

“But if you know or take it on faith that God is good and it would be irreligious to think differently), then He does no evil. Again, if we acknowledge that God is just (and to deny this would be sacrilegious), then, as He bestows rewards upon the good, so does He mete out punishments to the wicked.” (St. Augustine, “The Free Choice of the Will”)

“*Is* God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?” (Paul, Rom 3:5-6)

“But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me.” (Jesus, Luke 19:27)

The New Testament

From the point of view of an ethic of unconditional good will, we have found the Old Testament to be untenable. The credibility of the New Testament collapses insofar as it endorses the Old—which it does. However, it is also interesting to see how well the later book fares in its own right.

The Old Ball and Chain

In the larger picture, there is an inescapable link between the New and the Old testaments. After all, the New Testament's chief claim to legitimacy is that it fulfills Old Testament prophecy, complete with the Old Testament God sending his son to Earth for this purpose. And there is no doubt that Jesus and his disciples support the ways of God alleged in the Old Testament. The disciple John tells us, speaking with divine authority: "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning." (1 John 2:7) This implies that all of God's commandments, including those for genocide, capital punishment if one burns incense the wrong way, and all of the rest are eternal. Similarly, Jesus claims that he has not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them, (Matt 5:17) implying that all of God's laws, based as they are in a spirit of fear and self-interest, still stand. Specific Old Testament commandments are also reflected, as when Jesus is asked what one must do to inherit eternal life, and he replies: "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and thy mother." (Mark 10:17-9) Although the last passage does not list all of the laws of Moses, Jesus nevertheless upholds the Mosaic law in general: "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?" (John 7:19) Moreover, Jesus situates himself in a long line of Biblical patriarchs going back to olden times, as Peter testifies: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus..." (Acts 3:13) It is the genocidal God, then, who blesses Jesus.

But perhaps it might be objected that while the Mosaic law is acknowledged by Christianity, it is to be interpreted in a new spirit of love, mercy, and forgiveness. The New Testament itself reveals this objection to be erroneous. Thus, the cruel punishment of innocent beasts who touch the holy Mount Sinai is relayed in the New Testament's letter to the Hebrews: "...if so much as a beast touch the mountain [Sinai], it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart [i.e., an arrow or a spear]..." (Heb 12:20) This, of course, assumes that beasts who ignorantly amble about the mountain terrain are culpable. The unmerciful Old Testament death sentence for cursing one's father or mother is also still in force: "Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death..." (Mark 7:9-10) This same injunction is reinforced by another related passage, with its own implicit threat that things will not be well with one—or even that one might be killed—if one disobeys the commandment: "Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." (Eph 6:2-3) Also, this supposedly ethical prescription tells people to respect their parents not just because that is the parents' due, but out of self-interest (in response to an implicit threat), so that the person who observes the rule will live a long and good life.

Additionally, there are a few favorable reminiscences about the time of the Exodus. Paul recalls the terrible punishments that the Jews faced, wandering in the Sinai desert, and warns that Christians can be punished in the same unmerciful way:

...with many of them [the Jews] God was not well pleased: for they were

overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted...Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them were also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. (1 Cor 10:5-10)

So the same implication that God will destroy unbelievers is present in the New Testament, as is still more advocacy of punishment like that described in the Old Testament:

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrhah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, and set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” (Jude 1:5-7)

The New Testament, then, is thoroughly rooted in the viciousness of the Old, and therefore is entirely unacceptable, although that is not the full account of why it is morally unacceptable, since the newer book itself falls short of the ethical standpoint of unconditional good will.

Is Unconditional Good Will God's Ideal?

Let there be no doubt that such an ethical standpoint of unconditional good will properly applies to the New Testament, even on its own terms. Paul, who claims that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) when he speaks, enjoins us: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom 12:2) In this injunction, plainly, is not only the idea that God has good will, but indeed *perfect* good will (which must be unconditionally—or without qualification—good). God’s will is also said to be “acceptable,” although many will find the genocides, punishings of innocents, and so forth, which God, as seen in Part I, to be wholly unacceptable. This is the most explicit indication that God has perfect good will. There are other examples which generally ascribe perfection to God, which would, of course, include his will: “...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (John 1:5) Metaphorically, this implies that there is no darkness at all in God’s will too, or that it is perfectly good, inasmuch as “light” connotes “good” here, at least in part.

Yet we are challenged, at times, even in the New Testament’s general descriptions of God—let alone the specific acts ascribed to the divinity—to portray the Creator as possessing unconditional good will. Writes John: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (Rev 4:11) How can all things be for God’s pleasure? Does God take pleasure in war? According to this last quotation, he created war along with everything else. The “Song of Moses,” cited in Part I, would seem to imply as much in describing God as a “man of war.” Yet taking pleasure in evils is not expressive of perfect good will, which must inevitably regard bad things *as* bad or undesirable, and worthy of being avoided. So God’s taking pleasure in all things is inconsistent with the following words from Paul, who, recall, claimed to be divinely inspired: “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.” (Rom 12:9) How can one take pleasure in what one abhors? The last quote has helped to give rise to the notion, examined in more detail in Part III, that God loves the good with perfect love, and hates all evil with a perfect hatred. But is even total *hatred* of all evils compatible with unconditional good will? True hatred leads to holocausts, and innumerable other acts of violence and intolerance. Hatred is not compatible with a *loving* attitude, although one may certainly resist what is bad or evil, while not reacting with excess (and we have seen many examples of excessive punishments in Part I). For hatred inclines one to do evil things, although James tells us: “...God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man...” (Jas 1:13) This is at direct odds with God’s earlier actions recorded in the Old Testament, for example, when he “repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people,” (Exod 32:14) namely killing all of the Jews for creating a molten calf to worship. His repentance is clearly for being tempted with great evil. Moreover, despite James’ testimony that God does not tempt anyone, recall how God baited Job to renounce his faith in the almighty by afflicting the man through Satan’s agency. Yet Job, from the beginning, is innocent, and we recall that even God called Job “perfect,” thus assuming responsibility (as established in Part I of this book) for tempting an innocent man.

Consistent with the idea of God hating evil is the supreme being’s taking of vengeance. Hence Paul’s letter to the Romans even reserves all vengeance to God, denying that mortals have the right to inflict vengeance (contrary to the Old Testament, again, which instructs people

to avenge the slaying of relatives by killing the murderer(s) in turn): “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Rom 12:19) It is also written, very soon after the last quote, in fact, that we should “[b]e not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom 12:21) Vengeance is not overcoming evil with good, but with more evils inflicted upon wrongdoers, and insofar as it involves being overcome by hatred or malevolence, perhaps it also involves being “overcome of evil,” certainly not expressing perfect good will. It is also not compatible with human rights. So here we have one of the many contradictions of the New Testament.

Yet Paul considers this question of the worthiness of God inflicting vengeance, and has the following to say: “*Is* God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?” (Rom 3:5-6) This is not at all a helpful reply, for we would in turn question why God has to judge the world vindictively. It is a circular statement, implying that there is no other way to be, although a being of perfect good will, I contend, would not be vengeful, but rather understanding, tolerant, deterring evil actions without hatefully destroying or eternally punishing agents who do evil. Such hatred and vengefulness is not worthy of true love of one’s neighbor, preached in the New Testament itself: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of law.” (Rom 13:10) Vengefulness certainly visits ills on people, so God does not love us all, as one of unconditional good will would (without, of course, loving everyone’s actions, or all of our attributes). Also, the latter quote requires such love as fulfilling the law, which presumably God also obeys. God is also required not to do bad things, whether out of hatred or anything else, in the following prescription of James: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him is sin.” (Jas 4:17) God the all-knowing should have no excuse for not knowing what is the good—even the best—thing to do, although doing good in every possible instance is incompatible with the hatred or abhorrence of all evils that has already been ascribed to God.

Locating the Acts of God in the New Testament

Granted these preliminary—but already fatal—problems facing the New Testament, how can we ascribe any acts of God at all to what is written in this later book, as we have already been doing? After all, there are plenty of acts done by Jesus Christ and his disciples to report, but God’s own direct actions are generally absent. However, it will not be surprising that there are ample indications that Jesus and the apostles speak with divine authority. Jesus himself is supposed to be the son of God, bringing the message of the Father, so his case is not so problematic. But even the apostles declare such as the following, which is part of the holy writs: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.” (1 Cor 2:1) So says Paul. He goes on to say: “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory...” (1 Cor 2:7) Here he claims to offer God’s wisdom, even as he states that he is preaching the gospel of Christ himself. (Rom 15:19) Indeed, he notes in his letter to the Romans that “I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me.” (Rom 15:18) In the last quote he is attributing responsibility for the things he asserts to Christ. He also asks and answers the following important rhetorical question: “For whom hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor 2:16) So Paul claims to have, and to have known, the mind of God and Christ, that he may be instructed—presumably for the purpose of evangelism, as well as for his own enlightenment.

