natural eye) we make the choice to follow him on the basis of conscience, and not as the world makes choices, on the basis of expedience. When we follow our parent's or employer's will in their absence it is true obedience: true love. God designed it like this so his call would be on the basis of the right values.

In his wisdom God knew that this faith and hope in what we have not yet seen, but choose only because it is right, even in the midst of trial and temptations to do otherwise, could be the only real basis of true and just fellowship. Jesus himself went through this walk of faith so he could help us through it.

The evil we see on earth today came about by man's sin and disobedience to God. When God created the world it was "very good". (Gen 1:31) After man fell into sin the earth was cursed and the trials of life began. These are designed in part to lead us back to God, as we acknowledge the consequences of our sin and call on him for repentance. But if we see these consequences as God's fault, rather than the fault of mankind, there isn't much hope. (James 4:1)

For creation (mankind) was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of hope, because the creature itself (through the gospel) also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God (through new birth). Rom 8:20-21

Trials often do not come about by our own direct fault. God has saved us from the penalty of our own sin, but we still for the time being share in a world that is in rebellion against God. Through this we experience God's care and faithfulness and we grow in his love. It is like a marriage: we grow in love, not by having our own way, but by seeing something more precious than that: the growth in love itself.

What about when a loved one dies. In such cases we have to trust God who comforts us, knowing there isn't always justice in this fallen world, at least not in terms that we can at first understand. These things are not a sign of God not loving us. He shows us his love in the midst of these things:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, neither height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:38-39

Paul came to this knowledge through many sufferings and in the midst of that God proving himself even more faithful. The love of God doesn't mean all will be rosy: it does mean he will never forsake us. It doesn't mean he doesn't allow us to grow through trials: it means he gives us the victory. It doesn't mean he prevents us from seeing ill: it means he prevents us from being overcome by it. He intends for us to wear the crown of an overcomer. He wants to share with us the crown that Jesus wears: that faith was tried and found to be genuine. This is the will of God.

For you have need of patience, so that after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. Heb 10:36

The accuser would say God is needlessly putting us through suffering. But if this was not the case and there was no suffering, as with Job in the beginning, the accuser would say, we only serve God because it is easy. It is easy to accuse.

What about temptation? Does God lead us into temptation to test our faith? He allows our faith to be tested, but we are not tempted by him, but by our own desires. (James 1:13-14) In all the temptations and evil we face the promise of God is that He will be with us:

There shall no man be able to stand before you all the days of your life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with you: I shall not fail you, nor forsake you. Josh 1:5

I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Matt 28:20

Be not afraid, but speak, and do not hold your peace. For I am with you, and no man shall set on you to hurt you, for I have many people (a large harvest I have called) in this city. Acts 18:9-10

The question of suffering is not an easy one. The Holy Spirit brought this into focus through Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations. The theme of Lamentations is the redemption of God's people through the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is a beautiful poetic element where Jeremiah becomes Jerusalem which laments for their virgins and young men, which then represents Christ and his people in their sufferings and redemption.

Though the righteous suffer because of the sins of the nation, Christ also has suffered to redeem them. So when we ask why we suffer, we look to Christ who also suffered though he did no wrong. This both stops our mouth and also comforts us. The glorious answer to the sufferings of God's people in Lamentations, which weighs so heavily upon Jeremiah, is the sufferings of Christ: who did not hide himself, but came to identify with God's people.

Lamentations chapter three is a beautiful Messianic chapter: "He gives his cheek to them that smite him; he is filled with reproach". (Lam 3:30, Matt 5:39, Luke 22:64, Is 50:6) There are also connections with Messianic predictions from Jonah (Jon 2:2, Matt 12:40), including his burial and resurrection: "They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me (the grave stone)... I called upon your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. You have heard my voice... O Lord, you have pleaded the cause of my soul..." (Lam 3:53-58)

The *cause of his soul* was not sorrow for his own suffering, but the redemption of the people of Zion and Jerusalem (God's family): "My eye runs down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people... my soul has them still in remembrance..." (Lam 3:19-23, see 3:48). He made intercession for his people: "he poured out his life to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors". (Is 53:12) God said YES to Jesus in the grave regarding our justification. He came to take our identity in our sufferings, to bring us into his life. This is the God we serve, one who suffered for us in his Son.

Jeremiah weeps for God's family in Jerusalem and the Lord's answer is they are the precious to be redeemed by his own sufferings. God also promises to lead us through suffering and fulfil his cause and plan of faith in our lives: "For the Lord will not cast off forever... to subvert a man in his cause the Lord does not approve" (see Lam 3:31-36).

According to Jesus' prayer, this does not include those who reject God: "Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the Lord". (Lam 3:66)

What About Election?

In this section we look at the love of God with respect to the scriptural teaching on election. What does the Bible mean by election and how does this coincide with biblical teachings on God's love for mankind and justice?

That election is taught in the scripture there is no doubt. It's not my purpose to go through these passages in detail, but here are some: Deut 7:7-8, 9:4-6, 1 Kings 19:18, Ps 33:12, 65:4, Is 1:9, 8:18, 42:1, 51:2-3, 54:13, Jer 1:5, Ezek 16:3-6, Matt 11:25-27, John 6:37, 44-45, 10:26-30, 17:12, Rom 8:29-31, 9:6-24, Eph 1:4-12, Phil 1:6, 2:13, 2 Thes 2:13, Titus 1:1, Heb 2:10-16, 12:2, 1 Pet 1:2, Jude 1.

The common objection to these passages is that God chose those he knew in advance would choose him. Scripture does not teach this, nor is this the biblical meaning of "foreknowledge" (foreordain). Election is taught as a simple statement of fact in scripture, showing that God is sovereign over his creation. This full sovereignty of God in scripture cannot be denied. This sovereignty somehow coincides with human freewill. C. S Lewis strikes both of these chords in his *Narnia* tales.

The teaching of election can be handled the wrong way. Even when handled biblically it can still look unfair, or be a challenge to our pride. We may have seen the gospel as lending a hand, rather than raising the dead: if dead we can't contribute. (Eph 2:1) The whole point of scripture is to show the failure of man and the sufficiency of Christ. This takes the offence of the cross of Christ to its limit. Not only is the cross an offence because one lays down his life for us (rather than something great we have done), but now it is more offensive because we can't claim credit for even our response to this love.

Election stands at the pinnacle of the gospel message, for it fully enthrones Christ and strikes at the very core of fallen human nature: the god of self. This is the very heart of our redemption. It is the very heart of our Christ-life victory. We might enjoy the truth of freewill and opportunity, but the truth that Christ has every detail of our lives already completed in his finished work shows us the greater glory of God's love, care and power.

Election is one of the most misunderstood teachings in scripture: “we become mere robots, irresponsible, and our actions bring no bearing upon things”. The scripture says the opposite: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to desire and to do his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). We are encouraged to exercise initiative in faith, but also shown the true source of that faith. (Eph 2:8) As co-labourers, there is a union between our responsibility and God’s initiative. (1 Cor 3:9) He calls us to show *his* goodness by his works in us. (Eph 2:10, 1 Pet 2:9)

Where does election stand in relation to God’s love? It is only here we see unconditional love at its fullest. God is faithful to his people, unwavering and true at great cost to himself through Christ. His commitment goes further in sending his Spirit to gather us and ensure none is lost. This love seeks us out in our sin, not turning away from the filth of our condition or from the offence of our response. It does not depend on our love in return. This love is not understood in the law, or known in this world, but it transforms us into the same image.

Where then does election stand in relation to God’s fairness? Election highlights the main point about salvation: it is not about fairness, but about mercy. In fairness, the law deals to each man his wages, which is death. In mercy God overlooks that and draws us to himself in forgiveness, in a way that denies our self-righteousness:

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil because I am good? Matt 20:15

I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy. Rom 9:15

Who are you O man to reply against God. Rom 9:20

... not in respect of his justice, but in respect of his free choice.

When we have broken his law, and trodden under foot his continued kindness and the appeals he makes to us through creation and through his Son in the gospel message, then we stand condemned and God stands free to choose whom he will. There is no injustice in this, only mercy. At this point God’s free choice somehow coincides with our free choice of him. He chooses us by calling us through our free response to his gospel message.

The gospel is a call from God to all men. This means all people, from all races and tribes: not just from the Jews. This was the great revelation of the New Covenant church. It also means all men, all women and all children, of all classes of people. It is universal in scope. It is the first real call to fully cross-cultural and cross-class we have in history. In Christ we are all one: bond or free, rich or poor, female or male, Jew or Gentile. This was the great truth and experience in the churches of the first century.

I love the call to “all men” seen so often in the scripture: That God “gives liberally to all men, and upbraids not” is our encouragement to pray believing for a benevolent response (James 1:5); To all who receive him, he gives the power to become the sons of God (John 1:12); Whoever believes on him will not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16); Whosoever will, may come (Rev 22:17); Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37); He would that all men be saved (1 Tim 2:4); He is the saviour of all men, especially those who believe. (1 Tim 4:10)

With phrases like these God continually comforts and consoles those who look and come to him: like the brazen serpent, all who looked to it were healed. (Num 21:9, John 3:14) He continually encourages us that he receives us, no matter who we are, what our sins have been, or what our place in the world is. This is an absolute and unconditional invitation to believe and be blessed as a full part of his kingdom, to everyone who would respond. And everyone who responds, without exception, is given full access.

It was also the teaching of the apostles that only those who are called (elect) will respond. There are many texts in the scriptures that clearly state this. The others, by their own choice, will cast the call behind them and despise the opportunity freely granted by the sufferings of Christ. It is difficult to reconcile election with freedom of choice. The Bible plainly teaches both. The difficulty lies in our apprehension of God, not in any error in his word.

Election strikes at the very heart of human pride, at humanism, and the problem of the fall: self-exultation. It is the complete turnaround of the fall, and restores fully the glory of God. Our calling is not of ourselves. Knowing this we give glory to God and walk in a humble faith dependent upon his grace. There is no other rock to build our faith on than his sufficiency, from start to finish: the author and the finisher of faith, the beginning and the end.

Pacifism and Government

The purpose of this section is to see how God's love works in society. We will consider both his love working through believers, and working through government. "Love" sometimes leads people to pacifist ideas, including the belief that we should not kill from the commandment "you shall not murder". Pacifism covers issues such as war and capital punishment. In this section we are speaking of pacifism from a biblical perspective and especially from our perspective as followers of Jesus.

In our section *God's Love in the Law*, we look at the *Sermon on the Mount*, so we won't treat it here. Pacifism has a lot going for it. It tells us that the problems this world faces are not solved by another war, or by politics, rebellions or revolutions. All these are imperfect, so that it is never the case that one side is fully right and the other side fully wrong, despite all propaganda to the contrary. Though God no doubt works through these to accomplish his purposes, but from the perspective of disciples of Jesus none of them is our message, nor are they the message of the church.

Jesus in his time did not throw his weight behind any political or nationalist cause. His mission was the cross, for this alone could change man's heart and solve his nature problems. It is our purpose as his disciples, and the church's purpose, to carry forward this singular mission of Jesus to all nations.

But at the same time we are to be loyal to our nation. We are citizens on earth, as well as of heaven. We owe to Caesar what is due to Caesar, whether taxes, jury duty or enlistment in the armed services. Jesus did not condemn believers in the armed services of his day, and as followers of Jesus, the Bible tells us to obey the laws of the land:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme, or to governors, as to them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For this is the will

of God, that with well-doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. 1
Pet 2:13-15

Obviously we are not to obey laws against the law of God, but here Peter tells us how we as believers are to live: "Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king..." (1 Pet 2:17) The scriptures are clear and repetitive on this point. We are not to take the law into our own hands. We are not to be diverted from the church's message to a fruitless mission.

"By well doing we are to silence foolish men." Peter wasn't naive. He knew this might cost us something. It cost him his life. It cost all the first apostles their lives, but look at the results of that today. "Overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:21) We cannot overcome the world using the world's methods: that "they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation". (1 Pet 2:12)

Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him: if he is thirsty, give him a drink: for in doing this you shall heap coals of fire (conviction) upon his head. Rom 12:20

This is love, not just the drink we give, but the view to winning his soul. To the extent that everyone lives this way, we don't need government. This is what the scriptures mean by "you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world", not political activism. In fact looking through the New Testament you cannot find a direct mandate to disciples for political activism.

We hear the phrase "when good men do nothing evil prevails". I am not suggesting we do nothing, but that we do good. We speak the word of God to the king and to all men, and live it before them, whether it costs us our careers or otherwise. This is the best thing we can do.

Sometimes people compare Mahatma Ghandi to Jesus. Ghandi used pacifism to overthrow a government. Jesus had no such purpose in mind, nor ever even suggested it to the disciples. Some mistook his purpose in this way, especially the Jewish zealots, who thought he came to establish national Israel. He said plainly: "my kingdom is not of this world".

What else can the church do apart from speaking the truth and living it? I think this is the best thing we can do, at least it's a good start, and let's be honest, we haven't really done this much yet. Like Ghandi said, when he read the *Sermon on the Mount*: "Christianity looks like a good idea. Somebody should try it". We are commissioned to make disciples of all nations and if by this God transforms our nations, maybe he will then use some of the people in government to make godly laws.

But as for pacifism in government, this is not biblical. We are told to pray for government. What do we pray? That they would have the wisdom from God to do right; that they would have the courage to do it; and the strength to carry it out.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour. 1 Tim 2:1-3

Government's task is to keep peace and order. This is "good and acceptable" to God, meaning it is his will that we have strong government able to keep the peace. Strong government is God's gift and is the antidote to anarchy. As Peter said, "for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well". This is the will of God.

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (punishment from the government). For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil... For he is the minister of God to you for good... for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil. Rom 13:1-4

Government is an office appointed by God himself. The peace it brings is for our good. God intends for government to be strong. A government that fails to make laws, to reliably execute those laws and punish those who break them is not God's will. The society that doesn't have strong government is cursed and heading for destruction. We should not join with those who seek to pull down government, or who are overly cynical. Such a cause may seem noble, but is misled. All you will need is rioting, looting, burning of houses, murdering and terrorism to take over your suburb and you will pray for your government and army, even with its many faults.

A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life. Prov 20:2

Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upheld by mercy. Prov 20:28

Right government is to know and take the right path. We are not saying government should rule without Christ-likeness, but that government must know what its calling is and execute it faithfully. If members of government use their powers unjustly they will stand before God to account for their actions. So yes, government needs our prayers.

Government has a very easy to follow template: the *Ten Commandments*. When Israel came out of Egypt God set up judges over them and gave them the *Ten Commandments* as the yard stick for government and law making. It is no good saying that was under the Old Testament and doesn't apply today. The law was given because of sin and that is the same reason we need law today. The *Ten Commandments* were supposed to be applied in a Christ-like manner when God first gave them, and they can still be applied that way now (see the chapter *God's Love in the Law*).

There are two categories of law in the *Ten Commandments*: those regarding our relationship with God and those regarding our relationship with other people. In recent times most people (even Christians) claim government has no rights in the first category. They say government should be entirely secular. This is an extreme position to take on government.

While government should not tell us what church to go to or what to believe, government is partially responsible for maintaining respect for godliness within society. The government isn't the church and I am not advocating manmade theocracy, but government should apply biblical principles to its task. It may not be able to apply these principles perfectly, but should be led by them given the social conditions we have.

Without due respect for God, members of society will not respect each other. The two pillars of the law are you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. While we cannot legislate a change of heart, laws can be made that reflect the general tone of these two maxims. If a society relaxes one of them the other becomes undoable also.

A completely secular government has no basis from which to govern. Humanism in the end is philosophically opposed to government, where everyone does what is right in their own eyes. (Judges 17:6) One reason for the breakdown of modern Western society is government has become secular. It comes to the point where it has no authority except force.

Category one – Commandments 1-4: Prohibiting idolatry, taking the Lord's name in vain and dishonouring the Sabbath day. These laws are to prevent society from becoming so debased in its mind that every other destructive social perversion follows. They show God must be honoured in a society, for the protection of all its other values.

We don't follow a legalistic view of the Sabbath, but the principles God gave us show a nation must protect a level of honour for God. Blasphemy, atheism, witchcraft and greed within a society should be curtailed by government. This doesn't have to be done in a harsh way, but government should be aware of the impact these things have on individuals and society. Curtailing such is no more hindering liberties than is laws against polygamy or paedophilia. People should not have the liberty to destroy others by what they spread. Government for a long time has been slowly abdicating its responsibilities under category one.

This shouldn't degenerate into a witch-hunt or harsh religious laws. It is to maintain balance between freedom and responsibility. Government has drifted from its roots and must come back to the middle ground. Humanism has steadily replaced Christianity as a philosophy for government. They have called it separating faith from government, but it is exchanging government's faith from Christianity to Humanism.

Humanism changes all laws. It says people should be free to choose whether they take harmful drugs, while the law of God says people should have responsibility to each other. The government's role is to protect the weak from harmful influences. We have allowed the pendulum to swing too far. Restricting liberty is not love: abdication of responsibility in protecting the weak is not love. The government needs prayer.

Category two – Commandments 5-10: Honour your parents and do not commit adultery: to protect the family unit and prevent sexual perversion. Sex is for marriage, not for fornication, homosexuality or for under-aged people (paedophilia). These are basic principles to keep people safe. If the family falls, children are ruined and society falls. Government is slowly abdicating its responsibility in this field also.

Do not murder, steal, slander or covet. Many of our laws are based around these commandments, but weak government is now prevalent here as well. For example, a society of people suing each other is a society of people that covets what belongs to another. A society that doesn't properly monitor its capitalism, government members, professional classes and unions in an equitable manner will not be protected against covetousness.

God's commands are not grievous to those who would love their neighbour, or as Paul said, government of this sort is not a terror towards good works. Paul said the government's job is to be grievous to those (including themselves) who would destroy others. This is God's love, to bring well being into society to protect the innocent. The government's role is to safe guard the rule of law, while the church's role is to strive for godliness through the gospel and to pray for the government.

In a day of individualism we often don't like government, or sense a duty to it or to our society. If Satan has goals, bringing down government would be high on the list. We see government being undermined by terrorism, rebellion, lawlessness, the degrading of moral laws on sexuality, corruption, blasphemy and greed, all of which are rooted in anarchy. We should not join with those who weaken government. Government is God's gift to mankind. In the church government is one of the gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12:8). In the family godly leadership from parents is vital.

A government that leads for our well being carries out its role in a servant manner, in the interests of the people and not corruptly in its own interests. Good government is servant orientated, honest, just, godly and righteous. There are two aspects to government we need and which God designed we have: strong government and servant government. God's love, and his principles in his word, directs us towards this type of government.

Continuity Between Testaments

When discussing God's character and how his love is shown we need to look at both Testaments of scripture. Has God changed between the Old and New Testaments? Is the Old Testament irrelevant to the Christian? Does the Old Testament present an unforgiving God, while in the New Testament God's love is seen as tolerant and non-judgemental? Has God adjusted his former position?

The answer to these questions is although Christ changes man's heart in the New Covenant and has given all his worshippers his Spirit, there is continuity between the Old and New Testaments as far as God's values and character are concerned. The idea that the attributes of God have changed between the Old and New Testaments is a misconception.

This is an area where some people have misunderstood the love of God. Depicting life as brutal in the Old Testament it is said they lived under a harsh law, while in the New Testament we live under grace that previously did not exist. It may even be said that God in the Old Testament was gross and in the New Testament he is accommodating. This is a humanist way of perceiving God's love, often to excuse our lifestyle. It is a big mistake to define love by this wrong imagination.

Throughout the scriptures we see an unchangeable loving and just God. In the Old Testament God brought judgement in the flood during Noah's day and upon cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah. We also see God was slow to bring these judgements, much more willing to apply grace, to send prophets to warn and plead for repentance and change of behaviour: such as the case with Nineveh.

God sent Jonah to call Nineveh to repentance. When they repented God turned away his judgement and in grace forgave their sin. God's pastoral care towards Jonah's unloving attitude shows God's grace and compassion. It is this grace and compassion that eventually leads God to judge, correct, punish and cleanse the earth for man's own sake, when evil becomes unbridled.

Jonah had pity for a plant that died (the pity was really for himself as the plant was shading him). But he had no pity for the people of Nineveh and was angry that God spared them. In contrast God even cared for the animals:

You have had pity on the plant, which you didn't even labour for... and shouldn't I have spared Nineveh, that great city, of more than 120,000 people that cannot discern between their right and left hand; and also many cattle. Jonah 4:10-11

Jonah didn't understand God cared for the people of Nineveh, planting them and watching over them, even though they were a Gentile nation and not part of his chosen Israel. It is not very encouraging when a prophet of God does not see this much about God's nature. The characters of the Old Testament, even the prophets, did not always represent God well. They were like us today, and had faults.

Some claim God was swift in judgement in the Old Testament: the numbers of people who perished in the wilderness, for example, or Uzzah who was struck to death for steadying the ark. (2 Sam 6:7). But there is no real case of swift judgement. God is never swift to anger. His anger is nothing like the anger of man. God only acted in such ways after much warning and only if it were in the interest of the people as a whole.

Noah was building the ark for over 100 years, while he preached calling all to repentance. The flood was destined to come when Methuselah died, whose name means dart or judgement: i.e. when Methuselah dies the judgement will come. That Methuselah was the oldest man ever to live, says quite a lot about God's patience, kindness, grace and very controlled nature in judgement. How can we say he is swift to anger when he is more patient than any of us?

