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## TEN LIES ABOUT GOD

And How You May Already Be Deceived

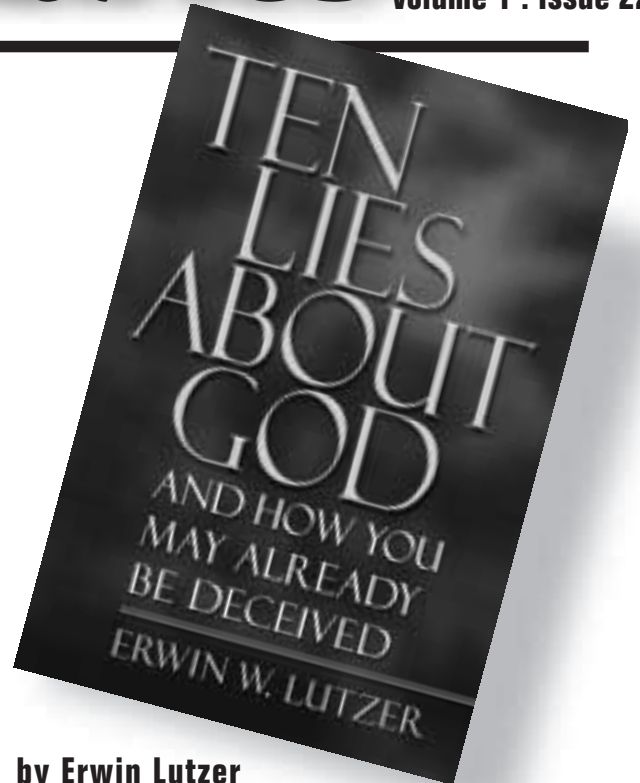
### A Quick Focus The Book's Purpose

- Dispel the misconceptions about God embraced by popular culture
- Reveal the truth of who God is
- Inspire Christians to worship the one true God
- Provide essential answers for a generation of seekers

### The Book's Message

The more our post-modern society searches for God, the more it seems to reach the wrong conclusions. Many have fallen into the trap of formulating a God for themselves, one carefully crafted to meet particular spiritual needs. Instead of embracing a truthful, biblical view of God, our culture approaches spirituality through the lens of popular culture and "felt needs."

Alarming,ly, this "made-in-our-own-image God" has crept into the hearts and minds of believers. This image must be



by Erwin Lutzer  
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shattered and replaced by the truth of who God is, the nature and significance of His relationship with mankind, and His plan for the world.



#### Ten Main Points

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LIE #1

# GOD IS WHATEVER

**We were created to** seek meaning and significance. In God's design, this spiritual hunger is ultimately a quest for God Himself. In our present pluralistic culture, however, there are many gods that claim to satisfy our spiritual hunger. Which of these should we choose to follow?

## From God to Idols

When we seek to know God, we can begin with ourselves and attempt to reason our way to God, or we can begin with God, accepting His self-revelation as true. When we adopt the former strategy, we end up constructing an idol. It is only when we take the latter approach that we can develop a true understanding of God.

Idolatry need not express itself in the construction of gold or silver statues. In fact, this activity is only the outward manifestation of the true spirit of idolatry, which is the process of creating a god in our own image, and treating our opinions about God as the truth about God. Idolatry, harboring false thoughts about God, is attractive because it allows us to remain in control, at the center of our own world, defining our own standards and expectations. Further, idolatry prevents others from judging our beliefs or behaviors. The idols that work for us may not work for others, but they are free to create their own and leave us with ours.

## Idols for Destruction

Some of our false gods may have a loose basis in Scripture, but most are based ultimately on human desires. Some of us make a god out of health and wealth, believing that God desires for His children to be financially successful and physically healthy. This god, however, is the god of western consumer capitalism,

**WE  
WANT  
HIM  
TO BE**

not the God of the Bible. For others, God is the "God of My Emotional Need." According to this false view, sin is nothing more than a lack of self-esteem. Self-knowledge and self-respect replace redemption and knowledge of God as our primary focus.