However, there is a measure of uncertainty in Paul’s claiming to speak for God and/or Christ (and Paul is the apostle who most claims such authority). For Paul gives a number of prescriptions regarding marriage, and then declares, “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord...” (1 Cor 7:12) which implies that Paul is thenceforth presenting his own ideas on sexual relations, and not God’s. At the end of this discourse of—supposedly his own—views, he proclaims that although a widow can remarry in the faith, “But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor 7:40) Here he seems to be having difficulty determining if he can be said to “have the Spirit of God.” Even if he is just giving his own opinion, after just speaking through Christ’s and God’s mind, why would he have to *guess* that God agrees with him, or why would he not know? If he cannot even tell whether he has the Spirit of God or not, this undermines his many claims to speak for God. But still, taking the Bible at its word, we will assume he does speak for God, and thus what Jesus and the apostles say are in effect acts of God, that is, God acting to express himself through these people. Paul’s credibility is also brought into question when he departs from claiming divine authority and starts talking about what nature itself supposedly teaches us:

Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?
Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man hath long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her* hair is given her for a covering. (1 Cor 11:13-5)

It further damages his credibility that his so-called “teaching” is so arbitrary, as most people in the modern age would agree. Certainly, “nature itself” permits longer hair for males, and it is only human intervention, generally speaking, which prevents such longer growth.

In any case, surely Christ is moved by God in what he does and says: “...Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit...” (1 Pet 3:18) This might be taken to imply that Christ was somehow animated by God. We do have the following problematic passage, however. When Jesus is called “Good Master,” he replies: “Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, *that is*, God.” (Luke 18:19) This implies that God and Jesus are two separate entities, and that Jesus himself is not perfectly good, as again God is supposed to be—even in his will. However, we can still suppose that although Jesus *the man* is perhaps not good, as he himself says, God acts through him, and so Jesus, no doubt more dramatically than his apostles, is expressive of indirect acts of God as well.

God's Ultimate Revenge: Eternal Hell

We have already seen the closest thing in the Bible to a justification for God's taking revenge: how else shall he judge the world? (Rom 3:5-6) This is a totally circular justification, as I noted above. So what could justify an eternity of revenge for sins committed in an inconceivably small, even infinitesimal fraction of all of the time in eternity? We are not even given a consistent account of who will judge us for our sins: Jesus or God? Already we have seen that these are not the same beings, namely, in the passage cited above in which Jesus questions why he should be called good, since only God is good. (Luke 18:19) In one passage, Jesus claims that he will not judge, but rather God will do so:

And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me..." (John 12:48-9)

Clearly, Jesus is referring to God, his Father, who will judge in the last day. But this prediction does not remain the same: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son..." (John 5:22) Indeed, in the prophecy about Judgment Day in Revelation, it is Jesus himself who judges whether we go to heaven or hell. (Rev 22:12) It is inconsistent with good will to tell people contradictory things, especially regarding such important matters, and all the more so if one is all-powerful and incapable of error.

What about our own judgment? We are to be punished for using it, since Jesus warns us that "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged..." (Matt 7:2) So if we judge in anger that a terrible scoundrel should go to hell, we will end up there ourselves, even if we never share that fate with the one upon whom we wish it? Or maybe we need only judge that someone else go to heaven; perhaps that would save us (no matter how rotten our characters), and we will be judged as we judge *that* person. But Jesus does not want us to take his words at all lightly, as he threatens: "Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." (Luke 12:5) It is unclear whether he is referring to himself or to God in this passage, although either way it is God's agency that we would ultimately be concerned with. The passage is indeed unsettling, for it implies that we do not simply die, but God that *kills* us, and then throws us into hell if that is his—or perhaps Jesus'—judgment.

A number of things—that one might not guess—are enough to earn one an eternity in all-consuming hellfire. Jesus informs us that whoever is angry without cause is in danger of the judgment, as is anyone who calls someone a "good-for-nothing" or "fool" also "in danger of hell fire." (Matt 5:22) Of course, God himself is exempt when he calls someone a "fool," (Luke 12:20) for it would be foolish to tell the Almighty to go to hell, especially given that he is already omnipresent. However, one sin, blasphemy—or impiety—is unforgivable: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." (Mark 3:29) Since God hates all sin, and all sin is impious, it is hard to think of any sin that

would not count as blasphemy. But if that is so, then all sin is unforgivable, which, of course, runs contrary to New Testament doctrine.

Both widows and the unmarried should beware: “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” (1 Cor 7:8-9) This implies that if the unmarried or widows “cannot contain” their sexual urges out of wedlock, then they will burn in hell. Many people today are direly condemned, then, since, for example, sex outside of marriage is quite common. In any event, at the end of the world the

Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 13:41-2)

There likely would be wailing and gnashing of teeth in this lifetime, too, since Jesus encourages people to self-mutilate rather than go to hell, for reasons that are never made clear:

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot...” (Matt 18:8-9)

This repetitive passage speaks of the eye, too, in the same way as the hand and the foot. An earlier passage also says that if one’s right eye or hand offends one, one should pluck them out, rather than have the whole body cast into hell. (Matt 5:29-30) Again, it is not clear how a body part, by itself, could be so offensive that one is destined for hell if one retains those parts. Perhaps the self-mutilation would be punishment enough so that hell would not be deemed necessary? Even if the passage is just a metaphor, it hardly seems to be suffused with sublime benevolence.

The Key to Heaven's Gate: Works, Faith, or...?

So we are in danger of being cast into a realm of eternal flames and worms, accompanied by wailing and gnashing of teeth. It is important to know what we are expected to do to avoid this fate, even if, as already seen, we do not exactly know who will judge us: Jesus or God. In various passages of the Bible, we are told that only good works are required to get into heaven and to keep out of hell, in other passages we are told that faith alone is required, and in other instances it is implied that both are needed. This has led to much conflict among different sects of Christianity, so that Calvinists say that works are irrelevant, and that one is predestined to enter heaven or hell, and others recognize, at least, the importance of works. Again, divine uttering of inconsistencies is manifestly not compatible with acting out of good will.

Many passages of the Bible would lead us to believe that having faith alone is sufficient to be saved. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth [save?] the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Rom 4:4-5) This clearly indicates that one needs faith but not works. This passage is also interesting because "grace" is often taken to mean an unmerited favor from God, whereas here it is clear that faith helps one merit grace. And the following passage indicates much the same thing: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph 2:8-9) It seems that God will not judge by works, for then people will boast about how good are their works. However, people boast over their works anyway, so "lest any man should boast" seems merely fanciful. Someone who does *no* good works and yet avoids sinning (to the extent that doing no good works is not a sin) can also boast of that accomplishment, or of how great is their faith. In any case, someone having faith in Christ must have faith in the divine commandments to love one's neighbor as oneself (among others), so it is hard to see how one can have faith without works.

Paul compares him and his fellow Christians to sinners: "What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one..." (Rom 3:9-10) But still, it seems likely that some are more sinners than others, so it is not obvious that sinful works should be ignored. This does not stop Paul, however, from proclaiming the law that deeds or works do not count: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin." (Rom 3:20) He drives his point home to eliminate all ambiguity:

Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded by what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law....Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. (Rom 3:27-8, 3:31)

Here, as in the previous passage from Ephesians, reference is made to the rationale of avoiding

boasting in requiring faith but works not at all. Of course, none of this makes any sense next to the warnings of Jesus that if one blasphemes one is in danger of hellfire, and so on with other deeds or “works” (discussed in the previous section).

Certainly this view that faith is required is not rare in the Bible, although Paul has said that having faith alone is sufficient to be saved. Jesus tells the disciples in their saving efforts to only give peace to a house if it is worthy, and to depart from those who do not receive them or hear their words. (Matt 10:13-4) That is, the disciples are not expressing unconditional good will, but only conditional good will, on the strict condition that the potential beneficiaries have faith. This pattern, we will see, is characteristic of *all* good acts by Jesus and the apostles, making such acts fall short of perfect good will, which knows no such imposed restrictions. Not only is this a case of not benefiting those without faith; indeed, they will be sorely punished. Jesus says of those who will not receive his disciples (and are therefore, presumably, not of the faithful): “Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.” (Mark 6:11) He was talking about whether households are receptive just prior to this statement, so it is quite possible that he means to destroy an entire city in which there is even one unreceptive household, or perhaps more plausibly, he has suddenly shifted to discussing unreceptive cities, not just households.