Why did God bring down judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it because he was intolerant over his laws being broken? No. It isn't the law he cares for, but the people his law is designed to protect. He said to Abraham, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous". (Gen 18:20). It was the cry of the oppressed he was responding to. See what the people of Sodom tried to do when the angels visited Lot. (Gen 19) Some people completely misrepresent God's nature in judgement.

Returning to Uzzah, Israel's leaders were told many times to read the law and follow it. David did not pay heed to this. Was it the ark that mattered? No, it was the indifference with which the people treated God and also their neighbour. Indifference towards God brought out the worst in the leaders and led to atrocities and suffering. God's purpose was that Israel's leadership govern in the fear of God. Pastoral care for the nation was God's aim. Leaders who do not honour God will not love people and will destroy their nation.

As for Uzzah, it wasn't entirely his fault. His leadership (David) failed him. There is responsibility in leadership and we need to take our roles seriously. Neither does this mean Uzzah went to hell, or was judged in that sense by God. This was an act of correction for the benefit of Israel's people.

This is not an "Old Testament God" acting here. We see this also in the New Testament. When the church was birthed in the midst of much power, God moved to protect the sanctity and godliness

within the church community. In this case Ananias and Sapphine lied to the Holy Spirit in order to gain favour with the church. Both were slain by the Holy Spirit and buried by the church.

And great fear came upon the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done... and no man dared join them (for the wrong motives): but the people magnified them (regarded the presence of God, salvation and truth in their midst). And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and of women. Acts 5:11-14

The outcome of God's action was people did not join the church unless they were genuine converts. It led to a magnification of the truth so that multitudes were saved. It showed them the church really was preaching the truth about God. And it shows us today that we can't serve God insincerely. It is a warning to us about holiness rather than pretended faith. This then saves many souls from judgement. But if we don't take these countless warnings from scripture there is no hope: as Jesus said concerning the rich man's relatives who had not repented, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead". (Luke 16:31)

The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament, with the same attributes and the same love. There were grace, faith, patience, salvation and judgement in the Old Testament and all of these exist in the New Testament and operate by the same principles. It should be no surprise that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever". (Heb 13:8)

We might say that judgement is even more prevalent in the New Testament, with those who have heard the gospel and known the truth and have turned away from it. It is the same principle though: "to whom much is given (much grace through the gospel) much is expected":

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, whereby he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has despised the Spirit of grace. Heb 10:28-29

We need to read this verse properly. It doesn't mean God acted rashly. *He that despised the law*, means the person was hardened and given over to a destructive course of action. We look at this in the chapter *God's Love in the Law*. It would be the same in the New Testament. Though Ananias and Sapphine died after one act, it was the result of many acts before, from a heart not open to God.

The New Covenant doesn't mean God has changed from the Old Testament character we have been told about. It means the grace he showed in the Old Covenant, is seen more clearly now in the sending of his Son and his Spirit, but to turn away from God's plan of salvation today, or to finally reject it, would have the same consequences as it did for those who turned away from his promises in the Old Covenant.

Paul points this out again in 1 Cor 10. He shows the standards of God's judgement are the same today as they were when he brought Israel out of Egypt. The church today is treated the same way:

Moreover brethren, I would not have you ignorant (concerning those who fell in the wilderness)... Now all these things happened to them for our example... 1 Cor 10:1-11

The New Testament has several other warnings about judgement for those who turn away from the gospel, or who use the grace given as a cloak for unrighteousness, or who use the ministry as a means of personal gain. Jesus, Paul, Peter and Jude, for example, all warn very clearly about this. This message is just as applicable for us today as it ever has been.

I exhort first of all that prayers... be made... for all men... for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our saviour; who would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim 2:1, 3-4

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, (as men would judge His actions), but is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Pet 3:9

Both of these passages show God's patience and great reluctance to bring judgement upon men. He is compassionate and feels for the suffering of those who are lost. He extends great lengths of time for repentance and sends many prophets to warn and plead, and only brings judgement as a last resort, to establish more godly societies once again. These passages do not mean God will forgive and save all men. His salvation is to the repentant who turn away from sin and turn to God.

When it says God is "not willing", it means it is not his will that any perish. This is a reference to what pleases him: that all repent and evil ceases. It means that people perish because of their own wilfulness, not because God desires it. It means he takes no delight in judgement at all. It means his vengeance isn't one of personal enjoyment, but it is demanded by his holiness and righteousness, by which he rules all things and secures the well being of society.

There is no difference here between these New Testament texts and the Old Testament revelation about God's character and ways:

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the sovereign Lord. Repent and live! Ezek 18:31-32

Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' Ezek 33:11

In all these examples we see a God who blesses man abundantly with all things in creation, in sending his Son to show us the truth and to take our sin, in sending many prophets and gifts of his Spirit to speak to us, and only brings judgement as a last resort, and only after a very long period of grace, in order to govern his universe and people for good.

How can we say the God of the Old Testament was rash when he forgave Manasseh after he repented, who was previously the most wicked king in the history of Israel? The Old Testament is a

history of God's love and patience with his people. He pleaded with Israel for around 1,500 years before bringing the nation into final judgement: but even then gave them grace through the gospel. He also made an example from the Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar, forgiving him and turning him to repentance, as an example to other Gentiles he loved. We can see in the New Testament that God has the same character:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.
1 Tim 1:15-16

Joshua's Conquest of Canaan

In this section we will look at some length at Joshua's conquest of Canaan. This narrative in the Old Testament has raised many objections against God being a God of love. The lessons here can be applied to other passages in of the Old Testament, such as David's raids on similar populations, which were essentially the same people and circumstances.

The tempo or character of God shown throughout the book of Joshua is highlighted in Josh 5. Jesus, with sword drawn, meets with Joshua before the invasion of Canaan begins:

And the captain of the Lord's hosts said to Joshua, Loose your shoes from off your feet; for the place where you stand (before the Lord) is holy ground. Josh 5:15

In this meeting impressions were made upon Joshua of the holiness of the Lord which was to be reflected throughout the campaign and habitation of the land. It was to be no celebration in blood lust or spoils of wars, but a sober judgement upon sinfulness that was destroying many lives. If Israel forgot this they would eventually suffer the same fate as those they were driving out. God would be no respecter of persons (or nations), though he had called Israel.

Our reconciliation of Joshua's invasion with the love of God begins with our perspective. When we look at Canaan the facts come to light.

Countless Witnesses

The people of Canaan knew the will of God. There were countless witnesses. This knowledge had been passed down from the patriarchs. Methuselah lived during Adam's day and Noah knew Methuselah. Canaan was Noah's grandchild. Likewise Abraham knew Noah and had family connection with Canaan and the people throughout that land. Here is a very close link between the patriarchs of Abraham and Canaan's day and Adam.

There were also many priests of God in the region (like Melchizedek), even in Moses' day (Moses' father in law), who were priests of Elohim, rather than priests of a local pagan deity. There were other godly people, possibly including Job, who were not Israelites. There were many other witnesses, far more than the Bible records. We cannot say that the people of Canaan were ignorant or "innocent". They knew their sin and they knew the consequences it would bring.

By Abraham's time the people of Canaan had already gone far from God. Abraham was just one of the prophets who was warned about the coming judgement on Canaan, more than 400 years before Joshua entered the land. God said to Abraham their sin was not yet "full". This means there would be an intervening period of grace, of calling to repentance, of kindness that would hopefully speak to their hearts and lead to repentance:

And God said to Abraham, know surely that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs (Egypt), and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them 400 years. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, I will judge (God gave Egypt 400 years warning also): and afterward they shall come out with great substance... but in the

fourth generation they shall come here again (to Canaan under Joshua): for the sin of the iniquity of the Amorites (people of Canaan) is not yet full. Gen 15:13-14, 16

The text in Genesis said this return of Abraham's household to Canaan would occur in the fourth generation, as John Gill explained: "Moses and Aaron were the fourth from Levi, or Eleazar from Kohath, and Caleb from Judah". This was the fourth generation of those who went to stay in Egypt. The Amorites were the strongest nation in the land of Canaan, but their mention includes the people of that land in general.

So God had prophets and priests calling the people to repentance for many years. But he also had his goodness in general as a witness to the people:

Nevertheless He did not leave himself without a witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. Acts 14:17

If we think God hasn't been good enough, it is not because he is not good, it is because of our covetousness, which leaves us unsatisfied: "I didn't get all the goods I would have liked". This is a reflection on our state, not on God's. (Luke 12:15)

Or do we despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and patience; not knowing that the goodness of God leads us to repentance? Rom 2:4

God knew what the outcome would be in Canaan's situation and told Abraham of it earlier. God was giving them more than 400 years to change, but by that time his patience and grace would have to give way to intervention and judgement. If God didn't intervene, oppression would be unending and godliness would vanish, making civilization unbearable for all.

The Evil of Canaan

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked.
Nahum 1:3

Apart from God's patience, in contrast we see the absolute wickedness and complete cruelty of the people. It is clear that something had to be done. If God didn't act in this situation he would be accused of aiding and abetting.

The people of Canaan had descended into complete debauchery. When we table their way of "life" our amazement is not that God brought judgement, but that God waited so long and spared so many. The wonder is that he didn't finish Canaan completely, but that he put his Spirit into men like Joshua and Caleb to bring renewal, righteousness and peaceful communities to the land. Even in judgement upon such evil, we see God's power controlled and contained, in contrast to the human excesses.

John Collyer (see online) reveals a little about how the Amorites lived when Joshua entered the land:

Inscribed baked clay tablets at Ras Shamra (Ugarit) in Syria, and at other sites, have revealed something of the horrible nature of the Amorite religious practices. They

worshipped gods who have been shown to be sexual perverts of the most grotesque kind, and who had no respect for the sanctity of human life.

Countless children were sacrificed to their gods by being thrown into the fires of their god Moloch... Also, funerary jars have been found containing the remains of young children distorted by suffocation as they struggled for life, after having been buried alive as a sacrifice to Canaanite gods. Such children have been found in the foundations of Canaanite houses.

The Ras Shamra tablets reveal a lot about the religion and way of life of the Canaanites. Everything the Bible mentions about the Canaanite pagan worship and degeneracy are fully described in these archaeological tablets. One of the gods the Canaanites worshipped was Anath, the patroness of sex and war. A portrait of this god survives today, and is described by William Albright:

The blood was so deep that she waded in it up to her knees – nay, up to her neck. Under her feet were human heads, above her hands human hands flew like locusts. In her sensuous delight she decorated herself with suspended heads while she attached hands to her girdle.

Her joy at the butchery is described in even more sadistic language: “Her liver swells with laughter, her heart was full of joy, the liver of Anath (was full of) exultation”. Afterwards Anath “was satisfied” and washed her hands in human gore before proceeding to other occupations.

Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, John Hopkins 1968, p. 77

This is a celebration of bloodlust, a joy in brutality just for the sake of it. There is no moderation, no grief at judgement, no pleading for the souls, no just cause, no relief for the oppressed: just a glorification of the shedding of blood, and an orgy of sex in personal gratification. This was the impact of these gods upon the society. God is often accused of brutality in Canaan, but we don't hear about the evil he intervened to stop. The accusers are quiet about this.

The issue God was dealing with was not just idolatry. He said he is a jealous God, but this jealousy is for our sake. The idol gods were made in man's fallen image, and the immoral myths associated with them made a society of people used as objects of other people's gratification. God hates this because he is a God of love. He is jealous against idolatry because of his love for mankind.

This is another characteristic of love. If there is no hatred of evil (not hatred of people), then there is no love. Where there is no action there is no love.

You that love the Lord, hate evil: He preserves the souls of his saints; he delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Ps 97:10

This verse shows why God judges. He does so to preserve the souls of the saints, meaning he protects them from the wicked taking over the whole earth. He delivers them from the oppression of the wicked, to allow them to live unmolested in peace. This is love.

In contrast to the pagan gods, the God shown in the Law of Moses is one of love. The Law of Moses highlighted the Canaanite practices and stated what Israel's response must be. Leviticus 18 told Israel not to follow the practices of the people of Canaan and then described how Israel must be different.

For in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you... For all these abominations have the men of the land done... Lev 18:24, 27

Israel was forbidden incest. Due to their seared conscience, Lev 18 had to define incest in its various forms. In the Canaanite culture no child was safe from sexual abuse. The details given in Lev 18 show the extremities to which sin had gone. The chapter forbids incest, adultery, sacrificing children in the fire, homosexuality and bestiality. These prohibitions were not to enforce religiosity, but were for the well-being of humanity. They were not tailored to restrict personal liberties, but to protect the liberties of others. Rights are not just about me, but what is good for my neighbour. An emphasis in a loving community is the responsibility of its members.

The Canaanites treated these sins as normal behaviour. Lev 18 says these practices were their *manner or custom*. It wasn't that they fell into these sins here and there, but were overtaken by them so that the whole society was fully given over and wholly committed to this slaying of human life. Their conscience was fully seared by this point and had been for a long time before God's final intervention.

When we read about Joshua's invasion, and later about some of David's raids, we imagine a village of peaceful people living in a quiet setting and suddenly being disturbed; then we ask questions about the rightness of it. The situation was not at all like that.

Apart from those things mentioned above, these people were constantly raiding neighbouring communities, killing all their inhabitants, raping all the women, men and children and taking all their goods and crops. God sent the government of Israel to bring judgement and warned Israel not to follow their practices, or they too would be judged. This is right, fair and loving.

The Language of Joshua

So why did God tell Joshua to kill man, woman and child? Firstly, this didn't mean every single person. The term "everything that breathes" (Deut 20:16) is a phrase that means to cover all life, i.e. person or animal, but it is not literal in terms of every single one.

Phrases like "they utterly destroyed all" were not then meant as an absolute statement. It was a figure of speech that meant God gave them "unconditional conquest". Only in Jericho were the animals given to slaughter so Israel would know this war was not for their booty, but a sober event of judgement upon people whom God valued.

There are a few points to note about these commands to "utterly destroy". To "perish" and "destroy" mean an action of judgement to remove from the land and are also later applied to Israel for idolatry (Deut 28:63, Jer 38:2, 17). That is, the term doesn't mean literally to kill all, but to bring into judgement and take away from the land. These are the terms used for Israel being carried away by Babylon. In Deut 7:2-5 God told Israel to utterly destroy the Canaanites, and on the other hand not to intermarry with them, which means that many were to remain alive.

Paul Copan points out the sense of certain phrases in the Hebrew culture at that time:

Joshua's conventional warfare rhetoric was common in many other ancient Near Eastern military accounts in the second and third millennium BC (Copan quotes many examples). The language is typically exaggerated and full of bravado, depicting total devastation. The knowing ancient Near Eastern reader recognized this as hyperbole; the accounts weren't understood to be literally true.

This language, Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen observes, has misled many Old Testament scholars in their assessments of the book of Joshua; some have concluded that the language of wholesale slaughter and total occupation – which didn't (from all other indications) actually take place proves that these accounts are falsehoods.

But ancient Near Eastern accounts readily used "utterly/completely destroy" and other obliteration language even when the event didn't literally happen that way.

Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, Baker Books 2011, p. 171 (See also Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics For the People of God*; Provan, Long & Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* and K. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*.)

Joshua himself clearly recognized this as hyperbole. On one hand he said he had wiped out all, and on the other he stated many were left, without any sense of contradiction. (Compare Josh 10:40-42, 11:16-23 with Josh 23:7, 12-13, 15:63, 16:10, 17:13, Jud 2:10-13.)

Copan notes Richard Hess' claim that the phrase:

'We captured all his cities at that time and utterly destroyed the men, women and children of every city. We left no survivor' (Deut 2:34) appears to be stereotypical for describing all the inhabitants of a town or region 'without predisposing the reader to assume anything further about their ages or even their genders'. (That is, they were actually military strongholds: see below.)

Copan, p. 175. See also Richard Hess, "The Jericho and Ai in the Book of Joshua", in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*.

See also "The Rhetorical Structuring of the Joshua Conquest Narratives", K. Lawson Younger Jr. in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, and Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, in the Appendix: "What About the Canaanites?"

The Offer of Repentance

Those who repented, who did have faith and who turned to God were given forgiveness, like Rahab and everyone she brought into her house in Jericho. This was an open door to all the repentant. (Josh 2:19) These were given full pardon. Rahab even became part of the lineage of Jesus.

There is no indication that repentance of individuals and households didn't take place at other times during Joshua's campaign and there is no reason for us to assume they didn't. An incident like this in the first battle is to serve as a theme and an example of God's principles to others in subsequent

battles. There is no reason why Joshua would have mentioned every other incident in which others would have turned to the Lord like Rahab and her house.

So even in this judgement, that came after so long a time of patience, there was room for repentance and forgiveness with a God of grace. Such repentance may not have been common in Canaan at that time, due to the condition of the people, but it was open. God valued the people far more than the pagan idol gods and far more than the people of Canaan valued the lives of others.

The Offer of Peace

Deut 20:10-18 has often been misread to mean that Israel were not to offer or to allow peace to those cities in Canaan where Israel would dwell. However, the distinction made between those cities and other cities further away, is not that peace shouldn't be offered, but in what to do with the inhabitants when an offer peace was rejected.

Canaanites could have repented and made peace with Israel, but otherwise they were to be driven out (or flee). (See Jeffrey Tigay in *Deuteronomy, Torah Commentary Series*, Jewish Publication Society, 2003, p. 474.) Several Rabbis hold to this interpretation. A source from Talmudic times reads:

‘That they teach you not to mimic their abominations’ (Dt. 20:18). This verse teaches us that if they repent, they shall not be killed. (*Sifre*, ad loc., §202)

The point of the commandment of God is not the killing of everyone, but the pollution of Israel from those tribes within their borders. Repentance would prevent pollution inside Israel's territory.

There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the inhabitants of Gibeon... for it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle... Josh 11:19-20

As Josh 11:19-20 points out, peace to cities within the land was offered and was possible upon repentance, though God did not often grant this repentance, but gave them up to their own hardened hearts.

For example, God told Moses to go against the Amorite king Sihon, in the land which God had given Israel to dwell (Deut 2:24-26). With no record God instructed him to do so, Moses first offered Sihon peace. This was Moses' understanding of God's instruction. He knew God to be a God of peace. Sihon could have accepted peace, but refused. The Bible says God hardened his heart, not in respect to making him continue in sin, but in respect to leading him by his own arrogance into judgement.

The Gibeonites deceived Joshua into making peace with them. Some Rabbis believe Moses or Joshua offered peace to the main cities beyond Jordan before the campaign began. All the cities refused. But after the Gibeonites saw what happened to Jericho and Ai they wanted peace. According to rabbinical tradition, once war had started the ban on calling for peace was in place. (The Maharal of Prague (1525-1609), in his *Sefer Gur Arye* to Dt 20:11; see also Rivon Krygier in www.adathshalom.org/RK/about_the_extermination_of_the_Canaanites.pdf, accessed May 25th 2011)

The “Ban” Against Idolatry

This is one of the most important points. Israel is not a racial term, but a faith term designating the people who worship God. This is the true meaning of the seed of Abraham, the father of faith. All those who turn from their sin to God are Israel. This has nothing to do with race. The “ban” is against sin and idolatry in the land, or in the church (Israel: the elect or called out people).

The invasion of Canaan was not a racial concern. There are many instances where different races are included in Israel, while Israelites are excluded, such as Achan (Josh 7). It is an issue of idolatry (Ex 34:12-13, Deut 12:2-3). God was not out to destroy an ethnic group, but idolatry. Copan explains the biblical meaning of these texts:

The ultimate issue was religious: Israel was to destroy altars, images, and sacred pillars. In other words, destroying Canaanite religion was more important than destroying Canaanite people... As Gary Millar writes, the concern of this destruction (*herem*) was “to see Israel established in a land purged of Canaanite idolatry as painlessly as possible”.

The goal was to “remove what is subject to [herem] laws (the idols)”. The root of the dilemma Israel faced wasn’t “the people themselves, but their idolatrous way of life”. Failure to remove the idolatry would put Israel in the position of the Canaanites and their idols before God. Israel would risk being consecrated to destruction.

Copan, p. 173 (See also Gary Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy*.)

God wanted the inhabitants of the land to be driven out or to repent from their sin. Israel was commanded not to reject the stranger in the land, regardless of their ethnicity, but to accept and integrate them into their society and treat them well. (Lev 19:34, 24:22, Deut 10:18-19, Num 35:15, Num 9:14, Ex 23:4-5)

These texts are clear evidence that God’s mind to the people of the land was to their salvation and to bring them into share in the blessings of Israel, even if Israel themselves resisted this. Even the ban on the Moabites entering God’s assembly (Deut 23:3), was in regard to their idolatry, not the case if they turned to God. Ruth was a Moabite and included in the lineage of Jesus. (See also Neh 13:1-3.)

So God did not tell Joshua to kill all the inhabitants of Canaan without chance of peace or repentance. God was rather looking for their repentance. But if Israel dwelt in the land without conquering the idolatry they would be led into sin. Israel failed to obey God in this and they eventually fell into all these sins and their children suffered greatly as a result.

This is the point for us. If we turn away from God’s word and compromise with the world’s values, they will destroy both us and our offspring in leading them away from God’s truth, which is given for our betterment, righteousness and blessing.

That they do not teach you to do their abominations... Deut 20:18

The Cities

There wasn't the wholesale killing of women, children and animals that one would think. Firstly, it was only Jericho where it was commanded that the animals be killed.