Still others construct a false god that favors their gender or sexual preference. At the root of each of these is an idol that could be called the "God of My Personal Self-Authentication." This God is the completely tolerant, non-judgmental God. This God makes no judgments, sets no standards, and is in fact exactly what we wish him/her/it to be. The study of such a God turns out to be very much a study of self.

**"...woe to those who see themselves in a mirror and proclaim that they have seen God."**

## The God Who Hides and Seeks

All of these false gods stand in sharp contrast to the God of the Bible. When we accept God's revelation of Himself, we encounter a majestic and mysterious God, one who is holy and yet merciful. This God is both transcendent and imminent—He hides, and yet He seeks us. Even while we are able, through revelation, to have true beliefs about God, these beliefs are always partial and incomplete. God is infinite and beyond complete comprehension; He remains hidden. Still, because of revelation, we can have personal knowledge of such a being; He has sought us out and revealed Himself to us. This God intrudes into our lives and judges us, revealing to us our utter sinfulness. But thankfully, this God who judges us also saves us. He offers to us grace and forgiveness.



LIE #2

# Many Paths Lead Into God's Presence

**Pluralism rejects** the idea that there is only one way to approach God. Today, God is a universal source of self-satisfaction, accessible by a plethora of pathways. The God of the Bible, however, is severe, uncompromising in His demands, and completely holy. Thankfully, though, He is also loving, gracious, and merciful.

## Approaching God

When approaching God, we must first be sure that we are approaching the one, true God, and not an idol. Further, we must be sure that we approach the one, true God in the right way. Today, even in evangelical circles, the notion that God honors sincerity is widely held, but Scriptures prove otherwise. Cain (Genesis 4:5), Nadab, and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2) discovered that good intentions were not enough when approaching God. When we ignore God's prescribed plan and procedure as we enter His presence, we do so at our own peril.

## Following Protocol

**"God has meticulously spelled out the proper way for us to come into His presence."**

Without doubt, the priests of Israel had a sense of God's awesomeness. The priest who entered the Holy of Holies would tie a rope around his ankle so that others could pull out his body if he offended the Lord God while in His presence. Further, God told Moses "No man can see Me and live." Today, however, we often seek to enter God's presence casually, without a second thought about the nature of the God to whom we come. Due to the unfathomable chasm between God and humans, we must follow God's rules when coming before Him. God is holy; man is sinful. God is majestic and great; humanity is pitiful and weak.

How then can this gap be bridged? How can we expect to come before God at all? The consistent message of Scripture is that we cannot come before God except through the mediation of Christ.

## An Acceptable Mediator and Sacrifice

No one enters into God's presence unmediated. In the Old Testament, the priests mediated between the Israelites and God, and they offered sacrifices continually to appease God's righteous judgment. Because these sacrifices only took care of past sins, however, they had to be reoffered continually. Today, Christ is our mediator and His death on the cross was a once-and-for-all sacrifice to atone for *all* sins: past, present, and future. Only Christ can be this once-and-for-all sacrifice. Only He can be our mediator because only He is able to meet God's requirements of sinless perfection.

According to the justice of God's character, sin demands payment. Since it [sin] is an offense to His holiness, a sacrifice must be offered to turn away God's wrath. God does not accept the sacrifices of sincerity, service, spiritual questing, or guilt.

**"Yes, we must bring an offering, a sacrifice to God, but it cannot be of our own making if we are to win His approval. It must be the sacrifice He Himself made for us. ...Jesus is the one qualified mediator, the only qualified sacrifice, and the only qualified Savior."**



LIE #3

# God Is More Tolerant Than He Used To Be

**In Old Testament** times, God's law was severe and without exception. In that day, many

sins that we overlook today were punished with death. Has God's law changed? Is He more tolerant than He used to be?

## God is Unchanging

When we look at what the Bible has to say in answer to this question, we discover that God has not changed. The God of the Old Testament is not different from the God of the New Testament. His nature, His truth, and His standards all remain the same for all eternity. He does not gain or lose power; He does not age. He is eternally just and compassionate. The same God who spoke to Abraham speaks to us today. He has not changed, nor will He change in the future. How then do we account for the differences between the Old and New Testament, specifically with regard to punishment for sin?