Again, Jesus holds conversion to the faith as a prerequisite for heaven: “Except ye be converted,...ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 18:3) But he promises great empowerment to the faithful beyond even this, specifically, that those who receive Jesus as God (which is confusing in light of remarks cited above which differentiates Christ from God) are given the power to become sons of God, (John 1:12) and those who believe in the Son of Man “should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:15) This is backed by Matthew’s account, in which Jesus notes that only one who does the will of Jesus’ father can enter into heaven. (Matt 7:21) Not only does Jesus tell us that belief will allow one into heaven, but will spare one from that other place: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” (John 5:24)

Jesus spares an adultress, famously daring her accusers to cast the first stone against her. (John 8:3-11) Immediately after releasing the woman, he explains: “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12) Presumably, following Jesus means having faith in him—although perhaps it also means performing works of certain kinds. Jesus could also be referring to deeds, insofar as he proclaims: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” (John 15: 10) Since his commandments relate to practice, good deeds are hinted of here, as well. Jesus once again uses the metaphor of light: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” (John 12:46) Again, only believers shall escape darkness, which likely refers to hell.

Is Jesus offering a false promise for those who keep his commandments? He suggests: “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*. If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:14-5) How many people have kept Christ’s commandments, and loved others in the best sense, yet were lost to the world, in spite of their prayers directed at Christ? And then there is the question of baptism. Jesus tells us: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16) This passage implies that one needs both to believe and to be baptized in order to be saved—the implication is that the

unbaptized are in danger of damnation. If one believes in God, and lives a life full of good works, one may still burn for eternity if one is not baptized, a prospect that sits ill with an ideal of unconditional beneficence.

At times, though, Christ is threatening, perhaps even violent, in his requirement of belief. He notes that "...he that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18) Presumably, this also applies to people born many generations after Jesus, who never witnessed him or his miracles, and must believe on mere faith—or be condemned. Wrath is also promised to unbelievers: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36) A sort of death is also promised to those who will not believe, meaning of course that they will not enjoy eternal life (at least not a *good* eternal life, if *hell* itself is eternal): "...ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24) It is not clear what difference in the world it makes if an individual believes that Christ is "he," since, presumably, Christ is "he" regardless, and yet this does supposedly determine if one is hellbound or not. By contrast, obviously good works do make a difference for the better in our world. But Christ is so opposed to unbelievers that he considers them to be "enemies," and wishes only genocide to them, reminiscent of the genocides wrought and sought in the Old Testament: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me." (Luke 19:27) It is not clear why this latter, rather startling saying of Jesus is less remembered than certain other pronouncements. In any case, it seems that faith is necessary, if not clearly sufficient, for salvation.

But pause. Another, contradictory set of requirements is available from the New Testament, to which one can also subscribe (but at the cost of being inconsistent with scriptural passages just discussed): that works are required, and faith in itself is not stressed nearly so much (although it may also be referred to at times). James tells us: "What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (Jas 2:14) He goes on at length:

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils [who do bad things] also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (Jas 2:17-22)

Here faith alone is not enough, even though it alone was sufficient from Paul's point of view. For James, faith is shown or made perfect through works, so the two together are needed, although doing works alone is stressed. It is also made clear that by faith one merely means belief "that there is one God," not being required to do any deeds—or *is* this clear, considering the other passages? Again, only works are stressed by James: "he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (Jas 1:25) Finally, even Paul seems to contradict his own meaning, by implying that sins lead to damnation, although sins are also by deed, not just faith: "the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 6:23)

There are also a few passages that are ambiguous as to whether works or faith are needed: “...if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” (Rom 11:6) This could imply that work is relevant, perhaps, but faith is necessary (if he associates it with the gift of grace, as his other passages, cited above, suggest). Again, Paul makes another puzzling reference to sin, which seems linked to deeds or works: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” (Rom 4:7)

If this is not confusing enough, there are also passages which assume the polar opposite of Paul’s doctrine that faith—or even faith alone—is needed (although again, Paul waffles on this): *works alone*, without faith, are sufficient to get one into heaven on Judgment Day. This seems to be the case, even though so many passages were produced above to show that faith is required. On that fateful day of judgment, the dead are raised, and “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire,” with the dead being judged “according to their works.” (Rev 20:12) So here we have a stress on works alone, even more so than in James, and Jesus himself is also quoted as confirming this in the prophecy of Revelation: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” (Rev 22:12) Despite all of these contradictions regarding what is the key to get into heaven, we dare not interpret for ourselves which is the sounder doctrine, for as Peter writes: “...no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Pet 1:20-1) How can we question the word of God, however incoherent it might be on the whole? To cope, we could either pursue a “safe” course of both faith and works, since neither is forbidden, and both are quite variously stressed, although it is not clear what is required or sufficient to be saved. Otherwise, we can renounce the whole thing as inconsistent, and therefore false, at least in part, and perhaps even as a whole. In any case, every inconsistent pronouncement on behalf of God is not consistent with complete good will, since, after all, it is never very kind to *confound* people.

More Innocents to be Punished

Lest it be thought that punishing the innocent is a practice peculiar to the Old Testament God, it will be clear that this almost unbelievable tradition carries on in the time of Jesus. Jesus himself, for example, mentions several cities that will suffer on judgment day, because they did not repent. (Matt 11:20-4) He notes, for example, that the city Capernaum will “be brought down to hell,” although it is difficult to imagine that *everyone* in these cities is worthy of eternal damnation. Consider, too, that given the way history has unfolded, Judgment Day would have to take place a great many generations after Jesus’ pronouncement, when quite innocent people of a new generation would be inhabiting these cities, if these habitations even continue to exist in present times, as Capernaum does not. True, a city of that name lies in ruins, on Lake Kinneret in Israel, a Biblical area of the world if ever there was one. Whether its “populace” will be sent to hell on Judgment Day is left for the reader to decide. And after condemning the lawyers (upon which I shall not elaborate), Jesus adds:

Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation. (Luke 11:49-51)

Jesus seems to be saying that all of the prophets hitherto slain will be avenged by exacting a toll from the current generation, even though this generation is not portrayed as more guilty than any other, and the present generation is *innocent* of any crimes committed against prophets of earlier times.

On a wider scale, recall that salvation depends—at least in part—on faith in Jesus, at least according to many passages (although not others). Astonishingly, Jesus claims that people have no choice as to whether they come to have faith in him: “But there are some of you that believe not,” notes Jesus, with John adding: “For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.” Jesus then completes the thought: “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.” (John 6:64-5) This remarkable passage implies that God knows in advance who will come to Jesus. So faith is a foregone conclusion, not a free choice, and people are innocent of actually making the choice themselves: it is just the way things are, or will be. God makes certain people come to Jesus, and makes certain people stay away, and then punishes all those who stay away—a classic case of punishing the innocent (true, it would appear, of most or all people going to hell). In a similar vein, Jesus muses: “It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe *unto him*, through whom they come!” (Luke 17:1) In other words, he fully expects people to sin, but will not spare woe unto those who do. Part of this understanding of

the inevitability of evil must be related to the fact that the devil can compel people to sin at will. Writes Paul:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Tim 2:24-6)

And if people are ensnared by the devil at will, are they not innocent of what they do, and is not the devil instead to blame?

But it goes beyond blaming the innocent. Paul relates to us that God actually makes people suffer for their being deceived by *God* himself:

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thess 2:10-2)

The phrase “received not the love of truth” is apt, for recall that God himself makes people seek Jesus. If he makes them stay away, though, by not giving them the ‘love of truth,’ he deludes them “*that* they all might be damned,” implying that God’s own delusion is the *cause* of their damnation. They were not themselves culpable for being deceived.

Even the unborn and infants will suffer on judgment day, predicted by Jesus as if it is fully “righteous”:

But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days [leading up to Judgment]! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:23-4)

In addition, note that innocents shall die by the sword or fall into captivity—or will *all* of the people living in Jerusalem be culpable?

In another case, servants are expected to be responsible for things of which they have no knowledge:

Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season? Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour

when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*, but he that knew not [his lord's will], and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. (Luke 12:42-8)

It is the last-named case of servants who are punished for violating wishes they did not even know about that is the most deplorable here.