Secondly, it was the military strongholds of Canaan that Joshua attacked. Copan claims the book of Joshua describes attacks on military strongholds, not on general populations. There is no archaeological evidence of civilian populations at Jericho and Ai and the other cities mentioned in Joshua in that period. (Copan, p. 175-176)

The ancient Amarna letters (between Pharaohs and Canaanites) support this. See also 2 Sam 12:26, 2 Sam 5:7 and 1 Chron 11:5, 7 for cities used as strongholds. Copan claims:

Given what we know about Canaanite life in the Bronze Age, Jericho and Ai were military strongholds. In fact, Jericho guarded the travel routes... This means that Israel's wars here were directed towards government and military installations; this is where the king, the army, and the priesthood resided. (Copan, p. 176)

The use of "women and children" is a "stereotypical expression for the destruction of all human life in the fort, presumably composed entirely of combatants". (Hess, in Copan, p. 176)

Presumably there would have been women serving in the cities whether as whores or as inn keepers or otherwise, but the cities were not general civilian centres. While Joshua mentions specific kings who were killed, the book does not mention specific civilians who were killed, in particular any outside of these military strongholds.

Copan also notes that the numbers of those killed in the Old Testament can be hard to estimate. The word for thousand (*eleph*) can also mean unit.

In Joshua, God acts in judgement when it is absolutely necessary, and to protect people. We see judgement in moderation, not bloodthirsty or motivated by ethnicity, aimed not at people, but at their sin. God's righteousness and vengeance stem from a Fatherly love and desire to turn away oppression and to preserve his truth for the sake of humanity and his creation. Satan wants to destroy his creation with moral and idolatrous pollutions: God will preserve it and renew it. This is love.

When it comes to interpreting scripture as it was written, in its own rhetoric and context, some people object to the process. But our task is to think about the text in the culture and history in which it was written and understand it intelligently. Some don't want to think about the text, but are like the children of Israel who told Moses, "You go to the mountain and bring back to us God's message and that will do us." (Ex 20:19) They want the easy way out. A shallow understanding of scripture, a careless approach to our faith, underlies a lot of the social problems in our day.

God's Love in the Law

In this section we look at the Law of Moses in a friendlier manner than we may be used to. It is not given by God to be grievous or burdensome, but to highlight his love and care for his people. Especially when we compare Moses' Law to the laws of other nations at the time, we see it was designed to lift burdens and protect human rights, as well as assign reasonable responsibilities. God's law only becomes burdensome to us when we seek to be justified by it, rather than by faith.

We aim to show the love of God revealed in the law. We also want to answer some questions about the law in regard to its alleged harshness and on its relevance to our time. This section counters several wrong ways of seeing the law: the idea we are saved or sanctified by the law; the idea it doesn't matter how we live with respect to the law; the idea that we are still required to keep the ceremonial law; the idea that human society can be kind and just apart from God's law.

The Fruit of Grace

There is no change regarding God's purpose for the law in the Old Testament and his purpose for it today. The law wasn't given then to save Israel, nor is it given to save us. Israel was called out not because they kept the law, but because God was fulfilling his promise to Abraham through the election of grace. That is the same for us today.

Neither should we suppose that today we may live contrary to the law "under grace". Old Testament Israel was also under grace, elected by God through faith without self-merit.

After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Deut 9:4-6

Israel's keeping of the law was a response to grace. Like us, they too were told they could not keep this law of themselves, but through faith, in dependence on God they would please him. Israel did not have this heart of faith. (Deut 5:29, Num 14, Heb 3:19) Instead, they first turned to idolatry, and after their return from captivity in Babylon, they turned to legalism (self-justification). This was never God's purpose for the law.

Likewise today we are called out by grace. We love God because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19) Just as with Israel: we are not saved by the law, but neither do we throw it out. If God's character reflected in the law is not working in us, then how can it be the same God who has called us? As God lives in us by faith through Christ, then the same fruit is shown. Christ is the root of the law, the same root we are grafted into by faith, so the fruit in us must also be the same. The gospel of the Old Testament and of the New Testament are the same.

In the law we see the love of God meeting with man in the condition in which he then lived. The nature of man, rather than God Himself, in some ways casts a shadow over the law. The law was given because of sin, to soften the effect of man's fallen nature upon other people. (Gal 3:19) Jesus said the law brought into consideration the hardness of the human heart. It moderated cultural customs which were not God's will, e.g. polygamy, slavery, divorce, war, death, attitudes towards women, children, foreigners, enemies, or those who fell into misfortune.

To see how these (i.e. marriage, human relations) were meant to be according to God's will, Jesus explained, we need to look at Genesis and creation before the fall.

Moses because of the hardness of your hearts allowed you to put away your wives (for fornication), but from the beginning it was not so. Matt 19:8

In governing Israel, a nation of people largely without faith, the law was *sewing new cloth onto old garments*, i.e. applying God's precepts to the weakness of man. Given the human condition, the intent of God's law was to reveal his love and care for people and fashion this into their daily lives and customs, to relieve suffering and oppression.

The law was not intended as a legalistic code, but a framework. The law did not cover every possible situation, but presented cases from which principles could be applied to differing circumstances. They were to depend on God, guided by him in its application to people's lives, keeping in mind God's intent for it to do the most good for the society.

The law wasn't placed over God's people; but as judges, magistrates, *elohim*, rulers, sons of God, Israel were brought into relationship with God to judge the law righteously. (Ps 82) It was failing to see this grace that angered the Jews against Jesus, when he claimed to be the Son of God. (John 10:34-36)

The purpose of the law was to heal. The law was made for man, and not man for the law. When we apply the law our purpose should be to heal others, not to pay homage to "the letter".

For I desired mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God (his nature) more than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:6

They that are whole do not need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice... Matt 9:12-13

And He said to them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. Mark 2:27

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:6

The intent of the law was to reveal God's love and nature in relation to their daily lives.

For all the law is fulfilled in this one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Gal 5:14

The whole law and all its parts, points to the love of God for people. This is how we interpret and apply the law. We should not apply the law legalistically. The inability we have in fulfilling the law is a heart issue, which legalism can't solve. Only Jesus through grace transforms our heart.

Interpreting the Law

Therefore all things that you would that men should do to you, do even so to them:
for this is the law and the prophets. Matt 7:12

The whole law and all the prophets are summarized by this. The reason for a vertical love for God is to ensure a horizontal love towards others. The Ten Commandments have been summarized as the first section dealing with matters of loving God and the second section dealing with matters of loving others.

The issue here in both sections of the Ten Commandments is not legality, but relationships. This is how the prophets saw the law:

Is not this the fast (worship) I have chosen: to undo the bonds of injustice, to undo the heavy yoke, to let the oppressed go free (friend or enemy), and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked that you cover him, and that you do not hide yourself from your own flesh (pass by on the other side). Is 58:6-7

This is how Jesus interpreted the law in the parable of the Good Samaritan. There were legal restrictions which prohibited the priest or the Levite from helping the man set upon by thieves. Maybe the priest couldn't be defiled on his way to the temple. But Jesus said understanding the law sets such issues aside and makes the act of helping the man "lawful" in God's heart.

To love your neighbour is what it means to be "clean" in God's law. The Jews wrongly imagined that God gave them sacrifice and ceremonies to cleanse their sin; but these merely pointed to the cross. The purpose of the cross is to free us from condemnation for us to fulfil the law in love:

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what the Lord requires of you, to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:7-8

Execute true judgement, and show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. And do not oppress the widow, or the fatherless, the stranger, or the poor; and let no one imagine evil against his brother in his heart. Zech 7:9-10

We see here that love is an action: doing what is right by the other person. The law teaches us that this is what it means to know the Lord, not in self-righteousness, but in relationship with and gratitude to him.

Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do judgement and justice, *and* then *it was* well with him? He defended the

cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? declares the Lord. Jer 22:15-16

By pointing us to love God and love our neighbour, God is showing us two things from the law:

- That worship of God in Christ and his church is the cornerstone of true love towards others
- That the worship of God without this love towards others is not true worship

By interpreting the law by its intent rather than by the letter we are not meaning disrespect for the law, for that would spoil the community. But it does mean shunning legalism. This is the balance we have in Christ: the law fulfilled and working through faith.

We can see the meaning of the law by contrasting David with Uzziah. David ate the showbread while being pursued by Saul, which was illegal for any to eat but priests (1 Sam 21-22, Matt 12:1-8). Jesus approved his action. Uzziah assumed a priestly duty and was corrected. His pride would result in dictatorial leadership and harm the people. (2 Chron 26:16-21) Judgement doesn't come because people haven't followed the letter of the law, but because they haven't repented of sin.

We can also contrast Phinehas with Jesus. Acting in an official capacity, Phinehas restrains sin by killing two people who defiantly lead Israel into the idolatrous immorality of Moab (Num 25:10-15). Jesus apparently rebukes similar zeal in his disciples who would call down fire on villagers for their indifference to Christ. (Luke 9:51-56) Some have said Jesus' case reflects New Covenant tolerance. It's a big mistake to read Jesus' message in this way.

Jesus said we shouldn't judge by mere outward appearance, but make right judgement. (John 7:24) His rebuking the disciples follows the same principles as the Old Testament. First, they had no official capacity in the matter they were suggesting. Second, they had no love or care for the sinner. (Jesus answered his disciples as God answered Jonah in Jon 4:11.) Third, judgement comes in God's time: before the end of that generation judgement did come on the villages Jesus passed through.

The nature of God in the law is to redeem his people from harm. This is how we interpret the law. There are two mistakes we should not make with regard to the law:

- We should not use it legalistically;
- Nor should we think God no longer judges mankind by its principles.

God's zeal to redeem and save his people eventually leads him to act in judgement against sin and those committed to it. In the law we see the nature of the redeeming Jesus, not a millstone to place around people's neck. "In the volume of the book it is written of me." (Heb 10:7) Sinners see condemnation in the law, while the repentant see Jesus' love and care.

Sermon on the Mount

The *Sermon on the Mount* exhibits the same continuity between Testaments. Jesus reveals the true meaning of the law and the consistency of God's nature. Statements like "turn the other cheek" and "love your enemies" are sometimes held to be New Testament innovations contrary to Old Testament precepts like "an eye for an eye". Rather, Jesus was correcting their use of this statement to justify personal revenge by taking people's goods.

“Eye for an eye” in the law was not to be taken literally. There was no punishment by mutilation, no gorging out of eyes in retribution in the law, but a payment of a fine to the victim. (Ex 21:19-30) “Eye for eye” was a principle of law meaning the fine should fit the crime. The purpose was to restrict harsh treatment in the courts. It gave the criminal, as well as the victim, rights under the law, making sure there was fairness. Jesus was not denouncing this. He is not overriding the proper Old Testament use of “an eye for an eye”.

In “going the second mile” Jesus meant that our character should resemble that of God, as he is revealed in the law. Jesus is in fact interpreting the law here, not superseding it. He is saying to the Jews, if you seek righteousness by the law, as you say, then this is what you must do. You must not only honour its outward, but also its inward demands of the heart. All this is in the law.

In the Old Testament we see God constantly “going the extra mile” with mankind. Isn’t that the story of his calling of Abraham to bless the world? And he kept being good to the wicked, and rose up early each day to warn them of judgement, and sent Jesus to die for us while we were his enemies. Throughout the whole of scripture this is God’s nature. If he is our Father, then this should also be our nature.

For I earnestly protested to your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. Jer 11:7

Jesus didn’t mean we shouldn’t seek civil protection for life and property from evil doers. That would contradict God’s revealed will in the law, which provided government partly for this purpose. He didn’t condemn the woman for going to the judge (Luke 18:3). Paul appealed to Rome for civil protection on several occasions. Jesus meant that “going the second mile” is our moral duty as sons of God. That is the duty (or in Christ we say the fruit) of love: doing more than the letter demands, because that is useful to the other person’s welfare.

The law is not do’s and don’ts. It is God’s requirement of a holiness of heart that must act positively for the other person’s interests, not because that is required, but because that is the fervent desire. If it does so only as a response to law, it has already failed the law. It is about positive love actions rather than prohibitions (Rom 12:9-10): instead of immorality, we desire the other person’s welfare; instead of abortion on demand, the father and mother seek the child’s safety. No law should be needed here. This is the heart Jesus showed and this life is only possible in him by faith.

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit to unpretended love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently. 1 Pet 1:22

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil 2:4

To this heart there is nothing in the law that is objectionable or in any way grievous. All that the law teaches is acknowledged as right and celebrated. Nor could such a heart think that God had forsaken them, because they automatically know God’s heart towards them is perfectly good. This was Jesus’ point in the *Sermon on the Mount* about the sparrows being

provided for and the contrasting lack of faith in humanity. This lack of faith fully displays man's fallen heart. These are the two qualities Jesus perfectly lived out: perfect love towards others and perfect faith towards his Father. These are the two problems man has. This is what new birth addresses.

When Jesus said if someone "sues you in court for your coat let him also have your shirt also", he didn't mean don't defend yourself in court. Jesus isn't promoting a society of anarchy, which wouldn't be love and wouldn't be in anyone's best interests. He meant if the judge found against you, don't seek revenge, taking the law into your own hands, and don't hate them. Accept the court's decision, showing that our life doesn't consist of our property, and love your enemy. This is to glorify God. This is also in the law.

In 1 Cor 6 Paul had a lot to say against believers going to court against each other. First, the believers themselves should settle private matters. Second, they should avoid all forms of covetousness. Third, they should rather suffer loss for the sake of peace with a brother. But what if, as Jesus puts it, one refuses to hear the church? He is then outside the church. He is not a brother. And if all these remedies have failed, and the case is serious, and the courts are just (not unjust as in 1 Cor 6:1), then proceed as the law provides, but with love toward him.

Moreover, if a brother trespasses against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone: if he shall hear you, you have gained a brother. But if he will not hear you, then call one or two others, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word be established. And if he will not hear them, take it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church let him be to you as a heathen man and a publican. Matt 18:15-17

There is no difference between what Jesus taught here, what Paul taught in 1 Cor 6 and what God taught in Old Testament law. The question is, how can a believer who is a citizen of heaven, live in a world hostile to God? We should not bear a grudge, we should not seek revenge, we should accept the rule of law and we should seek to do our enemy good when we have a chance.

If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. Ex 23:4

This is "turning the other cheek". Instead of revenge, or failing to act in his best interests, the law demands you do what is best for him even though he is your enemy. This means loving your enemy by acting toward them as you would have them act towards you. Note, the law is not a negative command, to ensure we avoid doing wrong to the enemy ("passing by on the other side"), but a positive command, to ensure we take action to do good to the enemy: "Bless those who curse you".

You shall not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. Lev 19:18

In case someone says we are to love our neighbour this way but not our enemy, Jesus defined our "neighbour" to include our enemies. This was not a New Testament improvement, but Jesus' interpretation of Lev 19:18 when questioned on this verse by a teacher of the law. (Luke 10:25-37)

Again, this command in the law is not just to avoid doing wrong: that is not fulfilling the law. The law of God requires we go out of our way to take positive action to do what is good and needed for the enemy. That is because this is what God did for us. The reason for this love is not whether someone is our friend or not, but because “I am the Lord”: it’s our moral duty or response to the revelation of his person to us. God loved Israel when they were strangers in Egypt, and so we should do likewise.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. Lev 19:17

Jesus noted the law didn’t only say you shouldn’t murder, but not even to hate. This also is in the law. Jesus was not adding to the law, but showing the requirement of the law: inner heart change. The same applies to adultery from the heart (Ex 20:17).

“Turning the other cheek” is an idiom against those who seek vengeance in greed. It means to avoid covetousness. It is a heart condition. We see this statement of Jesus broken so many times today in the courts. People use a situation to go after someone’s wealth, instead of responding graciously. This heart condition is also required by the law:

You shall not covet your neighbour’s house, you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife... nor anything that is your neighbours. Ex 20:17

“Turning the other cheek” isn’t a pacifist statement denying self-defence. Self-defence is recognized in the law (Ex 22:2-3, Num 35:22), though trusting God is a better strategy. (Ps 20:7) In Luke 22:36 Jesus discusses the disciples’ future, showing them that instead of hospitality they shall experience hostility and shall travel into dangerous regions, equipped with a sword for self-defence (a usual travel accessory at that time). Some say “sword” here is metaphorical, but not Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes e.g.; the sword being for defence against crime, not to propagate the gospel.

Jesus didn’t defend himself against those who arrested him. That was the will of the Father and also a government action. Jesus recognized Pilot’s authority over him, even though he could have called a legion of angels. The apostles followed his lead in their time and many since them have followed.

The scriptures teach us that God has put government in place to protect the innocent. If this fails us and we don’t get justice from those who God has set over us (in the home, office, state or otherwise) then we should bear it patiently, loving our enemies and following the example of Jesus. This is praiseworthy. (1 Pet 2:20) But scripture does not teach we should not seek protection or take reasonable measures to protect ourselves from personal harm.

Neither are David’s imprecatory psalms (calling for judgement upon God’s enemies) contrary to the New Testament. He wasn’t calling for personal vengeance, but acting in government for the peace of the people, foreshadowing Christ’s government of salvation and condemnation of sinners who do not repent. (Ps 69:22, Rom 11:9)

David did not take personal vengeance when given the opportunity with Saul (1 Sam 24:10), following “the New Testament virtue”, “vengeance is mine says the Lord”. (Rom 12:19) Imprecatory statements are also common in the New Testament: e.g. Matt 23:13, 26:23-24, 1 Cor 16:22, Gal 1:8-9, Gal 5:12, 2 Tim 4:14, Rev 6:10. The motive is justice that protects godliness and the innocent.

In the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus was attacking self-righteousness by properly interpreting the law and showing they had all fallen short. You can't put new wine into old wineskins: but he must first destroy the old wineskins and make the people ready for his faith. This is what Jesus uses the law to do, but also to show us the fruit of Christ in our new lives. Thus the law demands of us a new heart, which the prophets said Jesus was coming to give. (Ezek 36:26)

The Meaning of the Law

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. John 1:17

While the law is good, it couldn't give life. It testifies what is right, but doesn't provide the power to live it: it doesn't provide the change of heart. This comes through the gospel.

The law reflected the love of God, but not as well as Jesus showed us the Father: in the same way that example is better than precept. Our revelation of God and his love in Jesus is the same revelation we see in the law, only in Jesus we see it much more plainly. The scriptures do not suggest Jesus is not fully in agreement with the law.

"Is the law then against the promises of God?" (Gal 3:21) That is, is the law out of harmony with the gospel? The answer is "God forbid", and Paul explains the problem is with the sinner, not with the law. Our hearts were not in harmony with the law, neither in harmony with God: The natural mind (without the gospel) is dead in sin, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be. (Rom 8:7)

What the law could not do for us, because of our nature, God did by sending his Son to change our heart through the gospel. (Rom 8:3) Do we then cancel the law through faith? God forbid, rather we establish (live) the law. (Rom 3:31) We don't live by the law: we live by Christ. But in Christ we certainly do live out the law, or we are not in Christ. "From me is your fruit found." (Hosea 14:8)

Our purpose in this section is to go through examples of the precepts of the law, to see God's love reflected in them. Our intention here is to:

- Look at their meaning: how they are to be properly interpreted.
- See the values instilled in them: what good God was instilling in their society through these precepts.
- See in them the nature of Christ.
- Discover their value for societies of our day.

Below we start with a few examples on how to interpret the law by its intent, rather than by its letter. The letter of the law leads to ridiculous conclusions opposite to God's purpose.

a. The fruit tree

When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. Deut 24:20

Here we see God's care for those in need. We see our responsibility in love to work, and to share with others. The law states that when you are picking fruit from the tree, don't do it in a greedy way,

taking it all, but leave some for those in need who pass by. This is a principle we apply to life in general, not just to our olive tree.

Today our communities are organised differently. House gardens and farms are often enclosed, so strangers do not walk past our trees. To follow this law legalistically would be to “break” the law. If we left some apples on our tree and no strangers passed by, the apples would spoil. We may say we have kept the law, while we have failed to keep the meaning of the law.

Instead, today we could pick all the fruit off the tree, and then take some of it to those in need to share with them. This principle carries over into the New Testament and is expressed in Eph 4:28 and in 1 Tim 6:18.

In this law we see the love of Jesus for those in need. If Christ lives in us we reflect this love.

b. The sideburns

Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. Lev 19:27

This law was in reference to a custom of Canaan in that day, in which people shaved their side burns to honour their pagan god. In recent missions we have seen similar practices in which people shaved their head to honour the dead, as an idolatrous practice. Local Christian leaders refused to honour those idols in that way.

The laws of Moses were contextual: they applied directly to the situation Israel was facing as they crossed Jordan and entered Canaan. The principle for us today is, don't bow down to the practices of idols, or to the philosophies of our day. (Col 2:8)

To hold legalistically to this law, and grow long side burns and beards, when there is no corresponding pagan practice in our time, is a ridiculous conclusion. No wonder people think religion is often irrelevant to our times. It isn't the vain tradition of our fathers we pass on, but the principles they originally pointed to. (1 Pet 1:18, Mark 7:7-9)

The principle we see here is the love of Jesus towards those cruelly affected by idolatry.

c. Our clothing

A woman must not wear men's clothing, or a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this. Deut 22:5

This law is not about whether a woman can wear trousers. In some cultures it is normal for women to wear trousers. This text refers to transsexual or homosexual behaviour, then practiced widely in Canaan, which is contrary to the Lord's will because it leads to the destruction of our families and societies. God doesn't detest the clothing, but the perverted spirit that destroys other people.

I won't go into the statistics showing how homosexuality spoils a society and thus its individuals, by leading to anarchy (a disrespect for government and all forms of moral law) and to paedophilia. This

is clearly established and it is easy to see this is the effect many modern societies are beginning to face.