## God's Administration has Changed

While God Himself has not changed, and while the penalties for sin are as severe today as in the time of Moses, God has implemented changes in the timing and methods of punishment. This shift is evident in the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.

### Mount Sinai vs. Mount Zion

At Sinai, there was a physical distance between God and humans that symbolized the moral distance between them. The mountain was shrouded in smoke, fire, and lightning. At Sinai, God came down from heaven as a reminder that we are creatures beneath Him, and He remained inaccessible—even Moses could not see God face to face. Sinai represents God's presence without atonement or mediation, and as such, it reveals a God who is intolerant of sin, a terrifying God who is to be feared. Sinai's message is "Stand back!"

Mount Zion, however, reveals the other facets of God's unchanging character. At Zion, we are invited to

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**GOD IS MORE TOLERANT THAN HE USED TO BE**  
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come to God, already made citizens of the divine kingdom because of Christ. We are invited to praise God with the angels, rejoicing over God's conquest of sin. Unlike the inaccessible Sinai, Zion's invitation, "Come near!" is open to all who will accept Christ's sacrifice and mediation on their behalf. Zion is symbolic of grace, forgiveness, and life.

### The Old Covenant versus the New Covenant

Sinai and Zion represent the changing way in which God has chosen to deal with His people. This contrast can also be expressed in the language of covenants. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the whole nation of Israel. Religion and state were one and the same under this covenant; God's laws simply were the laws of the nation of Israel. However, under the new covenant, Christ's kingdom is not of this world. Under this covenant, God no longer deals exclusively with one nation; rather, He calls His people out of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

Today, behaviors that merited the death penalty under the old covenant are now matters for discipline within the church. With regard to the same behavior in unbelievers, though, it is not the responsibility of the church to judge or punish. Under the new covenant, the immediate physical judgment that was a part of Israel's laws has been replaced with future, eternal judgment. We should not assume that God's apparent silence in the face of sin signals His indifference toward it. God's judgment of sin is not eliminated; it is deferred. Between the sin and the punishment, grace is offered. Those who accept that grace are spared from punishment by virtue of Christ's atoning sacrifice on their behalf. For those who refuse that grace, punishment is severe and without exception.

**"In the end, all penalties will be exacted; retribution will be demanded; nothing will be overlooked."**



LIE #4

## God Has Never Personally Suffered

**In the face of the evil** that we face each day on this planet, many turn to belief in finite or deistic gods that seem to be compatible with human suffering; the omnipotent Christian God seems incompatible with our experience of evil. It would seem that an all-powerful God would have intervened to prevent evil. The fact that this apparently has not occurred suggests to some that the Christian God is indifferent to our sufferings~such a God is certainly not worthy of worship.

Such skepticism with regard to the Christian God comes hand in hand with the belief that God Himself has never suffered. The assumption is that if God has not suffered, He has no reason to be concerned with the sufferings of His creatures.

At the cross, however, we see definitive proof that God *has* in fact suffered, and that His suffering was brought about by His concern for us in our suffering. There is a clear connection between God and His creation. He is not indifferent or detached. God suffers with us.

**"At the cross, cynicism ends."**

### The Self-Substitution and Submission of God

Throughout the Bible, the concept of substitution is present. Animals were substituted for Adam and Eve to cover their sin and nakedness. A ram was substituted for Isaac on Abraham's altar. The blood of lambs was substituted for the Israelites to cover their guilt before God. The only permanent substitute for us before God, however, is Christ Himself. He submitted Himself to the punishment demanded by our sin in order to secure our redemption.

**"God became both our judge and our substitute. He both sentenced us to eternal condemnation and paid that price on our behalf."**

### The Suffering of God

No one can cause God to suffer against His will; yet God chose to suffer~in fact, it *pleased* Him to do so (Isaiah. 53:10). He chose to uphold His standards of holiness while bearing the punishment for sin Himself. Out of love, God willingly suffered. The love and justice of God meet in the cross; but God's suffering did not end there. God continues to be grieved by our sin and fallenness. He bears with us in our sufferings, understanding and caring for us. God has personally experienced the suffering of His creation, and consequently, He can comfort us in the midst of our sorrows.