Our last example of innocents punished by God is the unlikely example of Herod:

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave with a shout, *saying*, *It is* the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. (Acts 12:21-3)

It was the people who praised him as divine, not Herod himself, and yet it is the man who was killed as a result. It would be extreme to kill him even if only on the pretext that he did not rebuke others who so praised him. Altogether, it is merely carrying on the seemingly inexplicable Biblical tradition of punishing the innocent.

How Good It Is For Sinners to Suffer

We have already seen displayed the conviction that we are all sinners—hence Paul’s idea that we should not boast of our works. This notion that we are all sinners is closely allied with the belief that it is good, in a way, for us to suffer, perhaps as a way of atoning for our inherent sinfulness. For example, Jesus tells us to “resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matt 5:39) Perhaps this is partly rooted in subjecting ourselves to punishment for being sinners. Why should Christ be gentle with us? Certainly it is not intuitive that Christ is purely gentle, since, for example, he sends people to hell. This possibly sado-masochistic tendency continues: Jesus enjoins that if someone sues the coat off one’s back, one should offer one’s cloak, too. (Matt 5:40) And if someone compels one to go a mile, Jesus urges one should go two miles. (Matt 5:41) Perhaps this is the origin of the idea of “going the extra mile.” Jesus states that one should give “to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away.” (Matt 5:42) This compulsiveness in giving is sure to lead to one’s being ruthlessly exploited by the manipulative—until one is nothing short of bankrupt—but then this would only be more punishment for our inherent sinfulness. Perhaps Jesus’ instructing us to love our enemies, (Matt 5:44) if it is not a kind of unconditional good will (see below), is also part of the same pattern, loving what they inflict upon us. Besides, Jesus did not love his enemies: recall the passage in which he calls for all of those who do not accept his reign over them to be slain. (Luke 19:27)

People should also like to be punished by God himself, as the following passage queerly suggests :

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.
(Heb 12:5-8)

Interestingly, God is presenting himself as a father figure. Yet as a childbeater, he hardly cuts a convincing figure as someone who has unconditional good will. If human rights mean universality, that everyone is always owed a modicum of good will, then surely children will not be treated violently to instruct them. The end does not justify the means. He beats us because we are inherently sinful. Perhaps this is what motivated Jesus to teach that it is all right to eat with unwashed hands, because nothing can enter a man from without that can defile him; always do evil things come from within. (Mark 7:14-23) Evidently Jesus does not agree with the germ theory. But in any case, this suggestion that evil things always come from within implies that it is part of our own nature to be evil (this need not at all be at odds with the earlier cited Biblical assertion that the Devil can get people to sin at will).

Paul reflects the idea that we are all sinners, when it seems that he compares Christians to sinners: “What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved

both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one..." (Rom 3:9-10) He re-emphasizes this theme of our imperfections: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Rom 3:23-4) Again we have the inconsistent theme of saving grace. Mysteriously, however, we get the following from John: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9) Who is not born of God, ultimately? Are we all incapable of sin, then? Or let us suppose instead that only Jesus is God's offspring. And let us accept what he said, that the whole of the law is love, or that love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom 13:10) How, then, can we say that Jesus himself—who, among other things we have seen, called to have all of his enemies slain before him (Luke 19:27)—is incapable of sin?

A Fresh Crop of Capital Offenses

We saw how, in the Old Testament, capital punishments were dispensed rather liberally—or should I say *conservatively*? Jesus is anxious to endorse the death penalty for dishonoring one’s parents: “Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death...” (Mark 7:9-10) This is just a mirroring of the older book of Exodus, which sentences to death anyone who curses his or her father or mother. (Exod 21:15) In the New Testament, threats are also extended more broadly, to those who fail to honor their parents: “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.” (Eph 6:2-3) Yet what of Jesus himself? His mother tells him that wedding guests have no wine, and the Son’s response is: “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.” (John 2:4) This rebuke is more than mysterious, it is *disrespectful*, or not fully honoring the mother, who is still his mother, even if God is his Father, as is widely claimed.

A whole miscellany of infractions are said to be punishable by death. Men who take to “leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another,” (Rom 1:27) and those who are “filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful,” (Rom 1:29-31) are subject to “the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death,...” (Rom 1:32) Presumably, then, this biblical passage mercilessly recommends a death penalty for homosexuality, adultery, but also such things as debating (or perhaps taking issue with authority), whispering, boasting, lacking understanding... This is, at the very least, as absurd as the minor infractions leading to the spilling of blood in the Old Testament. It is *possibly* more understandable that murder is on the list (although I think one of unconditional good will inflicts the least harm, and so would favor locking up a murderer over killing him or her). Capital punishment is still incompatible with humans rights. But what about disobeying one’s parents? Perhaps parents can command wicked things, such as sexual impropriety, theft, or other things incompatible with ethics. Finally, given the New Testament’s explicit endorsement of the Old Testament, we can assume that all of the capital offenses from the older writs still hold.

The Ethic of Love

The God of love of the New Testament is and has been a familiar cultural theme in the West. Presumably, this idea is part of the “good news” that Christians are trying to spread. But what kind of love does Christianity actually express in its sacred writings? When Jesus instructs his disciples to go on their healing mission, he is explicitly not in favor of spreading love or good will unconditionally. He tells them not to go among the Samaritans or the Gentiles, but rather “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt 10:5-6) He shows less than loving discrimination against the Gentiles on another occasion, when he gives a reason for the following instructions: “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.” (Matt 6:25) What is his reason for ordering this? “For after these things do the Gentiles seek.” (Matt 6:32) I suppose that Gentiles are like the Philistines of the Old Testament, who lie at the root of the term “philistinism.” But it turns out, upon a sober analysis, that Christians want the very same materialistic things, only not necessarily in this life. Hence Jesus reassures Christians that God will add all of these things to one if one first seeks the kingdom of God. (Matt 6:33; Luke 12:22-31) Hence we see, like the first Testament, an ethic of following God out of self-interest, as in our previous discussion of heaven and hell: it is clearly in one’s self-interest to get into the one and to stay out of the other.

Also, heaven is depicted in a way that could not possibly be more outrageously materialistic, as we see in the following passage:

And the building of the wall it was *of* jasper: and the city *was* pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city *were* garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation *was* jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite, the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus, the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city *was* pure gold, as it were transparent glass. (Rev 21:18-21)

Compare this to James’ warning to the rich: “Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.” (Jas 5:3)

Jesus also condemned Babylon, which was clearly a materialistic city, as when he speaks of its eventual fall: “Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in the linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!” (Rev 18:16) In spite of this rich materialism which divinely glorifies heaven, love of the *same* thing on Earth is said to be wrong, even though it is unclear why one would value the same things in heaven if one despises them here:

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of

the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of this world. (1 John 2:15-6)

It seems this life-denying passage would forbid “loving” things in the only sense that applies: enjoying them greatly. But what is wrong with that, and why would a being of unconditional good will restrict against that? No reason is given. This “unlovingness” is supposed to extend to one’s own life, in the words of Jesus: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” (John 12:25) Not only this, but although one is to honor one’s father and mother or be killed (as we saw), one is still obliged to hate them, plus the rest of his family, according to Christ: “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26) *Whatever* form of contempt is being referred to here cannot be good, and cannot be consistent with an ethic of complete good will.

Jesus instructs that if one gives alms to others, and one is seen by others, one will “have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 6:1) Yet one of unconditional good will would simply give to those in need, whether observed or not—it is irrelevant. If one is not vain about it, then it does not matter if others see one do it. Perhaps the idea here is that the self will not get anything out of the giving if no one gives credit to oneself. Yet in the following passage, the opposite idea is implied, in that charitableness is coupled explicitly with self-reward:

When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor *thy* rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:12-14)

One of unconditional good will simply helps others for their own sakes, and does not need recompense to the self, either in this life or the hereafter. Such a one would not see helping others as a “sacrifice” that needs to be compensated by future gains, but simply as the thing to do, regardless of one’s own possible gain—here or hereafter.