This law shows the love of Jesus in protecting society against that which brings it harm.

Starting with three examples above, we see that the principles shown in the law are not those of a bygone or backward era, but are universal values to protect the individual, family and society.

The one principle of each of the above three laws is care for others. We see this foremost in the life of Jesus, who didn't use laws like these above to condemn people. Rather he came to set them free. So we have to remember, we are not zealous for the law, but for people the law is designed to protect.

Principles in the Law

When we compare the Law of Moses to laws of other nations of that period we see a big difference. Other nations had discriminatory laws and punishments for the rich or poor, for different ethnic groups, for men and women, institutionalised religious prostitution and child sacrifice (See *Hammurabi's Code* – Babylon BC 1,700.) The Law of Moses brought correction to all of these.

Below we go through verses from a passage of scripture in Exodus to highlight their meaning at the time of Moses and applications for our day. It would be wonderful if we could do this with all of the Law of Moses, but we will just take these few verses as examples. There is so much good to see in these statutes.

Exodus 20:23-25 Altars of rough stone, no gold, no silver, no carving or ornamentation

This law was to show Israel not to admire their own cleverness and handiwork when worshipping God, so as not to worship themselves. This may speak to the level of glitter and entertainment we have in "worship" today, which distracts us from the real thing: God's glory and his message to us.

Ex 20:26 No steps to the altar so no one would look at the priest's nakedness

This was in stark contrast to the religions of Canaan and Egypt, and most places where sexual immorality was part of religion. Shrine prostitution, homosexual prostitution and child abuse were actually part of their religious practices. Worship of God was utterly different to anything they saw in Egypt or may meet in Canaan.

This speaks of the holiness of worship, even to the way we (men and women) dress today. (1 Pet 3:3-4, 2 Cor 7:1, Rom 12:1)

Ex 21:2-6 Slavery was not perpetual

After six years were completed a slave was to have the option of freedom. This was very different to any other culture or any other time. There were numerous laws to protect the slave's well being. God said they were his, being redeemed out of bondage from Egypt, and must be treated like brothers. Slavery of this type was temporary and benevolent, to relieve a debt or pay a penalty for crime, without making poverty generational.

Even foreign slaves had rights. There was no direct provision for release after six years, or at the year of Jubilee, but they could work their way out of debt or convert from idolatry and become integrated into Israel. Many of them would have been voluntary slaves to be cared for, due to hard times from war or famine in their land. Ruth was purchased as a foreign slave by Boaz, not as an inferior, but benevolently and as a full partner as a wife.

Ruth then even came into the genealogy of Jesus, which shows God's mind. The book of Ruth is a great case study and shows how many of these laws in Israel worked out in daily practice.

The overall condition God made concerning foreigners was distinct from any other law of the time. If one was mistreated and ran away, he was not to be taken back to his master (Deut 23:15-16). The law was clear foreigners were to be treated well:

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Lev 19:33-34

Whether Israel carried out these laws fairly was another matter, but God's heart in this is clear. Slavery, seen as a type of community service, with numerous laws by which the slaves were protected (many more protections than those we have considered here), was far more beneficial to the society and to the individual than many of the penal systems of today.

Their rights in the law went far beyond those afforded to slaves in Christian nations, until recent times. Even 150 years ago in nations like the USA, slavery was unlimited by any kind of law. (See *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.) We know that in Britain it was the Christian man William Wilberforce and his Christian friends that overturned slavery, though it is still carried on covertly by the ungodly in our day. There is no text in the law that supports the treatment or segregation of people we have seen in some nations in recent years.

Ex 21:7-11 *There were no sex slaves*

If a man used a female slave for sex she had the status of wife. Polygamy was allowed, but it was regulated. It was not an excuse for abusing women. If a female slave had been used for sex and was not given the rights of a wife she was free to go.

Ex 21:12-14 *First degree murder*

... was carefully defined with no provision for the rich to find a way out, and a cooling off period to allow accidental deaths or accidental manslaughter to be properly assessed. The law required two or three witnesses for first degree murder to be tried. We don't apply this provision by its letter, as we could easily round up two questionable witnesses, but the provision means the evidence must be genuine.

Moreover, you shall not take a ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death. Num 35:31

On the issue of capital offences in general and a ransom being paid (Num 35:31, Ex 21:29-30), Paul Copan had this to say:

Walter Kaiser points out... there were some sixteen crimes that called for the death penalty... Only in the case of pre-meditated murder did the text say that the officials in Israel were forbidden to take “ransom” or a “substitute”. This has widely been interpreted to imply that in all the other fifteen cases the judges could commute the crimes deserving of capital punishment... In that case the death penalty served to mark the seriousness of the crime. One could cite other scholars such as Raymond Westbrook, Jacob Finkelstein, and Joseph Sprinkle, who readily concur with this assessment. (Copan, p. 95-96, and Kaiser, “The Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law”, in *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, vol. 1, ed. Westbrook, Leiden, Brill 2003)

Ex 21:16 Kidnapping

... for ransom or for the purpose of selling into slavery was made a capital offense. This enslavement was completely normal in the cultures of the day. That is the way the world worked then: there were frequently raids on unprotected settlements to capture slaves. Rich people were also captured and sold back to their families.

Ex 21:17 Honouring parents

... is a bedrock of society in any culture and was strongly enforced. The “civilised” world today fails to uphold this and the result is a culture of disrespect, disobedience, alcoholism, drug addiction, crime and suffering among youth. This “harsh” law is to prevent such suffering.

Ex 21:18-20 Assault

... even if it was beating a servant, was punishable.

Ex 21:22-36 Eye for an eye

This is not literal, but shows the level of compensation that should be paid. This principle is enshrined in English law, where the punishment is appropriate to the crime. If a slave was hit and the eye or the tooth was damaged, they were to be given their freedom. If a child was lost from the womb due to the mother being hit by a man, the man’s child was not killed, but due compensation was paid. By contrast, in Hammurabi’s Code “child for child” was literal.

In Ex 21:22-36 we see that the value of every life was assured and was equal. A woman was worth as much as a man, unlike Sharia, where a man has twice the value of a woman. Payment, compensation was negotiable with the family of the injured. Animals were to be kept in a responsible way and compensation made for any injuries caused.

Ex22:1-15 Theft of property

... in all its forms, was not punished by amputation, as in Sharia law, or by prison sentences as in other nations today, but by restitution. If the thief was unable to pay he would become a slave (community service), but for a limited time. If a thief was killed in the act of breaking in at night, that was considered accidental, but when in broad daylight that became murder: even the thief had rights.

Ex 22:16-17. *If a man seduced a girl*

... he was obliged to marry her. If her father refused to allow her to marry the scoundrel, he would pay money dearly for his action.

Ex 22:18-20. *Witchcraft*

... which in the context also involved ritual sexual perversion, bestiality and sacrificing to other gods (frequently human sacrifice involving ritualistic sexual crime), was a capital offence. The foul practises of the nations living in Canaan and surrounding nations were to have no place in God's people. These were abusive, destructive practices, part of a pattern of cruelty and sexual perversion that destroyed the innocent. God, in his love, desires our children to be protected, not the victims of sadistic murderous perversion.

This has nothing to do with the "witch hunting" practices said to have occurred during medieval times, which were often just from superstition or were "scapegoating".

Ex 22:21-24 *God's law protects the vulnerable*

... foreigners, the fatherless, widows. Love is to have practical expression in helping those in a helpless position.

Ex 22:22-27 *God's people were not to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor*

They could not charge interest on a loan to a poor person. They could not use his desperation to further impoverish him. The cycle of borrowing at steep interest ensures the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. That is not love. It may be economic sense for those controlling the economy, but it is not God's economy.

You shall not therefore oppress one another, but you shall fear your God: for I am the Lord your God. Lev 25:17

The practice of the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:10-17), where after 50 years all debts were cancelled and all land reverted to its original owner, helped stop the cycle of poverty (maybe begun by a drunkard father) perpetuating from one generation to the next.

From laws such as these, modern more socialist leaning political parties developed, led at first by concerned Christians, but later becoming ungodly and more communist. It's not capitalism or socialism we need, but godliness within the heart. A friend shared a Polish proverb: "Under capitalism man exploits man; under socialism the reverse is true".

Ex 23:1-9 *Truth and justice show love*

You shall not raise a false report... If you see the donkey of one who hates you under a burden... you shall surely help him... You shall not twist the judgement of the poor in his cause... do not slay the innocent, for I will not justify the wicked (judge)... You shall not take a gift (in your official duty), for the gift blinds the wise and perverts the words of righteousness. You shall not oppress the foreigner...

To me, these are some of the most beautiful texts in the Bible, showing God's nature. These verses outline the importance of truthfulness, particularly before a judge in a dispute or trial. They show the need to act fairly, without prejudice to those who are poor, or to the foreigner or towards someone who behaves as an enemy towards us. It prohibits bribery.

This is, "loving our neighbour". This is exactly what Jesus amplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan: our neighbour is not just our social friend but the one we would not normally associate with. If our religion does not lead us to act with truth and justice then it is hypocrisy, as James tells us. (James 1:27)

The law is rich in lessons we can draw upon for our own day. The legal system of modern Britain slowly developed and improved and was to some extent based upon principles in the Law of Moses. Modern European law is based on a humanist foundation that is eroding many biblical principles of the past.

There is so much in the law we will not be looking at in these notes. Here our text has been Exodus, but before concluding this section we will take just a couple of examples from Deuteronomy. You could have a fuller look at Deuteronomy yourself. All these passages have rich principles for our time and those verses which seem hard to understand do have answers if we look at them more closely. Some texts are straight forward in applying today, but others require an understanding of the context in Canaan to understand. Before we proceed to the ceremonial law, we will take two more civil law principles from Deuteronomy.

Deut 22:6 Environmental sustainability

The principle here is the damage unbridled greed and materialism can do to our environment, over which we have stewardship. We are not condoning false motives which sometimes exist in *environmentalism*, but business interests that would rape the land should be managed or prevented by governments.

If we are to love our neighbour, this includes loving the next generation of people to inherit the earth.

Deut 22:8 Responsibility of due care

The owner of a house was to be put a railing fence around the flat roof (used as living space) of a house, so visitors would not easily fall off. Considering the potential dangers to others is part of loving your neighbour. But this does not make the house owner responsible for accidents, unforeseeable events, or for the negligence of others. Balancing these responsibilities is the task of many court cases in our current day.

The Ceremonial Law

Leviticus focuses on the ceremonial aspects of Israel in Canaan. Paul called the ceremonial laws the rudimentary principles. This means the elementary or beginning teaching lessons. They were a shadow (foretaste or reflection), pointing to and fulfilled in the substance or true reality who is Christ.

The tabernacle and priestly sacrifices all represented the work of redemption provided by Jesus. Israel was elected and called by God, not only to show us principles for a caring and loving society, but also to point all nations to the coming redeeming and sanctifying work of Jesus.

This shows God's love in that he not only planned to send his Son to die for our salvation (to take the punishment of God's just law for our redemption), but he also called out Israel ahead as a witness, so all nations would understand the gospel.

The ceremonial practices were not given to bind us to legalistic observance, but to point to our liberty in Christ. This liberty is from both the ceremony and from sin. It is sin that makes people slaves. After Jesus fulfilled these ceremonies (the feasts, sacrifices, sabbath and kosher laws) we are no longer under these laws because the principle of them (freedom from sin/faith that works through love) is now written upon our hearts through new birth.

Lev 1-10 Sacrifice/Offering laws

Animal sacrifice was common in Canaan, but practiced mainly as witchcraft, i.e. to manipulate demons by gifts of blood, hoping for personal success in return (a bribe). This was a corruption from long standing practice. God's laws were very different to this, directing sacrifices towards heartfelt genuine worship, where the sacrifice foreshadowed Christ's atonement for one's sin, coupled with repentance and change of life style. (Gen 3:21, 4:4)

The sacrifices instructed by God's law were not senseless loss of animal life. They were enjoyed in family fellowship during the feast days as they ate the meat and drank together. The sacrifices formed part of the feast or celebration services in which Israel remembered God's redemption and blessing. These sacrifices were not harsh taxes in which the people lost their goods, but part of God's "holi-days" of enjoyment. Worship was set in the context of God's goodness and bounty to mankind.

God does not delight in the death of animals. Before sin in Eden there was no death. Man and beast ate herbs and fruit. (Today we see still herbivores in the animal kingdom with very large teeth.) God initiated sacrifice for atonement, signifying the death of Christ to take the penalty of sin. Through the sacrifices God showed that sin has deadly consequences, in order to warn men from the harm it would bring. These sacrifices reflect the love of God.

For I did not speak to your fathers, nor command them in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this is what I commanded them, Obey my voice, and I will be your God and you shall be my people: and walk in My ways that I have commanded you and it shall be well with you. Jer 7:22-23

Sacrifice was not the plan of God, but obedience to his will for the good of people. It was because man lost this heart that God used sacrifice to help direct him back to righteousness.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? says the Lord... I take no delight in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs or of goats... Wash yourself (change your ways), make yourself clean; put away the evil of your actions from before my eyes,

cease to do evil. Learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow. Is 1:11, 16-17

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire... Ps 40:6

I will take no bullock out of your house, nor the goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills... If I were hungry I would not tell you... will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows (live right) to the Most High. Ps 50:9-14

For you do not desire sacrifice, or I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Ps 51:16-17

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell (the offerings) in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them... But let judgement (truth) run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Amos 5:21-24

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and do not have love, it profits me nothing. 1 Cor 13:3

Lev 11 *Food laws*

These had to do with being “clean or unclean”. The unclean could not worship at the temple unless they had been purified by washings (*baptisms* – Heb 6:2). The main point of these laws remind of our sin, to show we need cleansing and renewal in our heart through the gift of faith. They were not a burden, but a pointer to God’s goodness. The “unclean” animals were not unclean in themselves (Rom 14:14), but symbolically stood for sin, in which state one could not approach the presence of God.

God showed us our sin through these pictures because of his love, to lead us to Christ for the cleansing of our conscience and the lifting of the burden of guilt to give us freedom. He wanted to lead us to true freedom, not by denying sin, but by dealing with it fully and completely in the right way.

After the resurrection of Jesus, the book of Hebrews states:

By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer (they were still being offered when Hebrews was written) are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them.

For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies - physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established. Heb 9:8-10

The laws served as a teaching instrument for Israel to develop conscience, to learn that God wanted us to discern between moral and immoral, right and wrong (Lev 11:47), to impact our behaviour towards godliness and towards other people. This produces a more equitable society for others.

These laws point us to the gospel. First, this cleansing from sin has come to us through Jesus. Sin has been put away by his death and the way into God's presence is now open to us all: we are now clean and can worship God freely without ceremony. Second, his Spirit in our hearts has given us conscience towards God and towards others. Our heart has been circumcised by faith, meaning the hardness of heart has been removed, enabling us to walk in love and purity.

This is what it means to be clean in God's sight. The society God is now building is his church, his eternal home where nothing is unclean, offends or hurts. (Rev 21:8, 27, 1 Pet 2:9)

There shall nothing hurt nor destroy in my entire holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Is 11:9

Lev 12 Purification after childbirth, bodily emissions or infections

(See also Lev 15.) These laws do not present the idea that sexual relations within marriage are unholy. The Bible never even hints at this.

These laws, relating to child bearing and new life, would have been a reminder of God's gracious gift of life through his coming Saviour. The blood associated with the woman was a reminder of the blood of Jesus by which we are cleansed. The blood was made holy, to point our minds towards God's gift of eternal life in Christ.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood (the death of Christ) that makes atonement for the soul. Lev 17:11

These laws may have also kept a distance between sex and the temple, due to the perverted religious sexual practices of the Canaanites. While "unclean" the men or women were not allowed at the temple.

The time for purification after childbirth may have been for the woman to recover and be cared for. This is the custom in many cultures. The purpose is for the welfare of the woman and new born child. We do know that the intent behind these laws was for the people's welfare in their context.

In the law the time of uncleanness was longer if the child was a girl. It is difficult to know the reason for this, but it is not a reflection on the comparative worth of the child. The scripture does not suggest the female child is inferior: the sacrifice for purification was the same whether the baby was male or female.

In cultures throughout the world child infanticide has been commonly practiced. This continued (even in the Roman Empire) until the early church stood against it. In Roman brothels female children were sometimes kept alive to grow up to become prostitute slaves, while male babies were killed. In other parts of the empire and for different reasons the reverse was the case: the female babies were killed. This infanticide, including ritual child sacrifice, was practiced in Canaanite cultures.

It is likely that these laws reflected the context of the time. To speculate on the reason for these laws today could lead to wrong conclusions.

Lev 19 Be holy for I am holy (vs. 2): laws of separation

This chapter speaks of holiness, or being separate and different from the world around us:

You shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie to one another. You shall not defraud your brother, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not stay with you overnight until the morning.

You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear the Lord: I am the Lord.

You shall do no unrighteousness in judgement: you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness you shall judge your neighbour.

You shall not go up and down as a talebearer... Lev 19:11-16

This holiness and distinctiveness/separation from those nations around Israel also extended to issues such as not planting different types of seed together in one field, and not weaving one piece of cloth with wool and linen mixed together. (Lev 19:19)

It has been difficult to explain laws such as these. Some have suggested they speak symbolically of discernment and not mixing moral with immoral. In this case, although mixing the seed and cloth is not of itself harmful, the lesson is said to serve as a reminder to moral separation.

But it does seem these laws would have also served a moral and not just a ceremonial purpose: i.e. in the same way that the clean/unclean laws discussed above were somehow relevant to the moral context of Canaan at that time. Earlier in these notes we saw that the law not to shave the sideburns related directly to an idolatrous practice. It is very likely that these seed and cloth laws did likewise, though the details of the context may not be so obvious to us today.

J. Daniel Hays explains:

The Law ... is clearly part of the Pentateuchal narrative and is firmly embedded into the story of Israel's exodus, wandering, and conquest. One's interpretive approach to the Law should take this into account. Connecting texts to their contexts is a basic tenet of proper interpretive method.

The Law is part of a story, and this story thus provides a critical context for interpreting the Law. The method for interpreting Old Testament Law should be similar to the method used in interpreting Old Testament narrative, for the Law is contextually part of the narrative.

Bibliotheca Sacra 158: 629 (2001): 21-35

To take the law outside of the context of the time doesn't make sense; it becomes blind observance. This does not apply to universal moral imperatives such as integrity and sexuality (marriage), which are indicated not just by the context of Israel's history, but also by nature itself and the created order from the beginning of mankind, as Jesus and Paul stated. (Matt 19:8, Rom 1:27)

One of the separation laws of Lev 19:19 included not allowing animals of different kind to "gender" together. In Hebrew this can mean to be yoked together, as in Deut 22:10, "You shall not plough with an ox and an ass (yoked) together." Different animals don't work in harmony: being of different sizes, weights, strengths, abilities and temperaments they pull in different directions.

Paul claimed even in regard to the ox we may interpret the law as a shadow applying to the gospel: "Does God say this for the oxen's sake or for our sake? For our sake no doubt it is written". (1 Cor 9:9-10 paraphrased.)

The separation laws show we should not be unequally yoked in marriage (in regard to faith in Christ, not in regard to race), and show for friendships to be fruitful we need to have the same objective as believers in Christ. (2 Cor 6:14) Thus we are to take Jesus' yoke. (Matt 11: 29) If we are yoked with Jesus, it would not work to also be yoked with someone else not yoked with Jesus.

The New Testament tells us to be separate, not in regard to coming out of the world, but not being like the world. We are most definitely to be in the world as believers: to go into the entire world, to be salt and light, to be an aroma of Christ, to occupy and fill the earth, to teach all nations. We are to influence the world. We are to be in the world, but not yoked with the world: i.e. kept from the evil.

I pray not that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil.
John 17:15

Our separation is in regard to the sins and nature of darkness in the world. We are to be light and light has no fellowship, joining, sewing, sowing, or yoking together with darkness. This is especially so with regard to false religion. We are to do the will of God and not just be religious without actual change of heart and life style.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. (Eph 5:11)

This reproof or exposing the works of darkness is also from love and shows the motive of God: to lead people away from destructive lives that hurt themselves and others around them.

Christopher Wright, in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, explains the nature of the law in introducing an ethics that reflects his character seen in his electing, redeeming, transforming and missional acts. The law must be seen and thus interpreted in this context of its historical narrative:

When Israel went after gods, the effects were not just religious but also ethical. Or rather 'unethical' - for idolatry always has disastrous social and ethical effects, as the prophets saw clearly...

God acts at first and calls people to respond. This is the starting point for the moral teaching of the Old Testament. God takes the initiative in grace and redeeming action and then makes his ethical demand in the light of it.

Ethics then becomes a matter of response and gratitude within a personal relationship, not of blind obedience to rules or adherence to timeless principles.

This might not always appear so when we read the laws of the Old Testament by themselves. Dip into a typical chapter of Leviticus or Deuteronomy and it might seem that obedience to the law is all that counts. But 'dipping in'... is always a dubious way to handle the biblical text. It is vitally important that we pay attention to the narrative framework in which the Old Testament laws are set.

Ceremonial Law Fulfilled

In Matt 15:11-20 Jesus explained the real meaning of these "clean/unclean" laws. He said what makes a person unclean is the thoughts and actions that proceed from the heart, not the ceremonial factors to do with external matters that cannot change the heart.