LIE #5

# God Is Obligated to Save Followers of Other Religions

**If God indeed cares** for us and suffers with us, then how is it that He can send a good person to an eternal hell just because she happened to belong to a non-Christian religion? If God really loves the whole world, would He really limit salvation only to those privileged few who, through accident of birth, were born in countries where the gospel was readily accessible? For many in today's pluralistic culture, such concepts are too difficult to accept.

## Is Salvation Through Christ Alone?

In John 14:6, Jesus clearly states, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the only acceptable mediator and sacrifice. The question then becomes this: could God save followers of other religions *because of Christ*?

Some theologians say "yes." Some of these thinkers (e.g., Clark Pinnock and John Sanders) would argue that while Christ is indeed the only way to God, it is not necessary to place direct faith in Him in order to benefit from His sacrificial mediation. Others argue that through His foreknowledge, God saves people who do not directly place faith in Christ. He knows that

if they had been born into different circumstances, they *would have* believed and He redeems them on that basis. Lastly, some theologians teach that God accepts Christ's sacrifice on behalf of those who sincerely seek God through the structures of other religions.

Each of these responses has problems, not the least of which is the lack of Scriptural support. Each position requires creative interpretation of certain verses and conjectures about the purposes of God well beyond that which is explicitly stated in the pages of the Bible. Ultimately, each of these arguments rests on the assumption that our concept of fairness applies to God and should control God's decisions about salvation. It is dangerous, though, to apply our limited understanding of fairness to God. Anyone could make a case that God's denial of eternal life to anyone is somehow "unfair." In the final analysis, however, we cannot base our judgments on our concept of fairness. We must rely only on that which is explicitly stated in God's Word.

**"We cannot go beyond what God has revealed. If He has a plan to save those of other religions, He has not seen fit to reveal it to us."**

## How Will Those Who Have Not Heard of Christ Be Judged?

For those who have never heard the gospel, God will judge them according to the revelation that they have received. That is, they will be judged on the basis of *general revelation*. It would be unjust of God to ask those who never heard of Christ why they did not believe in Him! According to the first two chapters of Romans, God reveals himself through nature

and through each person's inner consciousness of God. Every person has an innate sense of God's standards of righteousness. These two sources of revelation will be the basis for the judgment of those who do not hear the gospel.

Paul tells us, however, that even these people will stand without excuse before God on the Day of Judgment. God's judgment will reveal that no one lives according to the revelation of God that they have been given, whether general or specific. We regularly "suppress" the truth in our unrighteousness, deceiving ourselves about the truth of who God is. Only Christ's mediation can change God's judgment of us. In the end, we must recognize that the final word belongs to God alone, and His judgments are always just.



LIE #6

# God Takes No Responsibility for Natural Disasters

## Is God in Control of Natural Disasters?

The parade of natural disasters that fill newspaper headlines almost daily are clear evidence of the fact that nature suffers under the curse of sin. Does this mean that God is uninvolved in natural disasters? Is God simply allowing a sin-cursed world to spiral downward in decay, undirected by His providence?

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**GOD TAKES NO RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR NATURAL DISASTERS** continued from page 5

In response to these questions, we should note that the immediate cause of natural disasters could be explained in terms of purely physical conditions—like weather patterns and shifting layers of the earth's crust. The ultimate cause of all things, however, must be seen as God, the creator and *sustainer* of the universe. All things are under His providential control, as clearly demonstrated in Scripture.

God judged the world with a flood and sent plagues upon Egypt. In the book of Job, God granted Satan permission to use the forces of nature to test Job. In the book of Jonah, it was undeniably God who sent the storm that led to Jonah's brush with death.

And in the New Testament, the disciples marveled that "even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:41).