One is also impelled to forgive others’ trespasses for a selfish reason—the fear of oneself being punished otherwise, for if one does not forgive others’ trespasses, God will not forgive one’s own trespasses. (Matt 6:14-5) A game of reciprocity is obviously afoot. Similarly, Jesus links showing mercy with selfishly seeking to escape punishment, when he proclaims: “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt 5:7) He goes on to speak of heaven as if it is a reward for oneself, estimating that the “reward” in heaven is great. (Matt 5:12) But where reward is present, can punishment be far behind? Warns Jesus: “Whosoever...shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:19) The belief of Christians is summed up in terms that are self-interested, not unconditionally loving, in the following: “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but them that believe to the saving of the soul.” (Heb 10:39)

In this context of the pursuit of self-interest, which merely continues what we have

already observed in the Old Testament, even the maxim “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” (Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9) which Jesus calls the second commandment, may be called into question. This notion (which you will recall is just a repetition of an Old Testament saying, (Lev 19:18) although often mistakenly described as distinctively Christian) has a self-centered subtext. How can we really love others as we love ourselves, when everyone is lovable in a unique way, and has needs and desires which one may not share, but still ought to respect? The following saying seems to avoid this egocentric problem: “...love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” (Rom 13:9) However, loving others in order to fulfill the law must be taken in the context of fulfilling the law in order to go to heaven and avoid hell, which has already been established as a background consideration. Paul is also less than fully loving when he speaks as follows: “I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*.” (1 Cor 9:22-3) It sounds loving on the surface, that Paul is willing to give his all just so that everyone might partake of the gospels together. But let us put aside idle pleasantries: we have seen what the Gospels are like. Partaking of a vision where hell awaits those who become angry or have not been baptized, and where all of the horrid punishments of the Old Testament remain intact? If a salesman who claimed to be all things to all people tried to sell me this vision, or way of life, I would tell him to spare me the favor.

Nor is it even out of the question to suggest that we love as Jesus loves, given the nature of the acts of God that we have been analyzing: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34) But Jesus himself does not love people unconditionally, but only on the condition that others love and obey him. In his own words: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21) We are even given a rare insight into at least part of the content of love, that it involves inflicting no harm—despite the many harmful things we have seen Jesus and God do, describe, or prescribe. Jesus states: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of law.” (Rom 13:10) Indeed, how harmless was Jesus himself when he chased people and sheep and oxen out of the temple with a scourge (i.e., a whip made of small cords—a cruel instrument indeed), pouring out moneychangers’ money, overthrowing tables (John 2:15)—all needless violence, doing ill unto one’s neighbor—or an expression of Christ’s ‘love’?

Yet we are also expected to follow Jesus’ example of sacrifice “...if God so loved us [by sending the Son to be a propitiation of sins], we ought also to love one another.” (1 John 4:10-1) Similarly, Paul writes to the Romans: “by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.” (Rom 12:1) Does this mean people should die young in order to service others? Not likely. But as we have seen, there are untoward suggestions that helping the needy is itself a “sacrifice,” and that, indeed, any sacrifice is pursued for long-term self-gain.

How does telling the truth relate to Christian love? Paul describes “...God, that cannot lie,...” (Titus 1:2) Yet recall that he sends delusions to sinners, as cited above, (2 Thess 2:10-12) and Jesus can be accused of deceit, if not outright lying, when he said: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19) This is a misleading statement, and the Bible itself records how people thought he was referring to the temple he had just purged of moneychangers and animals. Instead, he meant his own body, which conveys the wrong

meaning, and shows much the same disregard for others' knowledge of the truth that is found in lying.

How loving too, is the following statement by Paul, which is curiously denied to be a lie before it is even fully begun (perhaps because people might otherwise find it to be unbelievable):

I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;...Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they [presumably, the children or their mother] continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (1 Tim 2:7, 2:11-5)

It is not clear why males should be given priority just because Adam was born first. On this logic, we would value awkward prototypes above advanced models of machines. Also, this passage imposes yet another blaming of the innocent, in a double sense, because naive Eve is not to blame for being deceived, nor, certainly, are succeeding generations of human females to blame for anything that Eve did, or failed to do. In any case, it is blatantly inconsistent with unconditional good will to subordinate women, and only to see them as having redeeming value in bearing children, as this passage intends to convey. As if this is not enough: the children have to "continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety," for which the woman is not strictly responsible: yet another trap for the innocent. This subjection is also extended to servants, says Peter: "Servants, *be* subject to *your* masters with all fear; not only to the good and the gentle, but also to the froward. For this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." (1 Pet 2:18-9) Why is it good that people suffer wrongfully, or that servants serve anyone, let alone people who are not good and gentle? Thus Christian love for humans.

Jesus' Love for Animals

A truly unconditional good will must extend to animals, and not be limited solely to humans. So I have argued in Part I. Although, in my analysis of the Old Testament, the practice of not muzzling oxen in the fields was charitably cited, Paul informs us that this does not directly regard the animal:

For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. (1 Cor 7:9-10)

While Paul denies that this is done for the animals' sakes, it is left unclear how not muzzling the ox is plowing "in hope." Perhaps it means hope for a good harvest, and that to conserve corn by muzzling the ox is too cautious, and does not imply faith in a good harvest? No doubt one hopes for a good harvest either way, so the meaning is still obscure. If it means hoping for salvation, it is not clear how this act conduces to salvation if it really makes no difference to the animal, but only to people.

A specific act against animals by Jesus occurred when he met two people possessed by evil spirits. He cast the devils into a herd of swine who were feeding, so that "the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters." (Matt 8:28-32; Mark 5:12-3) In other cases, it is not evident that Jesus needed to transfer evil spirits from one host to another, so this killing appears to be gratuitous (and it is doubtful that the disembodied *spirits* were "killed" along with the pigs, in any case). Also gratuitous is the calling for a sacrifice of two turtledoves and two young pigeons on the birth of Jesus, (Luke 2:24) which presumably means his birthday.

Arguably, unconditional good will towards animals means refraining from eating them, since meat-eating is not only irrelevant to a healthy lifestyle, but is also plainly harmful to the animals killed for that purpose. Yet Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king having a marriage for his son in which oxen and fatlings are killed for dinner. (Matt 22:2-4) Heaven, in that case, does not seem to be portrayed as a place where divine, perfect good will is the norm. Yet Paul, in his letter to Timothy, even condemns vegetarians as devilish:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy...*commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. (2 Tim 4:1-5)

If every *creature* of God is good, and nothing is to be refused, does this also include human flesh? Since we are his creatures too, this logically follows, although no doubt Paul would be embarrassed at this meaning of what “the Spirit” moved him to say.

Dogmatically valuing humans above all animals is also inconsistent with *unconditional* good will, which would hold regardless of species. Yet Jesus says :

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12:7)

Again, one of unconditional good will does not assess others’ fundamental worth according to either ability or usefulness, yet Jesus asks us to: “Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?” (Luke 12:24) The implication is that humans are much better than animals because the latter do not sow, reap, nor store. But these activities only make humans useful in various ways. What about disabled humans who can do none of these things, and what about animals themselves, to one of complete good will?

Miscellaneous Unseemly Acts of God

Although unconditional good will does pertain to nonhuman animals, it does not straightforwardly encompass plants. One can assist a plant because they are good for people and animals for food, aesthetic purposes, and so on, but just for the plant itself? In any case, it was a terrible waste, when Jesus left the temple hungry, passing a fig tree which he found without fruit, but only leaves, and he petulantly said, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever,” causing the tree to wither away. (Matt 21:18-9; Mark 11:14) Obviously, one of unconditional good will would, at the very least, not have done people such a disservice, for others might have enjoyed the fruits of the tree in later days.

Also inconsistent with unconditional good will, at a figurative level, is Jesus’ parable of a rich man, who builds great barns to store fruits, and tells himself to eat, drink and be merry. Jesus adds: “But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:16-20) This seems excessive punishment for someone who is simply enjoying life, although perhaps too selfishly. In any case, such parables have less credibility against the background, already investigated, that heaven will satisfy even wildly materialistic desires, as we have seen.

Again, at a figurative level, it is at odds with unconditional good will to revel in images of killing people, bloodletting, and cannibalism. God threatened to make people cannibals through the Old Testament prophets, and this was obviously a loathsome thing. Yet here we have Jesus declaring: “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:54) More acceptable ways can be formulated to describe someone following another’s way of life. Yet such gruesome ideas are widespread: “...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin,” (I John 1:7) and Jesus “...washed us from our sins in his own blood.” (Rev 1:5)

Yet another dispelling of the myth of Jesus as purely loving and gentle occurs in the following:

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (Luke 12:51-3)

Whither “Peace on Earth and good will to men”?