The prophets also dealt with the same issue: "They draw close to me with their mouths (in ceremonial worship), but their hearts are far from me". (Is 29:13) It is this outward observance that the Pharisees came to see as vital, missing the testimony these gave to their inner condition, which condition was the real witness of the law. As an example, the priest's garments spoke of consecration to the Lord, among other aspects of Christ's ministry. Today we are told to put on Christ as our garment: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness; and to put on the armour of the Lord. (Col 3:12-14, Eph 6:14)

In that the prophets said Jesus would give us a new heart and a new spirit, the ceremonies which pointed to this are fulfilled and done away. (Ezek 36:26) The real circumcision of heart replaces the outward circumcision of the flesh which was prophetic of Christ's coming. (Rom 2:28-29, Phil 3:3)

We are declared by God cleansed and sanctified by the blood of Christ. This is not just a historical cross, but a personal washing and renewing of our inward heart by the Holy Spirit: as the scripture says, Christ in us. (Titus 3:5, Gal 2:20) This renewal shapes our heart, producing in our lives what is pleasing to God and good for our communities, and thereby fulfils the law through grace.

Now that Christ has come, the ceremonial pointers are done away; or better, they are fulfilled in him and his new life. The book of Hebrews is clear on this:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they

not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins...

But this man (Jesus), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God... For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified. Heb 10:1-2, 12, 14

Since Christ is worthy, his offering only needs to be made once. This is why offering has now ceased. All the shadows (Sabbath, washings, unclean foods, laws about emissions, sacrifices, feast days, land, circumcision, etc) have now ceased, or better they continue on in their fulfilment in Christ, in the spiritual reality.

The Holy Spirit was showing by this (by these ceremonies) that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle (and ceremonies) was still standing. They have (now) ceased because there is no more remembrance of sin. Heb 9:8

...He takes away the first (covenant – the ceremonies, pointers) that he might establish the second (the fulfilment, substance in Christ). Heb 10:9

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these (removal of sin) is, there is no more offering for sin. Heb 10:17-18

This applies to both Jewish and Gentile worshippers. The ceremonial law has been completed in Christ. He has made the law perfect (completed) by coming to fulfil it.

Let no man therefore judge you in respect of food, or in drink, or in respect to any holy day, or of the new moon (Old Testament feast days), or of the Sabbath days, which were a shadow of things to come, but the substance is Christ. Col 2:16-17

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace (between Jew and Gentile). Eph 2:13-15

Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat". "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean". The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean". Acts 10:13-15

Paul dealt with the Jews' insistence that the ceremonial law was still binding after Christ came. He called these teachings doctrines of devils, for they denied the substance and fulfilment and thus the divinity of the Son of God. They insisted that the ceremonies were still necessary to cleanse us, which means the work of Christ didn't make us clean. They were rebuilding the wall Christ had torn down by his blood.

Now the Spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times (the days of Paul's ministry) some will depart from the faith (from the gospel of Jesus Christ), giving heed to

seducing spirits (worldly teachings), and doctrines of devils... Forbidding marriage, and commanding to abstain from foods, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by them which know the truth. 1 Tim 4:1, 3

Teaching sexual relations within marriage are unclean, or any foods are unclean, or women can't come to fellowship during menstruation, or after delivering a child, or insisting upon any shadow or feast, or Sabbath from the Old Testament, are doctrines of devils designed to lead us away from Christ back into a useless ceremony that cannot save or change the nature. It leads back into self-righteousness.

Paul claimed in Galatians that insisting on such ceremonial laws after Christ has come is "another Gospel" and akin to witchcraft (teaching that God's blessing is associated with avoiding taboos, rather than in faith and obedience in Christ). Hebrews teaches it is falling away from the living God, just as those in the wilderness wanderings did not possess the heart to love and follow God by faith alone.

Jesus & the Law Reconciled

Modern atheists desire a society based on *humanism* and claim God's law is barbaric, citing passages giving the death sentence to a child who cursed his parents (Lev 20:9); the part-Egyptian son who blasphemed (Lev 24:10-14); the man who gathered wood on the sabbath (Num 15:32-36); and the stubborn and rebellious son (Deut 21:18-21).

In the context of these passages we see: first, the great acts of power and mercy the congregation witnessed when being delivered from Egypt and sustained in the wilderness; second, the gross nature of the idolatry, immorality and human suffering in the nations surrounding Israel; third, the imperative for their own sake, that Israel not follow the nations and suffer from their life styles; and fourth, the importance of precedent, to warn Israel to take seriously the imperative to remain separate from the sins of the nations.

These passages do not reflect rash legalism. God is not catching people out for human frailty or ill considered sin, without allowing repentance. These are instances where the behaviour of the people is ongoing, stemming from an adamant refusal to honour the ways of God. Behind the behaviour is an activist agenda, to direct Israel away from God to the debauchery of other nations. If Israel failed to act, especially at this nation forming moment, it would have disastrous implications for the people. God's compassion and slowness to anger must be remembered when considering these passages.

It is hasty for *new atheists* to point their finger at God. In society today, how many people suffer and die from all types of addictions and diseases, through life styles that destroy them and countless others around them? Which society then is more brutal? Secularism, which denies the principles of God, is far more brutal in its impact upon individuals and human life.

The nature of God is to forgive, rather than delight in punishment, as Jesus showed in the parable of the *Prodigal Son*. Jesus wasn't changing the law, but showing the real heart of God in these statutes. Just like when forgiving the woman caught in adultery, the Pharisees thought Jesus was

contradicting the law, but he was showing God prefers a changed heart. This is also shown in the law:

Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sins... (Ex 34:7)

The law was given to heal, but it will judge us if we forsake it. The temple offerings were given for the forgiveness of sin, for the sinner who turned. Jesus came to seek those sinners and to save, just as the Old Testament priests should have been doing:

The diseased you have not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost, but with force and with cruelty you have ruled them. Ezek 34:4

But we are wrong to assume from Jesus' mercy that we are living in a different era of "grace" where God now winks at sin. This is not what Jesus taught.

As the prophets said, in the kingdom of Christ, the curse is more curtailed by God's Spirit working in our changed nature, and justice and peace increase, while the oppression of beastly natures and empires regresses. (Mic 2:1-5, Dan 2:34-35) That which was shown in shadow in the Old Testament, in God's love for fallen man, shines more brightly through the reign of Christ within us and in the nations.

The Teaching of Jesus

In this chapter we look at the way Jesus interpreted the Old Testament prophets and the significance of this for the church and for missions today. We see the contrast between Humanism and Universalism on one hand, and God's love and plan in Christ the shepherd leader who gives his life for his sheep. This chapter helps us to understand the prophets and the work Jesus did for us in our salvation. Jesus shows us the results of our calling, both in our love relations with each other and the church's love outreach to all other people.

The City of God

In this section we will look at Isaiah and show how God's love is fulfilled through the coming of Christ. In love he brings down the oppressive city and builds his city in which "none will harm nor destroy". (Is 11:9, Rev 21:27) Jesus' teaching in the Gospels was a clear representation of the law and the prophets of the Old Testament. He neither added to it nor took away from scripture.

References to Christ in Isaiah are commonly cited today: a virgin gives birth to a child, the government shall be upon his shoulders and he is put to death for our sins. I used to recognize a few prophecies about Jesus scattered through Isaiah, while I missed most of the Messianic content of the book. The whole content of the book of Isaiah is structured around the coming Messiah.

One reason I missed this at first is that in the Western world we have a different approach to understanding than those who lived in the period of the ancient Hebrew writings. Today we miss the poetic background in the text and after translating into English we often miss the original flow of thought. The Hebrew people so clearly saw Messiah as the major theme of these texts that the whole nation was expectant of his coming.

Isaiah speaks of the judgement of the nations/cities around Israel during the Old Testament period, and especially the judgement of Jerusalem. At first Judah would be carried into exile by Babylon, and 70 years after that they would be restored to their land. But they were to look beyond this, to see that their ultimate restoration wasn't political in nature, but relational: they would be finally restored through the suffering and resurrection of God's Son.

The reasons for this judgement were outlined as the oppressive and violent nature of the people against the weak. Isaiah depicts not only the Babylonian judgement against Jerusalem, but he shows the overthrow of Jerusalem in AD 70, and through the work of Messiah the establishment of a new Jerusalem, called his holy mountain. This is what Isaiah called "the last days", i.e. the transition from the old to the new covenant. This would not only be for the restored of Israel, but he would gather in Gentiles from the ends of the earth. God's name would be gloried throughout all nations, by his kingdom expanding in this current church age.

In this holy mountain there would be justice, rivers and streams of sustenance, and no one would harm or hurt others. Instead of oppression and violence "the wolf and lamb would eat together". People once against each other would be united in love in Messiah's kingdom and would thus change their swords into peaceful farming implements. All this would be achieved in the midst of crooked and God-hating nations, which had not only rejected him, but also brutally murdered his

Son. This kingdom, this stone “cut out without hands” (Dan 2:34-35), would extend to the whole world, as it does today.

Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believes shall not make haste. Is 28:16

This is the stone upon which the church is built, the corner stone of the new temple, the new Jerusalem, the new kingdom and the promise to Abraham: “through your seed I will bless all the nations of earth”. This is what we are seeing through the gospel. This is the kingdom Daniel spoke of, that brings salvation to all mankind who believe, through the seed of David: which all the prophets spoke of since the beginning of the world.

You also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house... as it is said in scripture, behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone... 1 Pet 2:5-6

Isaiah also shows this salvation is hidden from the proud. They, in Jesus’ day, were looking for an earthly kingdom and a mighty king, and failed to appreciate the significance of a baby born in a poor manger. They also looked for an earthly city and temple, against which Peter said we look for a spiritual temple, which is a whole new heaven and new earth, beginning through the church in our current age: whose builder is God, whose ethics are pure.

These earthly/heavenly contrasting value systems run down through our current age. Those who seek their own will and advantage are blinded by this contemporary corrupt and faithless age. Those who repent from their sin see God’s plan of salvation:

Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Is 29:14

The gospel becomes a stumbling block to the proud. This whole message of Isaiah was taught by Jesus.

Isaiah also speaks of Gog and Magog, his purging of the church and about God’s final judgement of sin in hell. In Isaiah chapters 28-33 he uses the old city of Jerusalem as an allegory of the church. Assyria comes against Jerusalem when it dwells in peace, to destroy it, just as many forces come against the church in our time. This purges Jerusalem of hypocrite believers at ease, but God destroyed the Assyrian army in an instant and delivered Jerusalem.

It is from passages like this that Jesus speaks when saying he will build his church and the gates of hell during our age will not prevail against it.

When translating Isaiah, the *Targum* (Aramaic translation) showed Isaiah’s meaning by calling Assyria “Gog”, symbolic of Messiah’s enemies, and thus linking the Isaiah text with the *Gog/Magog* theme in Ezekiel. (See *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10*, by Sverre Bøe.) The Jews of the Intertestamental period clearly saw these passages in Isaiah as Messianic, only misunderstanding the nature of his kingdom, to be fulfilled spiritually in his church.

The book of Revelation takes up this theme to show God's protection during Christ's kingdom, not as one battle at the end of the church age, but symbolic of his continual love for his church during our current time. The Jews saw Gog and Magog as representing a final battle, after which they would receive political dominion in Messiah's kingdom. Some Christians have taken this meaning into the Gog/Magog text in Revelation 20. Like the Jews, they think the kingdom Christ set up in the "last days" depicts one event at the end, but rather it is the entire period of Messiah's kingdom/church in our present age. The theme is God's shepherd/kingly care for his people.

Revelation depicts this church, just as Isaiah does...

Your eyes shall see the king in his beauty and behold the land that is afar off... Look upon Zion... a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes of it shall ever be removed. Neither shall any of its cords be broken... But there the glorious Lord will be to us a place of broad rivers and streams... Is 33:17-21 (See also Is 66:23)

The message of Isaiah was that as God protected Jerusalem when Assyria (Gog) came against it, so he will protect the new Jerusalem (his holy mountain) forever. It will never be removed. This is his land that he promised to Abraham, a city whose builder and maker is God. (Heb 11:10) It is unmistakable that the promises God made to Israel (and to us all) are fulfilled in Christ.

Isaiah has a strong *city* theme, taken up in Augustine's *Two Cities*: the city of God and the city of the world. The cities of men, founded by the serpent in the heart of Adamic man, seen in Nimrod's oppressive city, the old Jerusalem and in the empires of the beast in the book of Daniel (Dan 2), would be brought into judgement and destruction by the cross of Christ. Christ would then become the foundation stone of the glorious city and a covering for his people. Mount Zion was originally the Jebusite stronghold David captured, but it came to represent the spiritual city of God under Messiah in the New Testament. (Heb 12:22-24, 1 Pet 2:6)

In Revelation the two cities are Gog/Magog (i.e. the world today), and the new Jerusalem, the church (Heb 12:22). Jesus' teaching that the church would prevail over the gates (cities) of hell, is developed throughout Isaiah. Paul also follows Isaiah by showing Christ would prevail over all his enemies in this current age, before the bodily resurrection of the church (1 Cor 15:25-26, Is 25:8, 26:19) That is, Christ's kingdom will be glorious and prevalent on earth in our current age.

This is the meaning in the prophets of statements such as: of the increase of his government there shall be no end; ask of me and I will give you the nations; the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth; the abundance of the gentiles shall be converted to you; the rock shall fill the earth; he shall reign from sea to sea. The only world government coming is his. Here is God's love: that he shouldn't cast off a sinful world forever, but renew it and restore in righteousness.

Isaiah speaks of Tophet or Gehenna (a valley of fire outside Jerusalem where refuse was burnt and where children were sacrificed to idols) as the judgement that would come upon the Assyrian army, but also upon the hypocrites in Jerusalem. This judgement depicted not only physical destruction in this life, but a spiritual or everlasting one in the next. (Is 30:33, 33:14, 66:24) This theme also is carried over into Revelation as the final abode of all who are outside Christ's kingdom.

Many today reject God on the basis of this teaching about hell. They claim that God is threatening people who don't believe in him by the punishment of hell, as though he were a tyrant. This is not at all the case. God is showing us faithfully the result of our sin (a punishment which is just and right) in order to save us. It is not the threat of a tyrant, but the faithful witness of a holy God to self-centred humanity with a seared conscience. If we steer away from this truth because it isn't popular, then how is that love?

Jesus taught the whole message of Isaiah, without turning from any part of it. He spoke of his Messianic coming to redeem people from all nations; he spoke of his kingdom that would fill the earth as yeast fills the dough; he spoke of the church that would prevail against all assaults; he spoke of the reward of those called and the punishment of those who rejected the truth. And he reiterated Isaiah's theme that God would do this work in such a way that only the humble and not the oppressor would see it...

That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they would hear, and not understand... Mark 4:12 (see also Is 6:9)

I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes. Matt 11:25

Humanism

Isaiah said those who would receive Messiah would be called and elected by God. "I and the seed you have given me..." (Is 8:18 Heb 2:13): "All your seed shall be taught of the Lord." (Is 54:13, see also Gal 3:29) The seed here is referring to the church, those called out to believe on Jesus. Isaiah said they are called out because God has taught them, meaning he has revealed Jesus to us.

Jesus quoted Isaiah in John 6:44-45, "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent draw him... It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God'". What is it that God teaches us? He teaches us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This transforms our heart: it delivers us from the control of darkness, where we honour ourselves as king, and brings us into his kingdom where his love transforms our heart and actions.

So it is not our powers that bring us into Christ. It is not our powers that transform our heart and mould us into his image. It is his calling and election. Not only called to faith, but it is this faith that matures us and grows us in his love. It is not us.

And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, You are blessed Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father which is in heaven. Matt 16:16-17

He has set us free from the kingdom of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love. Col 1:13

We can see two things here. First, God calls and transfers us into his kingdom by revealing Jesus to us. Second, anyone transferred or transplanted into this kingdom will grow in his love. When Jesus is

first revealed to us God's Spirit and love come into our heart. The nature, character and likeness of Jesus grows within our lives.

Issues like this strike at the very heart of humanism. Humanism is a modern perspective that places man more towards the centre stage. There are degrees of humanism affecting the minds of believers and atheists. Humanism is all around us subtly influencing our thinking. In part it is a reaction against the fatalism of religion. It promotes a more pragmatic response to life. So far this is good, but it is also a reaction against the rule of God in our lives. We don't mind righteousness and holiness if we can do it ourselves.

Humanism is an incipient encroachment on the glory of God. The Westminster Confession and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican faith state that man's chief purpose is to bring glory to God. Humanists claim man's chief purpose is human fulfilment. The only outcome of this can be hedonism: even churches will go in that direction if we follow this thinking.

Humanism is not a new perspective. You don't have to be educated to embrace it. It is found in the remotest village, as articulately expressed as in any university. Sometimes it cleverly theorises against the existence of God. Other times it takes a human perspective on love, showing there is no judgement of sin, that the God of scripture has abused human rights, that there is no truth but only points of view, that God is unfair, or that if he does save he does so because of our good works.

There is one key factor at the bottom of each of these claims. The concepts scripture teaches, of accountability, making the right choices, judgement, faith in God, loving our neighbour, the state of man's heart, God's love, mercy, redemption through the cross, and his personal hand in our election, salvation, sanctification and preservation, all strike against our sense of autonomy.

All of these above truths are taught in scripture. But the problem always boils down to one issue: the God problem! The issue of God, the existence of God, the involvement of God: all of these take away my sense of autonomy. And if I think I have a right to be free, free in the sense of being autonomous in making my own decisions, having my own perspective on truth and reality, enjoying the universe as I want to see it, then I will be very angry with God.

But this autonomy is a lie. There is no autonomy outside of the life of the God who created us. He alone has life. This is the biggest issue of the atheists: "It is not fair that God create us and make us dependant on him. Why should I be grateful for what he has done? He should let me be free from him and still have life. I don't want to honour any God but myself. That's the life I want to live and God has no right to take that away". But if God allowed everyone to remain their own god there would be no universe, only evil. The desire of atheists is self defeating. It is this autonomy that destroys life.

Adam and Eve enjoyed God's creation of abundant good. Love, hope, faith and trust were all they knew. Then the serpent suggested that God was preventing their autonomy. Even today this appears to be the main basis of men's rebellion. God hands us a template that leads us to life. But we find this offensive, not because the template is wrong, but because we aren't the authors of it.

We may never fully understand God's love this side of heaven. It is called *agape* in Greek. It means complete selfless love, without corruption. I yearn for it. I have tasted it, but I yearn for it without

interruption. But the gospel strikes at the very heart of evil, when God saves us. It says, “You have not done this. God has done this for you”.

Universalism

Universalism includes the idea that God will save everybody. We don't see this taught by Jesus. He taught that at the resurrection at the end of this age there would be a resurrection of all people and some would go to a resurrection of judgement and others to a resurrection of life. (John 5:29) Jesus further explained that this judgement was an everlasting conscious suffering. (Mark 9:47-48) Jesus stated: he that believes the gospel would be saved and he that rejects the gospel was already under judgement. (Mark 16:16)

This is the judgement, that light has come into the world and men have loved darkness rather than light... John 3:19

That is, men have rejected the light. When Adam sinned God didn't cast him off but announced his plan of salvation through the coming Redeemer. (Gen 3:15) But in case men said they didn't need salvation, God gave us the law to show us our need. The law clearly shows our failing, not just in our action, but within our heart. But if man still rejects the light of the law, God sent his Son as the brightest light. If man then rejects the light of conscience, rejects the light of the law, rejects the light of his Son, he has rejected the offer of free salvation.

This was taught by all the prophets, by Jesus and by the apostles. (Dan 12:2, Rom 2:7-10) Man must accept he is fallen and accept God's grace to be restored. We don't have to do anything to be restored. We only have to accept what God says about us and then accept his free offer to restore us to life. And there should be no problem accepting what God says about us if it is true.

But universalism says we can curtail this. It claims there isn't judgement for rejecting the offer of his grace. John Newton (writer of the hymn Amazing Grace) described this situation as being like men who had committed the most heinous crimes (we may flatter ourselves, believing we aren't as guilty as others), and were then sent to prison to await certain punishment. While in prison the men receive a notice from the king that he will forgive all if they will accept their fault and ask for pardon. Instead the men mocked the king and his offer of forgiveness, and continued in this vein. After rejecting God's love, continuing to utterly scorn his offer and say we don't need or want it, Universalists believe God should still save us.

Universalism comes in different forms. Some people claim that if God wants to forgive he should just do so, even if we do not change. Going back to the king illustration in the previous paragraph, how could he allow such men to re-enter society? Others have asked why he has to forgive us through his Son. Can't God forgive through any of the world's faiths? Why does his Son have to die for sin for God to forgive our sin?

If God just forgave people for breaking his law, the devil would accuse God, saying his law was unimportant. The accuser would also say that if God forgave us, God must also forgive him. So Satan attempts one of two things: either he overthrows our salvation or he brings about a victory for anarchy. This may have been his plan in inspiring Adam's fall. Knowing God's love for man, he knew God would seek to forgive him. But Satan did not figure on God's plan or wisdom.

Some people don't believe the devil exists, but this is a self defeating argument. If you don't believe in a personal devil, let's just call the accuser of God the "devil's advocate". There are plenty of them around. The existence of the devil's advocate proves there is a devil, because God is not going to accuse himself regarding his own plan of salvation.

So God had a plan to save sinners who receive his love and turn from their sin, but not those who are committed to rebellion and who do not want salvation on the terms of God's love. He leaves man with a choice. We cannot blame God if we reject his mercy, for the offer is open to all of us: "Whoever comes to me, I will in no way cast out". (John 6:37) Those who see their own sin will also see the atonement in Christ who mercifully bore the punishment for that sin upon himself. This is God's plan to save those who see their need.