Similarly, the Bible tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God, and natural disasters serve to present a balanced view of God as revealed through nature—revealing His judgment along with His mercy. God cannot be separated from even the destructive forces of nature; they are subject to His meticulous control.

### Dare We Charge God With Evil?

How can a good God bring about or permit instances of destruction? In response to this, we must first realize that the rules are different for God than they are for us. Certain of

our moral obligations (including some of the Ten Commandments) do not apply to God. Thus, it may be that God is still good, even while ordaining death and destruction.

Furthermore, God does not delight in His creatures' sufferings. He delights in pursuing His plans and defending His glory, and sometimes natural disasters are necessary means to these ends; but the suffering of humanity is never an end in itself for God.

Finally, we must recognize that it is not our place to judge God's actions or intentions. We will never comprehend the full extent of God's eternal purposes, nor is it necessary for us to do so before we can humbly bow in submission before Him.



LIE #7

# God Does Not Know Our Decisions Before We Make Them

**Today, evangelical** scholars are debating the question of whether or not God knows everything, including the future. In this debate, some (e.g., Clark Pinnock and Greg Boyd) insist that God cannot know in advance what a free creature will choose to do. Thus, they claim, the only things that God can know about the future are possibilities, not actualities. According to this view (called the "open view of God"), God will definitely "win" in the end because His absolute power is sufficient to meet any challenge. This belief, that God is finite in knowledge, may not seem like a significant deviation from traditional Christian theology, but in the end, it has the capacity to destroy our faith in God.

## The Origin of the Idea of a Finite God

Some have claimed that God's omniscience requires only that He know that which is knowable. This

argument claims that since the future does not yet exist, it is not knowable, even by God. This is not seen as a limit on God's omniscience, since God still knows all that can possibly be known. Those who espouse this position desire to preserve human freedom. If God knows my choice before I make it, then it would seem that my choice is not a free choice. Also, this view seems to shield God from the charge of being the direct cause of evil. If God does not know His creatures' choices before they make them, then He cannot be held responsible for their choices if they are evil.

## Some Difficulties Believing in a Finite God

According to the open view of God, He can never be sure of what will happen, so His planning always involves risk. If this is the case, how can God issue prophecies or predict the future with any certainty? He

cannot know the future infallibly! Infallible knowledge of the future, however, is given in Scripture as one of the characteristics of God that sets Him apart from the idols (Isaiah. 41:21-23). How could Jesus know that Peter would deny Him (Luke 22:34) or that Judas would betray Him? The Bible states that Christ's betrayal and crucifixion were decreed by God (Acts 2:23, 4:27-28); this would require infallible knowledge of the future.

Further, there is a link between God's omniscience and His omnipotence. God knows the future because He ordains it. According to the open view, God is not in active control of history, but is working out His plan as a reaction to His creatures' choices; this position is at odds with a biblical view of God as sovereign over creation.

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**GOD DOES NOT KNOW OUR DECISIONS BEFORE WE MAKE THEM** continued from page 6

Additionally, the open view of God makes it difficult to trust in God. If God does not know the future, then He cannot protect us or preserve us for the work He has for us to do.

Finally, the Bible indicates that God knows us entirely, not just in the present, but even in the future. Psalm 139:16 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." In order for this to be so, God must have infallible knowledge of the future.



LIE #8

## The Fall Ruined God's Plan

Many people look at Christ's atoning sacrifice at Calvary as God's "Plan B." They believe that the fall ruined God's original plan for creation, forcing Him to go with a backup plan; this is an incorrect reading of the Bible. Viewed from an eternal perspective, God's plan of creation, fall, and redemption has always been God's "Plan A."

### God's Eternal Purposes, Eternal Redemption, and Final Consummation

God does everything for His own glory. He must honor and pursue that which is of highest value, and only God himself is of highest value. Thus, all that God does is directed at honoring Himself. Creation is the first link in a chain that culminates in the glory of God.