A literal miscellany of other acts of Jesus, that are inconsistent with complete good will, remains: when Jesus’ feet are rubbed with an ointment by a woman, and it is said that it could have been sold for the poor, Jesus callously and self-indulgently replies: “the poor [are] always with you; but me ye have not always.” (Matt 26:7-11) Essentially, this amounts to a dismissal of the poor, and a betrayal of the maxim, “Love thy neighbour as thyself.” It is a wonder why people do not more often question scripture itself, when it contains declarations like the

following of Jesus: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:32) It has been a great many generations since then, and Christians are still waiting for all of the prophecies, such as those in Revelation, to be fulfilled. All of the societies and cults predicting the end of the world were too late, by this quote—it already should have happened, or else Jesus was being deceptive.

Whenever salvation may come, however, Jesus mysteriously says that “...salvation is of the Jews.” (John 4:22) This is unclear as to whether only Jews are to be saved, or whether they shall save others, too. In any case, it seems favorable regarding the Jews. But in the same book, a declamation of Christ to unbelievers, the Jews, treats them in a way that is inconsistent with unconditional good will, and manifests more along the lines of anti-Semitism:

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

Here he is identifying the Jews with the devil, and also blaming their “lusts” on the same entity, implying that it is the devil’s fault, not the Jews, although Jews are being condemned just the same—more punishing of the innocent, it would seem. But more on biblically inspired anti-Semitism in Part III.

Mercy and Forgiveness, New and Improved

Many people consider the New Testament to represent a kinder, gentler creed. This impression is based on the smaller of two distinct sets of contradictory sayings in the Bible. It is true that Jesus says that all manner of sin except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall be forgiven, (Matt 12:31) and this sounds merciful, but perhaps it is questionable that *all* sins be forgiven, and the only one that will not be forgiven is disbelieving in the Biblical God. But then, perhaps forgiveness is not so automatic. Jesus tells us, speaking of Galileans slain by Pilate, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-3) So repentance is the key to forgiveness:

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.
(Luke 17:4)

All of this sounds relatively gentle, in utter contrast to earlier strident, even murderous utterances of Jesus (such as calling to slay all of his enemies before him). Consider further: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves..." (2 Tim 2:24-6) This is inconsistent with the Jesus who said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt 10:34) And yet James refers to "...God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not..." (Jas 1:5) as if hell is not promised to unbelievers, as a form of eternal "upbraiding."

In the New Testament, it is said that God has given us a *new* and *better* covenant than the Old Testament (although this new talk of eternal hell, again, hardly sounds *more* merciful):

...he [God] is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. [Or else regarded them with ill favor: see "Punishment Politics"] For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more [recall, here, the jealous God of the Old Testament, in which it was predicted that the disobedient shall all bow down to

the slaughter]. In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is* ready to vanish away. (Heb 8:6-13)

Even though the Old Testament God was praised as merciful, you will recall, even in the midst of his destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah, the once-wrathful God of old times now claims that people's "sins and iniquities will I remember no more." This "concession" seems more than odd, since recall that people are sent to *hell* for their sins, and recall also that Revelation gives the picture of a Jesus who judges people according to their works from the Book of Life: why *should* God have to remember people's sins if he has it all written down in a book? But the passage is even stranger in contrast with quotations from the very same chapter: "Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people." (Heb 10:30) This does not sound like forgetting all sins, nor does: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Heb 10:38) This last suggests that if one departs, or draws back, even the slightest, from living by the faith, this will incur God's displeasure. This is neither more merciful nor more forgetful than the Old Testament, if it can be described in these terms at all.

Also supposed to be "new" is the dismissal of animal sacrifices: "*it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." (Heb 10:4) If this is true, then why did God *command* animal sacrifices in the Old Testament? And why is a sacrifice of turtledoves and pigeons still required on Jesus' birthday? (Luke 2:24) In any case, if humans are animals, then we are still left with the sacrifice of a man: "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*....this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God..." (Heb 10:10, 10:12; repeated, in part, in 10:16-7)

Says John: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love Jesus, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:18-9) Yet Jesus coming into the world with a sword, to bring dissension, and eventually judge if people should be cast into eternal flames—no cause for fear? Europeans in the Middle Ages lived in great terror of hell—as do many of the modern era. Indeed, recall the following quotation in reference to Jesus: "Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." (Luke 12:5) Or again: "*It* is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:31) In any case, thus are the promises of *greater* mercy and forgiveness. Now for some additional biblical material which suggests just the opposite.

It is said that "[God] in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways." (Acts 14:16) This would be more tolerant and peaceful, if it were true, but if we can at all judge by the multiple genocides called for by God against unbelievers, the statement in question does not appear to be true. And, once more, far from taking an easy, 'forgetful' attitude towards sin, it is said: "He that commiteth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8) Actually, the legend is that the devil was once an archangel, so how could he have sinned from the beginning? But the same hateful, intolerant attitude is borne out in the following from Paul's letter to the Romans: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." (Rom 11:22) Being "cut off" we have seen to be associated with

genocide, and indeed, related sentiments are echoed by Jesus in the New Testament: “David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Mark 12:36; see also Acts 2:34-5 for a similar statement) So far from being merciful and “forgetful” in relation to sinners, when asked how many will be excluded from heaven, Jesus replies:

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all *ye* workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you *your selves* thrust out. (Luke 13:25)

This would seem to involve needlessly tormenting the damned, so alien is it to the vaunted promise of mercy.

Furthermore, it is no temporary torment of those crying outside of Heaven’s gates, as the following reveals:

...Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power... (2 Thess 1:7-9)

The punishment of those who know not God could be construed as punishing the ignorant, and hence the innocent. The “new deal,” then, does not sound as appealing as those few “promising” passages reproduced above may have made it seem. Perhaps God’s taking vengeance in flaming fire is even redundant: “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12:49) This picture of the Earth ablaze is a cruel reminder that God would never cause another global flood again—but he never said anything about fire. Certainly, Jesus is vengeful during the last days before judgment: “For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:22) Indeed, an approving reference is made to the same unmercifulness that we find in the Old Testament:

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved into judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly....The Lord knoweth how to...reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished... (2 Pet 2:5-6, 9)

Why should not the old patterns continue—forevermore? “...the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” (1 Pet 1:25) This, of course, goes against what we have already read, namely that the old covenant God made was with fault.

People are also told to live in fear of retribution during their own lifetimes, indeed, in terror of earthly rulers who are ministers of God (not that anyone would believe this today, given widespread cynicism regarding politicians): “For [the ruler] is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (Rom 13:4) Any ruler with a sword who thinks that he is a minister of God is a frightening historical reality to contemplate. Perhaps this passage was inserted by powerful people in order further to consolidate their power. But the same Bible promises great power to the faithful, to be mercilessly exercised, as Jesus’ voice is heard by John to say after Jesus’ death: “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule over them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.” (Rev 2:26-7) This remarkable passage not only endorses harsh rulership, but implies that Jesus was beaten horribly by his Father—i.e., God. Jesus himself punishes, keeping up the cycle of abuse, we might say: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Rev 3:19) Indeed, he promises punishment to people of various sorts:

Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:24-6)

An “iron rod” is used against these people for being innocent: sated, laughing, well spoken of... Christians will be rewarded with riches in heaven, we have already seen, but are forbidden the same things on Earth, and are even expected to despise riches.

There are a few instances in which Jesus behaves in a way that is bereft of mercy. We have already seen Jesus’ rebuke of his mother, and his attacking people with a corded whip in the temple. Moreover, a disciple wished Jesus to allow him to go bury his father, and the Christ callously replies, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.” (Matt 8:21-2) This is as nonsensical as it is inconsiderate. Typically, Jesus’ mercy is far from unconditional. If one is unmerciful oneself, one shall not receive it from the superior being: “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” (Jas 2:13) Yet Jesus is also merciless to anyone seeking a divorce. He acknowledges that Moses said one could write a bill of divorcement, but according to Jesus: “For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.” Rather, Jesus thinks that: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” He says that to divorce or “put away” one’s spouse and marry another is to commit adultery. (Mark 10:4-12) If “adultery” is the same as “fornication,” then we have already seen that this is considered an offense worthy of death. (Rom 1:29, 32) Rather, this view of divorce seems to be hard-hearted to those married people who find the need to part.