God's plan is to call the humble, for these will see his plan in Christ. Blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit. His Spirit draws us strongly by Christ's example of self sacrifice: his love. The wonderful grace shown in this act of becoming a man (the incarnation) and living where we live, being tempted as we are tempted (but without sin), taking our place and dying for us, becomes a compelling force of love in our hearts. (2 Cor 5:14, Phil 2:5-7) God's love did not just issue commandments from a burning mountain and say "Do this", but came and showed us by his own life and said "now follow me".

God himself in his Son satisfies his law in meeting the penalty of sin (sin being that which is exposed by the law as unrighteousness), but takes this penalty himself on his cross. In doing this he has fulfilled his word in regard to the penalty of sin and is then justified in taking us as his own.

The law had to be given so sin could be judged. And because of that judgement against sin, God had to be just in sending his Son to redeem his children. If God forgave us without the cross he could not judge sin or wickedness. The cross of Christ both saves sinners and judges evil. As Paul said, "To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life..." (2 Cor 2:16)

God's love doesn't mean he forgives us without the cross of Christ and it doesn't mean he forgives those who reject his mercy. He calls us all, each and every one of us, to accept our fault and receive his free pardon through his own settlement of our just punishment. If we choose to reject this we have rejected all the light he has bestowed upon us through creation, the law and the coming of his Son. Jesus did not teach universalism, but he warned people from love and compassion to flee from the wrath to come, not just in this life, but in the life to come. (Matt 3:7) Like John the Baptist, this is what Jesus taught.

There is also a form of Universalism in some churches today. It claims that because Jesus died for all on the cross then all are saved regardless of whether they repent and believe the gospel in this life. Jesus did not teach this. In Matt 25:31-46 he taught plainly the opposite. Below we will briefly mention those scriptural passages more commonly used to support Universalism.

That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Rom 8:21

Universalists teach all creation shall be renewed in Christ, including all people and all demons. The text does not say this. The church has traditionally taught this text means either God shall renew

creation at the resurrection, which the redeemed shall enjoy; or that creation here (as it often did in contexts like this in the Hebrew culture) refers to the Gentile nations coming into Christ through the gospel. (See Bishop John Lightfoot's commentary from the Hebraica on the New Testament for example).

For in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall be made alive. 1 Cor 15:22

This means all born in Adam are dead in sin. All in Adam inherit his death. And all born in Christ through faith are alive in him. It does not say that those who are not in Christ by shall be made alive. The "all" means either all in Adam, or all in Christ. In the context it is clear Paul is saying that all in Christ shall partake of the bodily resurrection of life at the end of this age.

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him. Eph 1:10

Universalists say this means God has redeemed all living things, including all people and demons, in Christ. Some stop at all demons and say only all people, whether or not they believe. But why stop at all people? Why not all demons also? The church has traditionally taught either that this verse refers to the second coming, in which Christ restores creation and gathers the church of heaven and earth into one, or that Paul was referring to Christ coming in the fullness of time to gather Jews and Gentiles into one body, this latter point being central to the theme of Ephesians, and that he might continue to do so through the gospel in the church age.

Certainly this verse speaks of the complete dominion of the kingdom of Christ, but it is a presumption to extend this to a Universalist teaching, especially when the Bible as a whole clearly does not teach Universalism. That is, when interpreting a passage of scripture and there is question about the intended meaning, we take it to mean what the Bible as a whole teaches on the subject.

And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself... whether they be things in earth, or in heaven... Col 1:20

Some claim this verse says Christ redeemed all things. This either refers to all people, or even to all principalities and powers mentioned among all things in verse 16. However, the clear reference point of this passage is the church. Paul claims God has made Christ the head of body, meaning the saviour, nourisher and protector of his body, the church. (Col 1:18)

Paul gives the text the same point in Eph 1:22, "And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church". The meaning of the passage is that in the redeeming work of the cross, God has bestowed all authority in the Christ/man and made him the head of the body, and by doing so has subjected every power in the universe to ensure our eternal deliverance. This same point is reiterated in Heb 2:8-18. The passage is not teaching Universalism.

... who is the Saviour of all men, especially those who believe. 1 Tim 4:10

The Saviour of all men means men from all races, not just from the Jews. This was the clear meaning in the minds of the apostles, especially Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles. It was distinct

from the belief of many Jews at that time that salvation was only for the Jews. This is the teaching of all the prophets, that God would include all the Gentile nations. They did not teach that God would save every person. In fact they taught God would save those who embraced Christ.

The second part of the verse says, “especially those who believe”. This is the category of those from among all men God is saving: those who believe. The NLT translation is, “particularly” those who believe. So, from among all races of men, God is saving in particular those who believe. This is what the verse is saying.

And every creature which is in the earth, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. Rev 5:13

Universalists say this verse shows every being worshipping God. This then would have to include the devil and his angels. Universalists call this the goal of redemption. They say any judgement or punishment before this is only punitive, or disciplinary, with the goal of eventual change and restoration. This is similar to the Roman Catholic purgatory doctrine.

However, the scripture does not teach anywhere that God’s eternal judgement is merely a disciplinary measure designed to restore the sinner. The end of the book of Revelation clearly teaches the opposite. Sinners are cast into the lake of fire, never to be restored, and separated from the kingdom of God. Rev 5:13 is simply saying that all creation acknowledges the glory of God (as in Phil 2:10-11). It is not teaching of Universal salvation.

There is nothing in the teachings of the prophets, or in the apostles that is different from the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. The apostles followed the Lord’s teaching. Universalism tries to see God’s love from a humanist perspective. It tries to make us comfortable in something we can’t fully understand. But the scripture says we can take comfort in this: “Shall not the judge of all the earth do that which is right?” (Gen 18:25) He will. Our understanding of scripture must come from scripture alone, as it interprets itself, and not be influenced by the culture of our time.

Shepherd Leadership

This section looks at love from the perspective of the model and teachings of Jesus. We focus on Jesus’ statements in John 10. Here Jesus masterfully draws together the Old Testament scriptures on the shepherd theme, showing God’s love for his people through sending his Son.

The first object of Jesus’ love was the Father. For Jesus love wasn’t something he consumed, but a life he lived. If we see love in a hedonist way, as a religious experience we tap into, we miss its real root. It’s the same in marriage. Love is first a commitment to the other’s welfare. Its foundation is not a feeling. Good fellowship and joy together are the fruit of love which is built from the character of Jesus.

But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father has given me commandment, even so I do. John 14:31

For Jesus, love for the Father meant doing his will. This is not seen as a duty, though it is. It is not seen as a dying to self, though it is. It is not seen as doing a list of things we really don't want to do, though often it is. It may often mean we put down the things we want and do what is best for others. But the more we grow in the Lord, the more these things are what we want. Jesus did the Father's will because he loved the Father. It's what Jesus wanted to do. His love for the Father controlled his heart, his passion and his direction. He could not go against his Father's will, and his Father's will is perfect for all of us.

This is how Jesus spoke of love when he addressed Peter:

Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?... Feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?... Feed my sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?... Feed my sheep. John 21:15-17

So ends the Gospel of John, after so many great revelations and wonderful deeds recorded, it boils down to this: do you love me? After such great revelations as Peter had, still Jesus fronts him up in this way. This was a great *Jesus the Pastor* experience for Peter. It set his heart and footsteps. It strongly impacted him and solidified him as a nourisher of the church, a father to the flock, to live for them, care for them and eventually die for them. That was his life, because he loved the Lord. Jesus took the Father's passion: us. Peter took Jesus' passion: us. This is the type of shepherd Jesus came to establish.

The shepherd theme runs through the whole Bible and links the scriptures together. Jacob's family were shepherds when they went down to Egypt and this was offensive to the Egyptians. God was already painting the picture of his care for us through the shepherding vocation of his people. When Israel came out of Egypt, Moses was their shepherd. But the work was too much for him, so God put his Spirit on 70 others who stood with Moses. When they crossed into Canaan they had judges. Many of these failed in their duty, and this gave rise to an early Messianic prophecy:

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, who shall do according to all that is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed forever. 1 Sam 2:35

The shepherds of Jerusalem after this were even worse. Ezekiel made a very scathing report of them, saying they didn't help the needy, feed the hungry, or care for the sick. This can be seen physically, but also as the nourishment of the truth of God's word they kept from the people. Instead they made themselves fat.

Woe to the shepherds of Israel that feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you kill them that are fed: but you do not feed the flock. Ezek 34:2-3

Behold, I am against the shepherds... I will cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore; for I will deliver my flock from their mouths, that they may not be meat for them. Ezek 34:10

God said he would deliver his flock from their mouths. This means he will take the flock from the rulers of Israel and give them to his Son, who would do his will because of love. Ezekiel is following the vineyard theme of Isaiah 5:1-7: "And he looked for judgement (right judgement from the rulers), but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry".(vs. 7)

God's people were being afflicted. Jesus said he would deliver God's people by taking the vineyard from the rulers of Israel. (Matt 21:43) "I will search for my sheep and seek them out." (Ezek 34:11) God would send his Son, his gospel, and his Spirit to call in his sheep from the nations, and place them in the care of his Son.

And I will set up one shepherd over them and he shall feed them, even my servant David, he shall feed them and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. Ezek 34:23-24

These are the prophecies Jesus was referring to and fulfilled when he said, "I am the Good Shepherd". (John 10:11) In John 10 Jesus said his sheep hear his voice and follow him, and will not follow the voice of a stranger; that his Father keeps all his sheep, so that not one of them is lost; that he lays his life down for the sheep, as he is not a hireling who flees when he sees the wolf coming. His sheep are not those in a religious institution, but those who hear his voice and follow him, and they are secure in Father's hands. We know we are his sheep because we follow him. We do for the sheep what Jesus did.

In Ezek 34:23-24 (cited above) we see an example of Old Testament type. "I will set up one shepherd... even my servant David... and my servant David a prince among them..." Ezekiel is using David figuratively to represent the kingdom of Christ. Christ came in the lineage of David to take his throne and fulfil the promises made to Abraham, David and all the fathers. He fulfils these promises today through the church, as shepherd and king over God's people. This church comprises God's flock, made up of restored Israel believers and believers from the Gentiles.

The Gentiles being included in the sheepfold is wonderfully portrayed by Amos. This passage (cited below) has often been interpreted as relating to the tabernacle of David in which he kept the ark, and a revival of praise or intercession in our time. Others have related it to a rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after Jesus returns. The passage does not relate to either of these themes, but to Jesus' ongoing fulfilment of the Davidic promises through the gospel.

In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen... that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the heathen, which are called by my name... Amos 9:11-12

James cited this text and said it was fulfilled by the gospel: "After this I will return and build again the tabernacle of David... that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called". (Acts 15:17) The phrase "I will return" is not the second coming of Jesus, but is commonly used to mean that after judging David's house in Babylon, God would return his favour and mercy to them through his Son. The tabernacle (literally booth or temporary shelter)

here is not referring to a worship tent, but to the dwelling of David, his city and dynasty, meaning Zion. It means God will fulfil his promises to David through Christ and include in that the Gentiles.

James interprets Amos in regard to Judah possessing Edom and the heathen, not in military terms, but through Messiah: the Gentiles being grafted into the kingdom by faith. I am quoting this to show how wrongly Dispensationalism interprets the prophets, resulting in an entirely different message. They claim James was referring to the second coming of Jesus for a national Israel, and so refute the gospel itself being the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. James clearly intends the gospel the apostles were preaching in the 1st Century is the fulfilment.

James was quoting Amos partly from the Greek Septuagint, a dynamic equivalent of the Hebrew text, which correctly understood the meaning, showing its fulfilment in Christ. The Septuagint reads, "That the remnant of men and all the nations upon whom my name is called may seek the Lord". The Septuagint appears to interpret "Edom" metaphorically for all the Gentile nations. ("Edom" and "Adam" both come from the Hebrew root for red or earthly.) In citing metaphorical instances of interpreting scripture, it is important that we understand the intent and Hebrew mind in the text.

By so many types (symbols) the scripture shows Jesus is the Good Shepherd, priest and king to lead and nourish God's people. His leadership is not for God's ego, but to protect and secure us, delivering us from Satan's deception and sin into his everlasting kingdom. The psalms depict the shepherd leadership of Christ, who lays down his life and takes it up again. Psalm 23 is possibly the lead psalm that identifies the main theme of the book of Psalms: The Lord is my Shepherd.

In Hag 2:23 Zerubbabel (governor and descendent of David) signifies the coming Messiah, and in Zech 3:8 and 6:13 the high priest Joshua portrayed Messiah who is both priest and king in the New Covenant, like Melchizedek. In Mal 4:5 Elijah is figuratively portrayed as John the Baptist, the messenger who goes before the Lord. This is a fitting end to the Old Testament, as Israel and others who have heard these prophecies await their fulfilment in the coming of Messiah.

When Ezekiel spoke of the new temple and land prefiguring the church he used Zadok to represent Christ. Zadok was the high priest in David's tent and at the tabernacle in Gibeon, and also in Solomon's temple when it was dedicated. When Ezekiel said Zadok will be priest in the new temple, he was not speaking literally of Zadok, who died many years earlier, but of Jesus and the church, the real temple of the Holy Spirit. (Ezek 44:15)

The prophets often used Old Covenant names to represent Jesus' as Shepherd, because in the Hebrew mind these names had rich significance and clearly portrayed God's plan of redemption from sin in the New Covenant. We cannot understand the prophets unless we see this. Understanding the prophets prepares us for our next section below.

The Kingdom Breaks Through

The love of God is seen strongly in the prophets' shepherd theme, especially in Micah, who shows the Shepherd/King laying down his life for the sheep and then gathering his fold from all the nations into his kingdom.

Micah's message is similar to the other prophets. The shepherds of Israel have failed the flock, but God has a Shepherd who is faithful to the point of death and who will search for and gather in his sheep, not only from Israel, but from all nations.

In this section we see how Jesus interpreted Micah and showed the book's fulfilment in the gospel. The passage below relates to Jesus' teaching about John the Baptist and the coming of his kingdom. The statement of Jesus that "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force" (which we look at further below) has had various interpretations in our time, most of which relate to our force in apprehending God's blessings. On the contrary, Jesus was speaking of his own work on the cross.

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people (a multitude). The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them. (Mic 2:12-13)

This passage has two verses, which we look at one verse at a time. The first verse speaks of God gathering his flock in the New Covenant. Jacob stands for the whole redeemed community. It includes the remnant of Israel and the elect of all nations. The Gentiles are grafted in and become part of Jacob. His name symbolises all who have faith, all the Lord God has called, from Jew and Gentile, and grafted into Christ his Shepherd. The verse tells us there is a multitude in this flock. The book of Revelation says thousands times ten thousands.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep (from the Gentiles), which are not of this fold (the Jews): I also must bring them (the Gentiles believers) and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd. John 10:15-16

Dispensationalists completely misunderstand verses like Mic 2:12 above. They speak of God gathering national Israel, but the mind of the Spirit is clearly Messianic, referring to the flock Jesus speaks of in John. Christ gathers the flock through the gospel. Israel (Jacob), as Paul points out repeatedly in the New Testament, is the whole believing community, both Jew and Gentile, "that (Abraham) might be the father of all them that believe". (Rom 4:11) Israel is Christ to whom the promises were made, and all those grafted into him. (Hos 11:1, Matt 2:15, Gal 3:16, 29)

But what should we make of the next verse above (Mic 2:13). The NIV reads, "One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head". This speaks of one preparing the way before the Lord and his flock. Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) showed the meaning of Mic 2:13: "In the words of our teachers of blessed memory and in the Midrash it is taught that "the breaker" is Elijah and "their king" is the branch of the son of David". (*Mikraot Gedalot*, New York: Schocken, 1938, 417b).

Mic 2:13 is the same prophecy as: "The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Is 40:3); "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly

come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant..." (Mal 3:1); and "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of that great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart..." (Mal 4:5-6).

All these speak of John the Baptist breaking through, i.e. preparing the way before Jesus. He is the first to announce the arrival of the New Covenant. "In Micah, the breaker is the first to come through the gate. In the New Testament, the person who "broke forth" or came first ahead of Jesus Christ was John the Baptist." (Brenda Grier, West End Bible Fellowship/Emory University website)

Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Luke 1:16-17

Commenting in Mic 2:13, Risto Santala said, "The Jews always remember Elijah as the Herald of the Messiah's coming at the Passover meal... In the beautiful prayer composed by Elazar Kalir we read: '*I rejoice and make merry in my heart . . . bring the Redeemer to Zion. Let the Branch sprout, Elijah and the Messiah-King.*'" (Santala, *The Messiah in the New Testament, in the Light of the Rabbinical Writings*) God has fulfilled his promise in Micah through Christ.

Dispensationalists claim Malachi was speaking of a literal Elijah appearing before the second coming of Jesus. The scripture does not teach this. Malachi was speaking of John the Baptist. He is called Elijah because he prepared the way of the Lord. Though John the Baptist said he wasn't literally Elijah (correcting their false notions about how Elijah would come), he explained he was the figurative Elijah the prophets said would come to break through men's callous hearts; to call them to repentance before Christ appeared. Jesus said John the Baptist was the fulfilment of the Elijah prophecy:

The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah truly shall come first and restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands". Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. Matt 17:10-13

By saying Elijah shall come first and restore all things, Jesus wasn't speaking of something still in the future. He was stating that Malachi's prophecy was surely true and then immediately said it was fulfilled in John the Baptist.

Elijah coming "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal 4:5), was not about the end of this world, but the judgement on Jerusalem in AD 70. This is what "day of the Lord" commonly meant in the prophets. Malachi promised that before Jerusalem would be destroyed Messiah would come and establish his covenant with those who would believe. He "would suddenly come to his temple", which Jesus did after the ministry of John the Baptist.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Jesus said John appeared just prior to the kingdom breaking forth. This means through Christ's coming, the flock would break free from sin and from being under the bondage of the law, into his kingdom:

For this is he, of whom it is written, behold I send my messenger before my face, which shall prepare your way before you... And since the days of John the Baptist till now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. Matt 11:10, 12

Jesus links the breaking through of his kingdom with the ministry of John preparing the way. What did Jesus mean by the kingdom suffers violence? We will misunderstand this text unless we see the Old Testament text Jesus is quoting from.

David Flusser and the Jerusalem School of Synoptic (Gospels) Research have identified this phrase as an idiom and linked the Greek word *biazo* (suffers violence) to the Hebrew word in Micah, *haporetz* (breach-maker). Brad Young translated Jesus' statement, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven breaks forth and everyone breaks forth with it". (*Jesus the Jewish Theologian*, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1995). Jesus was quoting Mic 2:13, speaking of the breaking forth or dawn of his kingdom, and his sheep breaking forth into it.

According to Young's research into the linguistic and cultural milieu of Jesus' time, the dynamic equivalent of the phrase, "the violent take it by force", is the flock break forth with the King, by hearing the Shepherd's voice and following him. This means they break out of the Old Covenant, where they were held in bondage until the redeemer set them free.

We repeat the verse from Micah to look at it again:

The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord at the head of them. (Mic 2:13)

Here again we see the King/Shepherd (priest) analogy. Firstly, the breaker is John the Baptist. He is the breach-maker, by preparing the way of the Lord. Then Micah says, "they have broken up and passed through the gate". "They" refers to the flock, which breaks through the gate of the sheep pen into liberty. "The king shall pass before them", meaning the Shepherd, who opens the gate of the sheep pen by his cross, leads the flock out into the pastures he has prepared for them. He leads them out of their restricted enclosure and *into* his kingdom. In the Hebrew culture a door meant gate. Thus the *Bible in Basic English* has, the sheep in the pen "will go on to the doorway and out through it":

Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep... I am the door: by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture... I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. John 10:7, 9, 11

In Hebrew culture the sheep were kept in a stone walled pen at night, to protect them from wolves. The shepherd slept at the gate of the pen, to ensure the sheep were protected. This image represents the Old Covenant, in which the sheep were kept under the law, still protected by the Lord.

The dark night speaks of the law added because of sin: "What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed ... had come". (Gal 3:19)

Paul speaks of our being kept under the law until the Messiah came, using the analogy of a guardian or trustee. This guardian serves the same function as a sheep pen:

What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father". Gal 4:1-6

When morning came, the shepherd would rise and lead the sheep out of the pen to be free in the pastures. This speaks of Jesus leading us out of the bondage of the law and sin into the liberty the sons of God. This is of the New Covenant.

The Shepherd/King goes ahead of us. He becomes the redeemer of Abraham's flock, and leads us into eternal life. Through our Shepherd we have broken forth (been set free by Christ) into the kingdom. Christ goes on ahead of us and we hear his voice through the gospel and follow him out of the pen and into life.

There is no violent action by us to break forth; we break forth by following our Shepherd/King. The door has already been opened by Christ. We don't break down an open door. Christ is the door. We don't come against him to get out. He opens a door that no man can shut. (Rev 3:8) We don't break through Satan, as Christ did that when he died. He bound the strongman, that he might spoil his goods and redeem Abraham's flock. This is the meaning of the prophecy in Micah. The King spoiled the strongman, releasing the flock. (Col 2:15, Heb 2:14)

Those breaking forth with Christ become heirs of the kingdom. This is what "the violent take it by force" means: those who break through by Christ's gospel possess the kingdom with him. We don't need to pull down the strongholds by fighting the heavens. Christ has opened the brass heavens of judgement through his blood. We now have bold and immediate access through Christ the door before his throne. (Heb 4:16, 10:19-20) We "pull down strongholds" (wrong teachings) by bringing every thought into the obedience of Christ's gospel. (2 Cor 10:4-5)

We must follow him, obey him and wait for him in trials. God hasn't asked us to be violent. He asks us to be immovable and steadfast. (1 Cor 15:58) He asked us to stand in the faith of Christ in the evil day. (Eph 6:13) He asked us to be strong in his grace. (2 Tim 2:1) The "pressing ahead" of disciples means "following after"; being immovable in the faith of Christ. (Phil 3:12-13) We steadfastly follow him in the gospel, not being turned aside by other voices, and possess the kingdom with the flock. This is our response to his love: remaining unwavering in the face of adversity, just as the Good Shepherd was when he died for us.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, nor shall any pluck them out of my hand.
John 10:27-28

The false shepherds of Israel were thieves and robbers. This applies to the way we serve God today. Do we care for his sheep, or do we feed ourselves off them? Jesus is the door, or the gate of the sheep. He lets us go in and out to find pasture before God's throne, by giving his life for us, and taking it up again. In the morning of his resurrection and the dawn of his kingdom in our heart by his Spirit, the Good Shepherd leads us out of the bondage of sin into his love.

Preserve & Witness

What did Jesus teach about love in regards to our relationships? What were the themes from the Old Testament that Jesus taught from when he spoke on relationships and how were Jesus' teachings in this area reflected in what the apostles taught?

Humanism has brought a whole new meaning to love, which has negatively impacted on the spiritual lives of multitudes. The consequences are a far cry from the so called objective of humanism: the well being of people. When we do not follow God's truth lives are greatly harmed.

Firstly, in humanism love is seen as not judging. The confusion here is that people believe they are not supposed to judge values, or judge between what is right and what is wrong. We are not to judge people, but if we do not judge between what is true and what is false in what we believe and in our own behaviour, then we are far away from what love really is about.

Secondly, people don't discern what is right in terms of relationships with friends, family, marriage or business partnerships and therefore will not see the value of fellowship with people who will study God's word together. Many portions of the scripture teach about relationships. The passages are there to help us avoid potential pain in life. Humanism says you must keep friends regardless of their values. Jesus said:

Who is my mother and who are my brothers? And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples, and said, look at my mother and my brethren. For whoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.
Matt 12:48-50

The key with Jesus was that his first love was for his Father. Jesus was fixed in following the things that were on his Father's heart and his Father's passion. Jesus would not deviate from holding his eye on the Father and doing his will. This perspective is actually in the best interest of true humanism. The Father's heart is for people. Many of Jesus' parables show this. If we follow the Father first, the result will be the best for all those around us. This is what the Father wants.

There are some things humanism is right about:

- False religion causes us to be judgemental of others
- False religion brings pride
- False religion separates us from helping and serving others

- False religion erodes community

The Hebrew people highly valued their community. Jesus was a part of that community and I have no doubt he loved and enjoyed that fellowship richly. Community fellowship is one of the greatest blessings God has given to us. It is far better than the individualistic/materialistic values often seen in Western nations. But because Jesus valued this community so much he would not compromise the foundation of it: honour for God. This would keep Satan from sowing the seeds that destroy lives and destroy community. This is the perspective God wants us to have regarding our relationships.

In the Old Testament we see God called people with two purposes in mind: to preserve the knowledge of him; to reach others through them. God didn't call people alone, but as a *beach-head* to reach the world. These are the two purposes we can never lose sight of. First, we must walk with God in a way that his truth is preserved in our lives; and second we must always realise that God is leading us to do this so we can reach out to others with the same love.

For I know (Abraham), that he will command his children and his house after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement, so that the Lord might bring on Abraham all he has spoken of. Gen 18:19

God wanted Abraham to walk in his way so he could bless Abraham's household. God's purpose in blessing his household was to reach all other people and nations. This is contrasted with Lot who pitched his tent near the cities of Sodom. (Gen 13:12-13) He was polluted and his family lost out on the purposes of God in a big way.

The actions of God we see in Genesis were about preserving his truth. This was the reason for judgement in each case, to preserve his people and the truth they carried. God did this with a mind to reaching us today with the truth intact. The truth is important. It is more important than our own lives. This is why many have given their lives through generations, to make sure we inherit the truth. Humanism will not teach us this value.

When Abraham looked for a wife for his son Isaac he sent Eliezer to his people:

And I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but you shall go to my country, and to my people, and take a wife for my son Isaac. Gen 24:3-4

This wasn't said for racial reasons. Though Abraham's people did not honour God in many ways, overall they did maintain a godly tradition that the Canaanites had already in Abraham's time largely lost. The purpose Abraham had in mind was a marriage partner for Isaac who would hold the same overall values of faith. A marriage must be in unity for the couple to fulfil God's purpose as a team and to pass on the truth to their children.

Continuing into the Law of Moses we see the heart of God. He calls Israel to be ethically separate in Canaan, but to love and care for strangers of different ethnic groups. (Ex 22:21) God called Israel to be separate so they would be a witness, so his love will reach all nations and his preserved truth help

the most people. These are the two keys: separate and witness. One without the other is never God's purpose. Both come from love.

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. Deut 4:5-6

This isn't said so Israel could boast; though this is the way they often took it. We too can miss this and not realise God's heart to reach all people. This isn't said because God wants his people to show off for his ego. It is because he loves all nations that he wants them to see, and then to seek and hear and then to follow and be blessed. If this truth isn't persevered in our lives and families then how is God's love going to reach others? First preserve God's truth and then share his love with all.

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation... Ex 19:5-6

The context of Israel's call was all the nations of the earth. They were to be peculiar in what is good, to show the nations the blessing God wanted them to have. A kingdom of priests meant all Israel were to have a life that was representative of God to all other people. They were to show God's blessing to the nations.

Peter echoed this same verse, showing that our call in Jesus is the same. We are to "show forth" the praises of him who called us, by our works, that others may glorify God:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should forth (to others) the praises (goodness) of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. 1 Pet 2:9

God wants his light to shine in the darkness other people face, to show them the hand of God reaching out to them through Jesus. Peter makes it clear it is not that we are special of ourselves, but that grace has called us and grace is for others also. (1 Pet 2:10) The same message was given to Israel. (Deut 9:5) God didn't call us because of our righteousness, because we were rebellious, but because of his love for us, which is also for others.

This why it must start in our families. When I was looking for God's truth many years ago, and people came and shared with me, I looked at their lives and at their marriages and families. I wanted to see the fruit, to see if it was real. The scriptures are the final guide of truth, but our lives are an example of it. But it doesn't stop with our families. Our families aren't an idol. Love is to fill our families as it is shared with others. But before this can happen, first the truth must be preserved in your family:

And you shall teach (all my words) diligently to your children, and talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. Deut 6:7

Israel failed in God's purpose primarily because they did not observe this verse. They didn't have the heart to do it. This is the primary reason why any nation fails to inherit God's blessings.

Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever. Deut 5:29

See why God wants us to preserve truth: so that it might be well with people. To ignore God's truth in our relationships isn't love. Humanism is wrong about that. This puts out the light which shows us the way. We can be a light, but the light must be kept maintained and in good order. A lighthouse is no good to others when it isn't working well.

In the Prophets we see the same emphasis in relationships. Relationship with God is placed first and from this flows the right motives, message and ministry among the people. This priority preserves the community. This emphasis didn't really come from the law, which couldn't change the heart, but from God Spirit, as a fire, within the hearts of those he called.

When Isaiah was called God told him the people would not accept his message. Being one with God means we experience the same rejection he has, but also the same endurance and character of turning the other cheek and continuing to reach out. We may desire to worship God without sharing his rejection, but to do so is religion without reality. Despite the rejection, Isaiah laid an amazing foundation for the Messiah to come and bless all nations. His fruit was phenomenal.

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear indeed, but do not understand; and see indeed, but do not perceive. Is 6:9

Sometimes we think it is different today in the New Covenant. We say the multitudes come and accept God, as they did with Jesus. But among the multitudes, they came with many different motives. God wants to reveal these motives in ourselves and transform us.

When God called Jeremiah it was a call to loyalty to him, no matter the cost. God was clear the people would reject his message and also reject him, but he was warned not to allow this to affect him:

Do not be afraid of their faces: for I am with you to deliver you... to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and throw down, to build, and to plant... And they shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you... Jer 1:8, 10, 19

No one loved his nation and community more than Jeremiah (see the Lamentations). Yet it was because of this love he was called to stand against them. The prophets were called to speak plainly and to call sin, sin. That isn't welcome in our day and it wasn't welcome in Jeremiah's day either. But the purpose of pulling down is that the truth may be built up.

Ezekiel's call was the same. (Ezek 2:6) Each prophet was called to place God and his message above other relationships, because this was for the overall good. None of them (except maybe Jonah) revelled in this. They were not a condemning or unloving group of people. And they all struggled with

this, as many people today would. Our prayer should not only be, “Lord help me declare the truth”, but also, “Lord, help me love the people I declare it to”.

This love ought to move us like it moved the prophets. Tradition holds that Isaiah was sawn in two; Jeremiah was shut up in a pit toilet. Many of the prophets were treated this way, yet they kept on obeying the Lord. Sometimes self-preservation is the issue when we speak about maintaining good relationships at the work place or socially. This is where we really learn about how God keeps us. This is where we know God, as Paul found:

That I might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. Phil 3:10

It is in the prophets that we see the character of Jesus and can understand some of the challenging things he said about our relationships. Why did Jesus, full of God’s love, behave the way he did when he visited the temple and overturned the tables? John said it was because of zeal for his father’s house. He couldn’t stand back when he saw the contempt for his Father. It was love for his father that moved him to action.

Make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal for your house has consumed him. John 2:16-17

This “consumed him” can be understood two ways. It filled him and drove him to action, but it also made him an enemy to the world. No one else was concerned about the Father. They didn’t know him or care for what he cared for. Even Jesus’ family thought he was mad. (John 7:2-13, Mark 3:21)

Because for your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face. I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother’s children. For the zeal of your house has eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached you are fallen upon me. Ps 69:7-9

I love that last phrase: the reproaches of them that reproached you have fallen on me. This is being aligned with Father’s heart and with his actions, beyond care for ourselves. This summarizes Jesus’ life and the things he said about relationships.

But we are not speaking about getting some religious idea that we are a prophet or Jesus to correct everybody’s wrongs just to draw attention to our self. Neither that we should throw away our jobs or friends just to make a stand, especially when we often find later that many of our stands were immature. Jesus’ motivation wasn’t that of a radical zealot. He did all things at the right time, for the right reason and with full appreciation of what was important.

Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:25-27

Here Jesus addresses the multitude. They followed him for different reasons, but here he addressed whether love for the Father was in their heart. Are we walking on the same road he is walking on?

Not do we go to church. Do we hold the Father first place in our lives? He said call no man father, for we have one Father in heaven, and call no man teacher but Christ. (Matt 23:8-10) Where is our heart and how does this translate into real action in our life?

Jesus wasn't insecure in ministry or afraid of losing the multitude, for it was the Father he was focused on, not on how many people received his message. When the multitude was offended at his message, he didn't call them back to "explain", but turned to his disciples and said, "Will you also go away?" (John 6:67) This is the foundation of ministry that transforms lives and society. By such examples he taught his disciples well.

Obviously Jesus isn't saying we should literally hate our families, or not to have teachers, but he is submitting all relationships, and even our own personal desires, under the love of God and his will.

We can see that the first objective of Jesus was to preserve righteousness; to preserve the truth and to preserve the honour of his Father. Out of this comes good community and loving relationships with others we so richly enjoy and which God wants us to have.

Jesus' second objective was mission, witness and searching out the sheep: bringing others into the community. A community that exists for itself is dead. It must exist for God and his heart is mission to people. This was the same twofold purpose God had in the law and it was the same purpose with the Old Testament prophets.

Judge Not?

The Pharisees had interest in preserving human traditions, but no interest in inviting people into God's life. Jesus said they kept the kingdom locked up from the common folk, and did not enter themselves. (Matt 23:13) While Jesus didn't break the law, he cared more about the sick than the Sabbath; more about the sinner than human tradition; and more about the prodigal than eating with the "right people".

The Pharisees felt Jesus wasn't discerning enough, that he didn't judge others. He said "Judge not, that ye be not judged". (Matt 7:1) He said he didn't come to condemn, but to save; not to the well deserving, but to the undeserving. Examples of this abound. The Pharisees pointed out the sin of the prostitute woman, who washed Jesus feet with her tears. Jesus knew their lack of gratitude for God's mercy revealed a far greater problem. (Luke 7:36-50)

John the Baptist fasted and they said he had a demon. Jesus drank wine and ate with the common people and they called him a winebibber and a glutton. (Matt 11:18-19) This is the sort of false judgement Jesus was speaking about. The parable of the Prodigal Son was given on occasion of the Pharisees saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them". (Luke 15:2) Jesus contrasted the love of the Father in rejoicing in the son's return, with the callous jealousy of the Pharisees who had no care for their brother. They were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the people.

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him... And great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all... That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah... a bruised reed shall he not break, and a

smoking flax shall he not quench, till he sends forth judgement to victory. Matt 12:14-15, 17, 20

Jesus' heart for the sinner was that he would not snuff out any hope or life in them. He would not crush them. This is the heart of the Father towards sinners. While there is any hope of life towards God, he will fan that hope until they become a new man. He will not condemn or snuff out what little light is left.

Jesus fulfils God's plan in the prophets. Hosea's prostitute wife was a picture of Israel who God would redeem and seek out to bring to himself. His mercy is seen here with such tender words: "I will allure her... and speak comfortably to her... you shall call me Ishi (husband)... and I will betroth you to me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. (Hos 2:14, 16, 19)

And this is what Hosea said God would do with the remnant of Israel he redeems:

And they shall hear Jezreel (God sows). And I will sow her to me in the earth. And I will have mercy on her that has not obtained mercy, and I will say to them which were not my people, You are my people; and they shall say, You are my God. Hos 2:22-23

What a beautiful prophecy of God sowing Jesus and then sowing the gospel through the Jewish believers to the whole 1st Century world. What a heritage for Israel to have had this honour! "Zionism" today is fixated on nationalism, not recognizing the far greater glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' mission was from the sinners of Israel to the sinners of the Gentiles: grace for all.

Jesus' mission is outward to the people. John Stott commented on the question of the disciples, "Will you restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?" Jesus' answer was the restoration of Israel and the Gentiles through Christ was spiritual, not political; it was global, not Jerusalem centred; and it was a gradual expansion in the Father's time, not immediate, through the gospel. (Acts 1:6-8) Jesus' mission was not understood by either the Pharisees or the disciples until Pentecost unfolded, and throughout the books of Acts.

In the light of Jesus' relentless mission to the sinner, some of the apostles' statements at first glance look incongruent. Wasn't Jesus interested in preserving the values of God in the church? Was he suggesting that we mix with people with wrong lifestyles and allow them to lead us in that way? Does his example mean that our fellowship with other believers is less important?

Not at all: he came to us to gather us out of sin and into his church. We should not think Jesus won't act to keep his church clean to preserve the truth. Ananias and Sapphira show us he does. (Acts 5) He warned us all not to reject the opportunity of his grace. (Luke 19:44) "Why do you call me Lord and don't do the things I say." (Luke 6:46) "Teaching them to observe all I have commanded you." (Matt 28:20) He said the church would preserve truth by its discipline. (Matt 18:17) Both in his heart towards sinners, and in his call to repentance, we see a congruence between his teaching, the law and the prophets, and the teaching of the apostles.

But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." 1 Cor 5:11-12

The last phrase of Paul is a quote from Deut 13:5, showing the principles haven't changed from the law. The reasoning is obvious. If the church is destroyed because of the stubborn behaviour of a person, then how is that love? It is love to protect the people from harm and corruption, and also to hope that the one disciplined repents and is restored. An example of such restoration is seen in 2 Cor:

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him... yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 2 Cor 2:7-8, 7:9-10

When Paul said we "judge those inside" the church, he meant that if someone's behaviour is seriously contrary to what is right and is harmful to others then it is proper for the church to take the right action in the correct and measured way. We are not condemning the person, but praying for God to deliver them. The church ought to be mature enough to do this. Paul is not speaking about judging anyone's heart. This is for God alone. Jesus didn't tell us not to judge at all, but to judge mercifully and judge rightly. (Matt 9:13) "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement." (John 7:24)

Judge not, that ye be not judged - These exhortations are pointed against rash, harsh, and uncharitable judgements, the thinking evil, where no evil seems, and speaking of it accordingly. The Jews were highly criminal here, and yet had very excellent maxims against it, as may be seen in Schoettgen. This is one of the most important exhortations in the whole of this excellent sermon. By a secret and criminal disposition of nature, man endeavours to elevate himself above others, and, to do it more effectually, depresses them. His jealous and envious heart wishes that there may be no good quality found but in himself, that he alone may be esteemed. Such is the state of every unconverted man; and it is from this criminal disposition, that evil surmises, rash judgements, precipitate decisions, and all other unjust procedures against our neighbour, flow. (Adam Clarke's Commentary)

Jesus statement, "Judge not, that ye be not judged". (Matt 7:1), means that while judgements must be made in courts and in other public affairs, and concerning wrong behaviour, in our own lives and in others, we must always desire the other person's good as much as conditions make possible, and always seek their restoration, as we realise our own frailty and need of grace.

The statement of James, "For he shall have judgement without mercy, that has shown no mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgement". (James 2:13) is similar. We are to warn those going wrong, as

James did, and seek their repentance, as James did, and we rejoice when there is repentance (as the angels do, Luke 15:7), but the apostles warned of the judgement coming if we failed to change. Peter's statement, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins". (1 Pet 4:8), means overlooking one another's faults and seeking continued transformation of our lives through God's love.

We are not to judge each other on issues of personal character, conscience, culture and opinion, which are not significant to the gospel or to God. There are so many areas in which we have liberty and where there will be differences with other people. In such cases, rather than find fault we are to understand and edify the other person. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith we may edify another." (Rom 14:19, see Rom 14:1-23, 1 Cor 10:29-33, Heb 13:9)

There is a difference between our many faults and a destructive character.

Now I plead with you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. Rom 16:17

Again, if someone who knows the truth and has decided to act against it and to lead others into what they know is wrong, and they will not hear correction, then mark them and avoid them, so they don't take you into their destructive ways. This makes sense. It is better that they repent and live, than that you and the other person fall together. Your refusal to go their way may even wake them up.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Col 3:16

In the Greek this admonishing one another means that through the word of God we correct one another in a pastoral spirit of love. The Helps Word Studies defines the word: "(admonish through instruction) especially *appeals to the mind*, supplying *doctrinal and spiritual substance (content)*. This "exerts positive pressure" *on someone's logic (reasoning)*, i.e. urging them to choose (turn to) God's best".

In the references below this Greek word is translated warn or admonish:

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I did not cease to warn every one night and day with tears. Acts 20:31

And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Rom 15:14

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. 1 Cor 4:14

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Col 1:28

And we plead with you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thes 5:12-13

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 1 Thes 5:14

And if any man does not obey our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2 Thes 3:14-15

In light of God's word being the truth and it really mattering in this life and in the one to come, then if we love our neighbour we will obviously behave towards them in this way, seeking the best for them. If we don't care for them then we won't offer them the truth in a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves also.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Gal 6:1

Mission In & Outside the Church

The mission of God can be described as God calling people into his love. This love keeps acting in the face of rejection and insult. The mission of God can be seen as twofold: the church coming into the fullness of his love together through the Holy Spirit (this is where the mission starts); and the church calling all other people, all nations and cultures, into his love.

God's mission in the early church was sparked by the resurrection of Christ. This resurrection meant the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and proof he had not cast off his people Israel, or forsaken mankind in his sin.

We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus... Acts 13:32-33

Paul called the work of Christ in the gospel the "hope of Israel", meaning that the promises of the prophets to Israel were fulfilled in the gospel, not in a national Israel:

...because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. Acts 28:20

Paul saw the resurrection as pivotal to the whole plan of God, not only for Israel, but in his love mission to the world. Through the resurrection the gospel of God's love and forgiveness of sin is now taken to the world.

The resurrection of Christ is the most attested to fact of history. The unique prophetic descriptions (not vague forecasts with various possible interpretations) of Christ's coming have seen exact fulfilment. No other book in the world contains precise prophetic statements of this status. Given the ancient manuscripts we have and the circulation of these texts and Messianic expectation in Hebrew culture well before Jesus came, the escape clause that the Old Testament predictions were written

after Christ is absurd. The pre-Christ date of the Old Testament is historically indisputable. The New Testament documents are also by far the best authenticated historical documents known to man.

The fact that Christianity burst onto the scene in the 1st Century and overran much of the world in the first 300 years, despite all its enemies, and the fact that all its original witnesses willingly gave their lives for their testimony, cannot be accounted for any other way than by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that no serious historian of any religion, or any atheist, can pin any sin on Jesus or fault his teaching, itself testifies to his divinity. There is no other man in history of whom it is said by all, "I find no fault in him". (John 19:6) So many historians who set out to disprove the resurrection have either converted or at least admitted its historicity.

Besides the prophecies regarding Christ, there are hundreds of Old Testament prophecies concerning the church. Isaiah foretold Israel's captivity in Babylon and said God would return them to the land and establish a New Covenant with them through Messiah. He said the followers of Messiah would come from all nations and his church would fill the earth. When this prophecy was given, the Assyrians were besieging Jerusalem: there appeared no hope Isaiah's word would be fulfilled.