The pinnacle of mercilessness, however, is expected on the day of judgment, in which people will witness the wrath of the lamb: a great earthquake, with every mountain and island displaced, the sun becoming black as sackcloth, and the moon becoming as blood. “For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev 6:12-7) On this terrible day, seven angels of God will sound their trumpets: the first will cause hail and fire mingled with blood to fall to Earth, burning a third of all trees and green grass; the second angel will cause a great mountain burning with fire to be cast into the sea, so that the sea becomes one-third blood, with a third of all sea creatures and oceangoing vessels destroyed; the third angel will cause a star to fall from heaven, falling on a third of all rivers and fountains, and making them become “Wormwood”; the fourth angel will cause a third of the sun, moon, and stars to become “smitten,” which in turn will cause a third less daylight; the fifth angel will also cause a star to fall, and be given the key to a bottomless pit, having locusts emerge in order to hurt whomever lacks the seal of God on their foreheads, which torment will go on for five months, with the locusts being inescapable, having teeth like lions, and tails like scorpions; the sixth angel will sound his trumpet, releasing four angels bound in the great river Euphrates in order to slay a third of all men over a period of a year, a month, and one day, killing by fire and brimstone from the angels’ horses’ mouths; the seventh angel will sound, and from a “little book,” will declare the prophets in a thundering voice, (Rev 8:2-10:7) and will be responsible for a deadly earthquake that will kill 7,000 people (as well as other deadly things). (Rev 11:13)

As if the vicious punishments inflicted by these seven angels were not more than enough to show the lack of mercy promised in the Christian religion, seven more angels are promised, bearing seven last plagues, which are in turn released. (Rev 15:1-8) One plague will cause sores, another will kill all in the sea, another turn rivers and fountains into blood; another angel will scorch people with fire from the sun. The sixth angel will inflict sores that are painful, and finally, the seventh angel will create thunder and great earthquakes, “such as was not since men were upon the earth,” so that no islands or mountains shall remain, and also “great hail.” (Rev 16:1-21)

It is only fitting, perhaps, that the last declaration of substance in the Bible (besides the final platitude that Jesus is coming and may he be with you! (Rev 22:20-1)) is a characteristic admonition:

For I testify [on behalf of God or Jesus, we can presume] unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.” (Rev 22:18-9)

Evidently, this typically frightful threat worked, since Revelation is the last book ever to be added to the Bible.

Acts of Conditional Good Will in the New Testament

Having seen that the Bible fails its own ethics in the foregoing, it remains to examine at least those acts of God that are at least consistent with some form of *conditional* good will, which can be expressed as part of another agenda, or in order to obtain something else (such as the furtherance of recognizing Christ as God, etc.). Many people regard the New Testament more fondly than the Old, perhaps partly with regard to the many healings and other miracles of the New Testament. People might think the Bible is overflowing with such acts of God—through Jesus—that are in keeping with unconditional good will. However, it would be erroneous to characterize such healings as expressive of *unconditional* good will, benevolent though these acts might be. The healings, as I shall illustrate, are always carried out for an ulterior motive.

Thus, one reason given for all of the healing is: “[Jesus] healed all that were sick that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” (Matt 8:16-7) The healing only took place in order to fulfill a prophecy. Lest it be thought that the healing did in fact fulfill a prophecy, but was nevertheless of “pure intent,” the more unequivocal reason why the healings only manifest conditional good will is that they were never dispensed unconditionally, but only on the condition that the sick person has faith in Jesus. Thus, Jesus tells a woman whom he heals, “thy faith hath made thee whole.” (Matt 9:22) This implies that if the woman lacked faith, she would not have been made whole, and would seem to hold true of anyone healed by him. Similarly, Jesus cures a blind man, and says to him: “Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.” (Luke 18:10)

The good will expressed through healing is not spread freely and unconditionally to both the faithful and faithless alike. In keeping with this practice, Jesus tells the disciples to give peace to a house only if it is worthy, and to depart those who do not receive them or hear their words. (Matt 10:13-4) Jesus’ preferential treatment in healing practices is epitomized in the following example: a woman of Canaan begged Jesus to have mercy on her, for her “daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” He did not answer her, but told his disciples, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Only following this, when the woman professed faith in him, did he heal her daughter. (Matt 15:22-8) The explicit agenda in healing is to reward the faithful. Since God, and hence Jesus, is no respecter of persons, (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11) meaning that he is not partial to individuals, it follows that he did not only require faith of just these individuals just mentioned, but of *anyone* who was healed. Yet if God is omnipotent, he could heal those needing faith—he certainly does many other things to those who lack faith.

Another purpose in restoring vitality is to create faith, and to give God a chance to glorify himself. When someone beseeches Jesus to heal his son, who is at the point of death, Jesus insensitively replies: “Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” (John 4:48) Jesus did, in fact, heal the man’s son from afar, which was called his second miracle. (John 4:54) As resentful as Jesus sounds of having to use miracles to instill faith, he promotes this sort of thing at the same time. After ridding a man of an “unclean spirit,” Jesus instructs him: “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” (Mark 5:19) It is just as though he is on a political campaign. Could not God and his Son simply eliminate diseases out of perfect good will? But God, evidently, wants

to be glorified, which cannot be gotten from unbelievers. Hence when Jesus heals ten lepers, just one person came back to fall on his face and give thanks, and Jesus answers: “Were there not ten cleansed? but where *are* the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.” (Luke 17:12-8)

This desire for glory is expressed elsewhere, such as when Jesus gives sight to a man who has been blind from birth, although neither the man nor his parents has sinned—whence the blindness? Jesus instructs: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:1-7) This is reminiscent of what was cited above from Exodus, to the effect that the Pharaoh’s heart was “hardened” so that the plagues could be further inflicted upon Egypt, thus glorifying God. Jesus also sought glory in the famous resurrection of Lazarus. When Christ hears of Lazarus’ illness, he declares: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” (John 11:4) Then Jesus waits for two days before going into Judea just for show, knowing when Lazarus died, and proclaimed that “...he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” (John 11:25) Again, Lazarus was saved because he had faith, and also, of course, in order to glorify God.

But God, through Jesus and the disciples, would as soon harm as heal in order to secure faith. Thus did Paul blind Elymas the sorcerer for trying to turn away “the deputy” from the faith, and in fact the deputy, “astonished,” was made to believe by this less than benevolent attack. (Acts 13:6-12) Helping only the faithful should come as no surprise to us, since we have already seen numerous passages indicating that it is only the faithful who are to be saved.

Bearing this context of conditional good will firmly in mind, with no indication that healings are also to be bestowed upon the faithless, or that God has lost sight of his overarching goal of glorifying himself, we can now explore other healing acts of God. (Of course, even if they are interpreted, implausibly, as unconditionally benevolent, this does not do anything to diminish, in any way, the huge, indelible mar of the many acts of God inconsistent with good will.) Many sorts of ailments are dealt with. In some cases it is hard to tell when the apostles are referring to the same acts of healing anonymous individuals, but in other cases, the healings are quite distinctive. In certain cases, even the illness is not named, such as when Christ is said to have healed a ruler’s daughter. (Matt 9:18, 9:23-5) Jesus heals a woman who is “diseased with an issue of the blood,” (Matt 9:20-2) mends a man with a withered hand on the sabbath day, (Matt 12:10-3; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10) and also cures a lunatic child. (Matt 17:14-8) He gives Mary a son (Luke 1:31-5) and does the same for Elisabeth, mother of John, (Luke 1:59-60) both of whom serve to further faith in God. Christ helps a man who foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and cries out, possessed by a deaf and dumb spirit which the disciples could not remove. (Mark 9:17-27) Jesus also finds an old woman—again on a sabbath day—bowed over with infirmity, who cannot lift herself up, and after his cure, “immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” (Luke 13:11-3) Peter and John heal a lame man, (Acts 3:2-8) and Paul by himself heals a lame man “perceiving that he had faith to be healed.” (Acts 14:8-10) This latter act again confirms that the apostles, too, heal only the faithful, making their healing mission less than unconditionally benevolent. Jesus is said to heal an anonymous sick man, (John 4:50) and two anonymous crippled men. (John 4:8-9; John 5:5-9) On another sabbath day, Christ heals a man with dropsy. (Luke 14:1-4) This is yet another of the miscellany of illnesses and conditions treated by Jesus, although many other healings fall into broader groups.