Israel in Babylon is called a barren woman, forsaken by her husband (hearkening back to barren Sarah: meaning God raises up the seed by promise, when it is impossible for man). But her restoration in Christ would lead to a great company of the spiritual seed of Abraham from all nations:

Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the Lord. Is 54:1 (Gal 4:27)

Isaiah develops this theme throughout the book and today we are witnesses that all these most improbable prophecies are being completely fulfilled. After the resurrection Jews and Gentiles from around the world came to Christ, and continue to, to this day.

We are going to look at how Jesus saw God's mission, but first we pick up the theme of mission in the Old Testament: i.e. what is the love of God and who is God planning to share it with? God's love calls us out of the love of the world, into the love of his Son. (1 John 2:15)

Calling us out of the love of the world is depicted by the Song of Songs. Solomon writes of the love of a young woman for a man. The beautiful country girl (possibly Abishag, the Shunnamite: 1 Kings 1:3) has attracted King Solomon's attention and is brought into his harem for beauty treatment in preparation for marriage. She resists the honour because she is in love with a shepherd, who she describes to the women of the harem. Her brothers were angry with her, forcing her to look after the vineyards instead of caring for her personal appearance, to discourage her from choosing a humble shepherd, but it did not change her mind. She is not interested in the riches, honour and fame of being Solomon's favourite concubine, perhaps even a favoured wife, because Solomon is not the one she loves. She risks disgrace and possibly the king's vindictive anger, to preserve her chastity, to run back to her shepherd, to whom her brothers finally give her in marriage. (See J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, Zondervan, 1962, 344, 523)

We could take this as a parable of God's love calling us. His love becomes far more alluring than the world, or than material things, despite possible persecution and personal cost to our selves. It speaks

of fidelity to true love, as opposed to Solomon and Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness. It shows what the centre of true ministry should be today: Christ himself and not what he can do for us. This is his love in contrast to the love of the world.

A common Hebrew word for God's love is *hesed* or *chesed*, often translated loving-kindness or mercy. "Surely goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of life..." (Ps 23:6) The word is associated with covenant. It means that God has covenanted love towards us for no other reason than that is his will. It is conditional on nothing from us, but initiates and is sustained only by God's own character and disposition towards us. This sort of love is unfathomable to man. When it was expressed to David his response was, Who am I that you would treat me like this?... Men don't love like this... there is no one like you... we have not heard of any god like you... (2 Sam 7:18-22)

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love (loving-kindness) for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you. Is 54:10

This was promised to Israel, but fulfilled for them in Christ. The promises were made to Abraham and his seed, one seed, i.e. Christ. (Gal 3:16) Israel and Christ were promised that though judgement would come to Israel, and the cross would come to Jesus, God's covenant and faithful love would not leave them. God's promise of unfailing love to us is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God will never remove his love from Christ and those he has placed in him: whether from the Jewish nation or us from the Gentiles. Through his love, he has made us into one new man in Christ. (Eph 2:15)

This mission is seen in Ps 87. It shows us that God's people are taken from all the Gentile nations to form spiritual Israel (Abraham's seed) and that the true Zion is not an earthly city, but Christ's heavenly kingdom. This expands the mission to all people. The place of birth that God regards is birth into his kingdom, not natural lineage.

Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah. I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me, Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush, and will say, 'This one was born in Zion'. Indeed, of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her', and the highest himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count when he writes up the people, that this man was born there. Ps 87:3-6

I have quoted verse verses 4-5 above from the NIV version as this correctly paraphrases the meaning of the Hebrew in this instance. Likewise, the NLT says, "I will count Egypt and Babylon among those who know me--also Philistia and Tyre, and even distant Ethiopia. They have all become citizens of Jerusalem! Regarding Jerusalem it will be said, 'Everyone enjoys the rights of citizenship there.' And the Most High will personally bless this city". C. H. Spurgeon in his *Treasury of David* says it literally reads, "This was born there", which he says means, "this nation has been born into Zion, regenerated into the church of God". I doubt God is speaking of the whole nation, but many from those nations, and all Gentile nations intended.

Once again, in speaking of the restored Israel in Christ, Isaiah says foreigners should not say they are not God's people, for God will gather them just as he gathers Israel and join them to his church.

Worship is symbolised by Old Covenant terms such as Sabbath, burnt offerings and altar, but according to Jesus and the apostles this is fulfilled in Christ and his church.

Even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer... The Lord God which gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet will I gather others to him (Christ)... Is 56:7-8

Jesus referred to this Isaiah passage at least twice. He said the temple was a house of prayer for all nations. Then he said he was the temple or house of God, meaning his body and his church: so wherever two or three gather in his name, there he is, i.e. his *shekinah* (the glory that filled the temple on occasions in the Old Testament), was no longer in a brick house. Jesus also said to the Jewish disciples he has sheep of another fold, which the above shepherd theme states. These passages are not speaking of a so called future millennium, but of the church in Christ today.

The mission of Jesus was to bring God's unfailing love to the nations and fulfil the heart and plan of God shown in the whole Old Testament Law and Prophets. Jesus had eternal fellowship with the Father and he came to call us into that love. I can't begin to describe this trinity fellowship. I think our doctrinal formulations of the trinity are useful, but certainly not sufficient. We know that love existed in fellowship and sharing. Since God is love and love must share, this demands fellowship, but not taking away from the wholeness of the Godhead.

The whole mission of Jesus is to bring us into this love. This is what all the Old Covenant symbols pointed to. His redemption brings us to a person: his Father. This is eternal life, not the land, not just heaven, but knowing him. (John 17:3) Jesus said he was preparing us a place where he is. Philip said show us the way. Jesus said I am the way. Philip said show us the Father and Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen the Father, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me". (John 14:11) This is the place he came to bring us to: a place in the Father's house/family/church. And Jesus prepared this for us by his blood and by coming to us by his Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus said he would send his Spirit and they would then be partakers of eternal life, "And in that day you shall know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you". (John 14:20) John later said, "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ". (1 John 1:3) This is the bottom line: fellowship with one another, with the Father, with the Son, with the Spirit, with the truth and in his love.

There is an outward mission drive to share this fellowship with all others. Jesus' prayer in John 17 was about the Father securing us in this fellowship. Then he said:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who shall believe in me through their word. That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

This outward mission works when the Holy Spirit fulfils his mission in us. It starts in the church. When we love each other as the Lord has loved us, then the world will know that God sent the Son. As the Old Testament reveals a mission of God to all nations, so Jesus sends us with a mission of love

to each other in the church, that spills over to include all people. This is what God looked for in Israel and didn't find: this is what he found in his Son and now by him in us.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34-35

The first part of his mission is love in the church. Paul said love starts by God giving his love to us through the Holy Spirit. (Rom 5:5) Then he described this love in possibly one of the greatest pieces ever written on the topic. The essential element is: love does seek its own will, but what is good for others. This is how God has loved mankind throughout history and how Jesus lived:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and do not have love I am just a noise maker. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and do not have love, I am nothing. And though I give all my goods to the poor, and give my body to be burned, and do not have love, it does not profit me at all. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not put itself on display, and is not proud. It does not behave itself unseemly, does not seek her own, is not easily provoked, and does not think evil. It does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Love never fails... 1 Cor 13:1-8

The apostles spoke on our relations with each other. We call these the "one another" passages. A main theme of the apostles for the church is that we reflect God's love for us by loving one another. Below are just some of the passages:

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Rom 12:9-10

Owe no man anything, but love one another. Rom 13:8

Stop passing judgement on one another. Rom 14:13

Accept one another, just as Christ has accepted you. Rom 15:7

Have equal concern for one another. 1 Cor 12:25

... by love serve one another. Gal 5:13

Carry one another's burdens. Gal 6:2

With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. Eph 4:2

Speak to one another in psalms, songs and spiritual hymns. (i.e. build one another up.) Eph 5:19

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. Eph 4:32

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Eph 5:21

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil 2:3-4

Concerning brotherly love... you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. 1 Thes 4:9

Pray for one another. James 5:16

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Pet 1:22

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Pet 4:8

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Pet 4:9

Clothe yourself with humility towards one another. 1 Pet 5:5

Love one another. I John 3:11, 23, 4:7,11,12

Every day we should be working out how to live this way more and more. It is appreciating and building up each other in Christ. This is the most important thing we can do: far more than any exploit we may achieve, or any other service for the Lord, or any other quality we may desire to grow in. Our life in Jesus is not fulfilled by living to ourselves, but by living with others. The individualism of Western society is quite contrary to real Christ-like living. We must change from our cultures to his culture. This is what Paul meant by renew the mind: it simply meant change how we think about life. (Rom 12:1-2) He wasn't speaking about some process of maturity. He simply meant view things differently to how you did before.

None of this comes from us, but from Christ's life inside us:

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator... Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Col 3:10, 12-14

Our mission to the world should be carried out in the context of this type of Christ-likeness within the church. The world doesn't have this love. If the church doesn't show this love then how is it the church; or what has it to offer that the world doesn't already have: just religion? On the other hand,

if the church does look like Jesus, then we won't have to say much: people will flow towards Jesus. His life clearly shows what we preach.

In discussing the church's outward mission I am going to say more about reaching Muslims. This isn't to say that mission to them is more important than missions to any other person, including our family, friends and neighbours. The principles I will discuss relate to any person we reach with the gospel. In speaking about reaching the Muslims, I am also not saying missions to them is more important than missions to the Jews.

Missions to the Jews is important, but many seem to have been embarking on the wrong mission in that regard. Mission to the Jews has often been more about encouraging their nationhood, the land, their identity in the Old Testament or in Judaism, or in standing with them politically against those seen as their enemies. It must be about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I hesitate to broach matters that infringe upon the situation in the Middle East, because of the political and emotional fervour invested in the region. I feel the issue must be addressed however, because we may think gospel resistance in the Middle East, or resistance to the West in general, is only due to the aggression of Islam. The situation in the Middle East is very important, firstly because of the huge opportunities that exist for many coming to Christ; and secondly because of the potential for serious conflict. As Christians we must address our theology related to the region.

Our response to the overall situation in the Middle East should be one of fairness (as much as possible), rather than favouring one people above another. Munther Isaac (Bethlehem Bible College) said believers have divided between pro-Israel and pro-Palestine. He hopes instead Christians will be pro-peace and justice. Salim Musalaha (see his book *The Land Cries Out*) says the conflict in the Middle East is being interpreted from a Western theological framework. He said the region needs a theology of the cross, not a theology that makes either Israel or the Palestinians the enemy.

Rather than looking on the region in racial terms, we should show support to all through the gospel. People known today as Jews are mixed racially. Some Palestinian Christians may have stronger Jewish background as direct descendants from the 1st Century church. Yet these are the ones who are leaving the land today in large numbers. But the point is racial descent doesn't matter. Our role is to show compassion to all and to share the gospel to all so they may become "true Jews" by faith in Jesus Christ. (Rom 2:28-29, 9:6-8) Without going into the biblical theology any further here, this is what it means to be Abraham's seed.

A biblical perspective means standing with brothers and sisters in Christ, from whatever background. Palestinian believers have undergone much suffering in recent years, due in part to persecution from some Muslims and from some Israeli policies: this has been largely ignored by believers abroad. Consequently the Christian population of the land has greatly reduced. It is the believers in the region that we should be most concerned to support, just as the churches cared for believers in Jerusalem during the 1st Century famine. (2 Cor 8) Jesus said my mother and brothers are those who do the will of his Father: "Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers.'" (Matt 12:49-50)

We need to share a gospel that is only the gospel. We all come from backgrounds in which we have different views regarding cultural, political or nationalist matters. These are often partly right and partly wrong. It isn't love to mix these views with the gospel when reaching out to others. It isn't love because people need to be told about the love of Christ within their own cultural setting. Jesus became a Jew to reach the Jews and he becomes an Arab to reach the Muslims, not to endorse their cultures, but to lead them to himself. Sometimes it isn't the gospel people reject, but the other issues packaged with it.

We must resist the urge to paint all Muslims with the same brush. No matter what the Quran says, not all Muslims are aggressive, just as Christianity in the West isn't properly represented by all that happens there. Many Muslims are "God-fearers", people who take their religion seriously and who try their best to live good lives according to the knowledge of God they have. Many also side with Christians to try to help them when they are attacked.

About half a century ago Christians and Muslims lived in peace in many nations (like Indonesia, in Africa and Asia) where today there is much conflict. This is partly because of the rise of what some Muslims see as unjust Western influences in the Middle East and Christianity is often associated with these actions. As a result Christians embedded in Middle Eastern nations like Egypt have suffered a lot of backlash.

There is much in the Quran and in Islam that strongly and violently resists people converting to Christ. Rather than this resulting in us seeing them as enemies, it should cause us to feel even more compassion for them. They are the first captives of this totalitarian faith. So many Muslim people suffer under the regime. This, put together with the suffering of many from poverty, selfish governments, other political and international injustices beyond their control, and a faith that inhibits their understanding and growth, deserves our compassion to reach them with the love of Jesus.

Be prepared to be shocked, but read this to the end and think about it. How do we see missions? Is it converting people to Christianity? Of course it is not, but we often at least partially see it this way. We see two religious camps, the Christian camp and the Muslim camp. These camps have large religious structures that grow up as a barrier between us and which make it even more difficult for us to cross over to interact, to heal hurts and to share Christ. We often associate our camp with Christ and say the Muslim must cross over into the Christian camp to be saved. Firstly, this is not true. Secondly, this involves so many changes that have nothing to do with Christ and which hinder them in opening to Jesus.

Missions is about the *agape* love of Jesus. It is loving people and letting them know that Jesus loves them, that he died for them and rose again, and that he will come into their heart and make them new. It is letting them know that God will forgive their sin and open their eyes to Jesus and give them his Holy Spirit. It is showing them that Jesus will help them love God and follow him, even when they are persecuted by their friends. Missions is believing that God will take your witness and make it words of life, as Jesus steps into the person's heart and supernaturally makes them a child of God.

This has nothing to do with them changing their name to a Christian sounding name, changing their religion, changing their dress, culture or language, or even leaving a mosque. The issue is Jesus alone.

Once they know Jesus he will lead them step by step in following him. What I am aiming at here is presenting Jesus without saying they can't be a Muslim or they have to change who they are in their culture. We are not saying they won't change these things, but that the changing of these things is not our message. The message is you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved. The Holy Spirit is the one who changes them and the way they live. We don't do that.

When the gospel came to the Jews it was presented truly as the fulfilment of their hopes and religion. When they poured out water at the feast Jesus cried out, "If any man thirst let him come to me and drink". (John 7:37) He didn't attack their faith, but showed he was its substance. He only showed its emptiness without him. Those who received Christ continued worshipping in the synagogues for some time afterwards. This way the gospel spread through the synagogues and many others heard. It wasn't easy. There was much persecution, but they essentially received the gospel as Jews.

The gospel can come to the Muslims the same way. They have hopes of salvation and a religion by which many of them sincerely look for God and expect him to lead them to him. They don't know him, but many of them hope that one day they will. Jesus is the fulfilment of their hopes in the same way as he came to us in our society to lead us to the Father. They have to be able to receive Jesus in their context, without us saying, "You must take Christianity as we have dressed it up".

There are many challenges involved in this of course. There will be much persecution. It will be a main threat to the Islamic establishment, just as this approach is also seen as a threat to the Christian establishment, meaning the way we think Christianity should be. When the Gentiles turned to Christ in the 1st Century the big issue with the Jewish Christians was, "Can these Gentiles be saved without being Jews first?" "Can they be believers without looking like us, doing it the way we do it, coming through our Jewish system?" This was the biggest issue then and Paul defended the Gentile believers in this, knowing that Christ would save millions.

It was the unbelievers who first called the followers of Jesus Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:26) It wasn't Jesus or the apostles who called us Christians. Christianity today is often seen (and often is) an arm of an imperialistic government, or culture, even when we are not aware of it. At times the church became the church of Constantine (Imperial Rome) more than the church of Jesus. I don't mind being called a Christian, but in mission our message is Jesus, not "Christianity": "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake". (2 Cor 4:5) We come as servants of their faith in Jesus, not as lords to conform them to our form.

In Islam people can be killed for converting, and many times we have to help get them out of their area for safety. But it's much better if they can stay. Taking them out can marginalise their family and friends, who get angry at Christianity because they have lost their family and status. It causes a split right through their family and community. Jesus said he came to bring a sword, to divide one from another and to be sure the truth will do that, but let it not be us who brings this split about unnecessarily. (Matt 10:34-35) We are there to love and support, not to break up relationships.

The Jews in the 1st Century were often just as violent against the gospel as some Muslims are today. (1 Thes 2:15-16) They killed many Christians and persecuted them relentlessly. (Luke 21:12-19) However, they couldn't stop a very large movement to Christ happening within their synagogues,

their homes, and even in the temple. Jesus went to the temple to preach. Can't Muslim converts go to the mosque? We know of several instances where people have been quiet (though honest) about their faith and it has spread to many families of worshippers within mosques. There will be offense and persecution, but let it not be because of what we add to the message, but because of the message of life itself.

But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. Luke 21:12-13

The outcome of this is seen in the Book of Acts: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith". (Acts 6:7) "See ... how many thousands of Jews there are which believe..." (Acts 21:20) James had the largest Jewish congregation in Jerusalem, who met in synagogues, also in houses together, and in the temple. James also had big problems with them, but none of these stopped the harvest from being reaped.

Somehow the Gentile and Jewish believers had to accommodate each other, not because the gospel was different, but as they each grew in understanding. We should be witnessing the same dynamic today as new groups come into Christ. It was because of this dynamic that Paul taught, "Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way". (Rom 14:13); and, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (culture), but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". (Rom 14:17)

The synagogues weren't always much better than mosques today. There was truth preached in them and also lies. It is the same in mosques. They do speak truth about God. They have some truth from the Old and New Testaments. They do know some things about God accurately. But they also have lies that lead them away from the Saviour. So in this way it is essentially the same as early Judaism. The Quran even has many true statements about Jesus that the Holy Spirit often uses to lead a seeker of the truth to him.

We can preach Jesus, at least in part, from the Quran. Not that the Quran is the word of God. The Quran advises them to seek out "the people of the Book" (the Old and New Testament scriptures) and mentions the Gospels. It says Jesus never sinned, that he is highest in heaven, he is the word of God and he is coming again to judge the world. It also says some wrong things about Christ and leads people away from his cross. But when the Holy Spirit touches them they seek the true Jesus from the scriptures. Millions are doing this today. In Egypt for example, there are more Muslim converts to Jesus Christ today than at any time in its history, and very few of them go to a Christian church.

Even the word Muslim means one who submits to Allah: what is wrong with that? And there is nothing wrong with the term Allah. Many African Christians happily use it for the true God. We say Allah isn't the same God, but "God" comes from the Germanic word, and I am sure in their paganism the term didn't mean the same as the biblical God, nor did Theo in Greek. In meeting the Muslims where they are, we are not affirming their faith, their culture or their mosque at all. There is no hope

or truth in these. There is only hope in Jesus and his word. We are meeting them there to share Jesus where they are. Missions is not Christianizing, it is Christ:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 2
Cor 4:6

There are real problems with this approach and we mention three of them here. First, the believer can backslide easily when they remain in their former environment. People take them back into their former culture and faith. They may often need to be rightly taken out for this reason. But surely we need to have more confidence in Jesus to keep them, than in enforcing Christianized culture on new believers to keep them.

Second, there is a risk of syncretism. This means that the faith takes on a cultural meaning rather than a biblical meaning. We may criticise the mixed faith of Muslim converts, but in the 1st Century in Jerusalem it was just as bad: they were believers, but still "zealous for the law". (Acts 21:20) This is the issue addressed in the book of Hebrews. The Jews who believed in Jesus Christ and stayed in their culture were numerous during the period of the book of Acts. But because of persecution they were tempted to go back into Judaism, or at least interpret Christianity in the terms of Judaism. Paul fought this in Galatians also. They had made "another gospel". But there is always risk of this. The West has also done this to the gospel. The answer to this is sound biblical teaching.

Third, there is a stronger risk of persecution. But this is something we must be willing to face. The early church faced it. They didn't withdraw from the synagogues, but were eventually thrown out. They suffered for the gospel and in this way the gospel won. This is the only way the gospel wins. Unless we are prepared to suffer for the faith, the knowledge of Jesus cannot spread to those who need it. It is just that simple. There is no mission without those who love Jesus laying down their life for the people they love and want to reach. This is probably one of the greatest ways in which the West has syncretised the gospel in the last 50 years: by taking out suffering.

So when the early church was attacked, they didn't pray the attacks would stop, but that the Lord would give them boldness to preach the gospel. (Acts 4:29) They continued to love the enemy by preaching the good news of the gospel to them. Eventually they overcame the enemy, not by arms, but by the Lord converting them. Mission, from start to finish, is about the love of Jesus working in and through his people to others. There is no reason why we should see Muslims as any different to ourselves: people who need the love of Jesus. Are we willing to reach them with it?

The main aspect of missions to Muslims is that it is miraculous. God alone is the one who turns their hearts. He does it by revealing Jesus in so many ways: through the Quran, through the scriptures, by visions of Jesus and dreams, by miraculous healings. There are many different interest groups vying for power in the Middle East today, but through all this God is opening it wide to the gospel. There are greater opportunities there now than have been seen for centuries. Today is the time for millions of Muslims to flow into the kingdom of God by the faith of Jesus Christ.

We should not judge the Muslim, or be afraid, but have compassion on him/her and reach him/her with the gospel, just as someone reached us when we were enemies of God.

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