A number of other cases of healing the blind are reported, which may be reported repeatedly by the apostles but which I shall number separately in order to give a fair, or rather generous, analysis. (Matt 9:27-30; Matt 20:30-4; Matt 21:14; Mark 8:22-5). Also, Jesus healed of fever Peter's wife's mother, (Matt 8:14-5) Simon's wife's mother, (Mark 1:30-1) and Simon's mother (who immediately arose and ministered to Jesus and company as guests). (Luke 4:38-9) I am charitably assuming that the reporters here are not mixing up who had the fever, even though the cases are most similar. Four cases of Jesus curing palsy are mentioned, although it is impossible to determine if the same cases are referred to in anonymous cases, (Matt 8:5-13; Matt 9:2-7; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18-25) and Peter is also said to have cured a man stricken with palsy for eight years. (Acts 9:32-3) A few cases of leprosy being cured are mentioned. (Mark 1:40-2; Luke 5:12-3) One other leper in particular is said to have worshipped Jesus, and was immediately cleansed—still further evidence of the faithful being rewarded. (Matt 8:2-3)

Casting out evil spirits was another specialty of Jesus, as seen in one instance already cited. Jesus helped many on the evening of the Sermon of the Mount “possessed by devils.” (Matt 8:16) He also assisted a dumb man who was possessed by a devil, but who spoke after the devil was cast out. (Matt 9:32-3) He helps another who is possessed, dumb and blind. (Matt 12:22) He also gave his disciples the power to cast out unclean spirits, and to heal all manner of sickness and disease. (Matt 10:1; Mark 6:7) A few other anonymous cases of Jesus casting out unclean spirits are also reported. (Mark 1:23-6; Mark 7:24-9; Luke 4:34-5) Besides Lazarus' resurrection reported above, he also helped a man's daughter who died, (Mark 5:23) and Peter resurrects Tabitha, (Acts 9:36-41) while Paul revived an unnamed man who died after dozing on a third-storey loft while being preached to and then plummeting to the ground. (Acts 29:7-12)

Several cases of healings and/or exorcisings of multitudes are reported in the case of Jesus (Matt 4:23; Matt 15:29-31; Mark 1:32-4; Mark 6:53-6; Luke 4:40-1; Luke 6:17-9) and in the case of his disciples. (Acts 5:16; Acts 8:7) Also affecting multitudes were his miracles of feeding them, by multiplying bread and fish in order to nourish thousands (Matt 14:15-21; Matt 15:32-8; Mark 6:35-42; Mark 8:1-9) No doubt this too was conditional good will, intended only for the faithful, such as when he said that “he that cometh to me [evidently in terms of faith] shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35) At another point, Jesus turns water into wine. (John 2:6-9)

Not a few miracles are recorded that were intended to save the disciples, which perfectly fits the master plan of furthering the faith. When he and the disciples are caught in a storm aboard a ship, he makes the seas calm. (Matt 8:23-6; evidently, the same incident is recounted in Mark 4:37-9) Jesus even walks across water to still another storm at sea and save his disciples adrift on a boat. (Mark 6:48-51) He gives Paul a vision to the effect that the latter should do preaching in Macedonia, (Acts 16:9-10) and earlier appears to Paul in the form of a blinding light on the road to Damascus, converting him, and—revealing the underlying agenda—sending “far hence unto the Gentiles.” (Acts 22:3-21, 26:12-8) God causes an earthquake which frees the disciples from prison, and causes the startled guard to worship God. (Acts 16:25-34) In another case an angel frees Peter from Herod's prison, (Acts 12:6-10) and an angel of God is said to have freed the apostles from a common prison. (Acts 5:19)

God reassures Paul and his storm-tossed shipmates that they will make it to land, with the familiar reason of conditional good will, extended in order to further the faith, and never the

welfare of the faithless: “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar...” (Acts 27:24) When Paul, shipwrecked on an island, was bitten by a viper, he did not succumb to any poison—presumably he was saved, yet again, for work in Rome. (Acts 28:3-6) The apostles generally were even made to speak in different tongues by God so that others could understand the twelve in their own languages. (Acts 2:4-11) But perhaps the strangest miracle of all, which really would have been something to see, pertains to Paul. God caused “special miracles by the hands of Paul,” so that he not only had the already familiar power of casting out evil spirits, but also, from his body were brought forth handkerchiefs or aprons to the sick. (Acts 19:11-2)

Unconditional Good Will?

I doubt that any acts of unconditional good will are to be found in the New Testament. However, in order to be as fair as possible, I have charitably interpreted a few passages that *might* be included here, even if, as I believe, it is not plausible to believe they are genuinely expressive of unconditional good will, given the background of the rest of the New Testament (e.g., the promises of going to heaven or hell, depending on how one acts). There are certain ethical imperatives given by Paul in his letter to the Romans, which, *if taken out of context*, can fit into this noble category, although we have seen that the Christian ethic of the Bible emphasizes the seeking of one's own selfish reward in heaven (with a paradoxical hatred of this world and its wealth, while anticipating a richly opulent heaven), and quite possibly God prizes belief in himself over good works (although the Bible is notoriously inconsistent on this point). I have endeavored to include all possible candidates for divine acts of complete good will—if the reader believes that he or she has found such an act, I would appreciate being notified, care of the publisher.

In any case, Paul enjoins:

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom 12:9-18)

However, immediately following this is the following, more suspect passage:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:19-21)

Could these verses conform to an ethic of complete good will? It should be noted, however, that abhorrence of all evil can lead to hateful violence as a result. Moreover, the injunction to love others as God does is at variance with the present prescription not to mete out evil for evil, although it is clear that God intends to do just this when he declares, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (which itself is arguably inconsistent with complete good will,

compounding evil upon evil).

Additionally, the idea of helping one's enemy so as to "heap coals of fire on his head" is altogether inconsistent with unconditional good will, let alone loving one's enemy. (Matt 5:44) However, the rest of the passage is consistent enough with perfect good will, *if taken completely out of context from the rest of the New Testament*. For instance, the passage in question is immediately followed by a chapter which urges subjection to authority, claiming that if one resists the ordinance of God, one will receive damnation, (Rom 13:2) so therefore, one should fear doing evil lest one fall to the sword of one ruler. The ruler is depicted as a minister of God here, "a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil," which is why "ye must needs be subject [to rulers], not only for [their] wrath, but also for conscience sake." (Rom 13:4-5) An ethic of unconditional good will would not urge blind subjection to rulers—it would have to be a good ruler, at the very *least*, but even this is inadequate if unquestioning service is required at all.

A second long passage regarding ethics can also be entertained as a candidate for this section:

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet ; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law. And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on an armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. (Rom 13:7-13)

It is not clear if, after listing five of the ten commandments, and then asking if there be any others (implicitly, by noting, "if there be any other commandment"), whether skepticism of the other five is being expressed. Moreover, the call to wake out of sleep may be seen as related to the injunction to love others, and since the reason one should awaken is because salvation is at hand, we can see, in all of this, the familiar face of self-interest in Biblical ethics. Indeed, that salvation is at hand is the reason (hence the "therefore") for casting off works of darkness, not just for doing good so that others may simply benefit and not be harmed for their own sakes. So it is unlikely that unconditional good will is intended in this last passage.

Another injunction from the same book (and hence with the same logic of self-promotion, in the last analysis) is also worth including here, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." (Rom 15:1) Also, we should note the general injunction to love thy neighbor as thyself, (Mark 12:31; Rom 13:9) this last precept being a carryover from the Old Testament's identical commandment. (Lev 19:18) Similarly, the commandment, which admirably makes no reference to the self, and so risks less egocentricity, is as follows: "...love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." (Rom 13:9)

If only the acts of God—throughout the Bible—lived up to so fine an ideal, despite their being embedded in so damning a context. Instead, there are no acts of God that live up to unconditional good will, although all his acts are supposed to, and in the nothingness that remains, the Bible's own credibility is annihilated.

Conclusion

Many people believe that the New Testament is much better than the Old, for a God of Love supposedly replaces a God of Wrath. However, this belief is based upon an illusion. Perhaps the mistake revolves mostly around the acts of healing, and so forth, which, when placed in their explicit context, do not, in fact, constitute acts of pure love, or unconditional good will. Those acts of unconditional good will which *might* be identified are either of questionable character, or else remind us of how far short the majority of the acts of God fall of perfect good will (which God is said or implied to have in the writings of Paul, and many others). Let us not forget the hellish torments, the punished innocents, the abused animals, the hypocrisy over material pursuits, and so many other damning aspects of the New Testament. Let us not forget, too, that the New Testament endorses the Old Testament, as I have shown, so the New Testament cannot be less harsh, but only adds to the harshness of the Old. The Bible stands discredited in itself, by itself. Its moral implications, to be examined next, further savage its credibility—if any yet remains.