Each of God's attributes would indicate that His creation of this world must be Plan A. God is omnipotent, and thus had the power to create a world without sin; yet He chose not to. He is also omniscient, so nothing (not even sin) can catch Him by surprise. Thus, He would know that sin would be a part of this world, and yet He chose to create it anyway. Thirdly, God is omnipresent, so there is nothing that could happen in this universe that is outside of His presence. Would a God with these characteristics create a universe in which something could go contrary to His will? It seems not.

### Questions About God's Great Plan

This account of God's purposes raises several significant questions. First and foremost is the question of free will. Are we just puppets, acting out a pre-ordained script orchestrated by God? While this question cannot be resolved completely, this much can be said: God has ordained things in such a way that our desires are in harmony with His purposes. Thus, we are responsible, since we act on our desires; and yet God is in control.

**"...any view of free will that denies that God rules among the inhabitants of earth is unscriptural; any view of predestination that makes us into puppets is equally unscriptural."**

A second question raised by the above account is this: how can an evil world be Plan A? To answer this question, we can distinguish God's revealed will from His hidden will. His revealed will is the source of His standards for right and wrong behavior; but His hidden will is His

overarching plan, according to which all things are working toward a good end. Sometimes instances of evil are necessary as a means toward this end. Ultimately, no matter what instances of evil occur on this planet, they always advance the eternal plan of God.

The third question that surfaces here is: should we passively accept evil, since it is a part of God's eternal plan? The answer is *no*. God's revealed will is that we should fight against evil. Furthermore, God's eternal plan includes the eventual triumph of good over evil. Thus, as tools in the hands of God to accomplish His purposes, we should fight against that which is contrary to God's revealed will.

Finally, this description of God causes many to ask, "Can God be trusted?" In fact, the view outlined here gives us greater reason to trust in God than does any alternative. If God is firmly in control of all things, including evil, then we have reason to hope that evil will eventually be overcome, that wrongs will be set right, and that love and justice will prevail in the end. If God is *not* in control, then we have no guarantee that any of this will happen. Only in God's sovereign hands can evil be seen as having a purpose. Apart from God, evil is brutal and senseless.



LIE #9

## We Must Choose Between God's Pleasures and Our Own

We tend to set God's desires for us over against our own desires and assume that submission to God's desires means that we cannot seek our own pleasure any longer. The choice is seen as one between a free sense of personal happiness on the one hand, and a somber, dutiful

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obedience on the other. Thankfully, nothing could be further from the truth! The Bible teaches that our desire for pleasure is God-given and is to be satisfied. Further, it teaches that it is only by putting God first that we truly satisfy our deepest desires for pleasure.

## Five Links in the Chain of Joy

### 1. God Himself Has Many Pleasures

God delights in His Son, and has done so for all eternity. God also delights in His creation, calling it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Finally, God delights in His people. Because we glorify Him, He rejoices in us. Even though God reveals that He is sometimes grieved or displeased by aspects of His creation, He does all that He does and ordains all that happens according to His pleasure.

### 2. God Created Us to Seek Pleasure

God has given us our desires and has ordained the proper way to fulfill them. Our problems arise not because of the desires we have, but because we seek to fulfill those desires in the wrong ways.

### 3. Our Temptation Is to Seek Lesser Pleasures

When we deviate from God-ordained ways of fulfilling our desires, we are actually seeking pleasures less fulfilling than those that are found in Him. We are substituting the creature for the Creator, worshipping the temporal rather than the eternal; in other words, we become idolaters. The delights of the world, however, fail to deliver the enjoyment that they promise; they promise freedom and pleasure, but they produce slavery and regret.

### 4. Spiritual Maturity Is Substituting the Greater Pleasures for the Lesser

God alone can truly satisfy us more than any lesser pleasure can. The enjoyment of God brings both a present fulfillment and a future benefit. Here and now, we can rejoice in God without guilt or regrets, in true freedom. In the future, we will enjoy eternal existence with God in the heavenly kingdom.

## 5. God's Pleasures and Our Pleasures Are in Harmony

Ultimately, what is best for God is best for us, and the pleasures of God will be the most rewarding for us. God does not promise that there will be no difficulties in the life of one who rejoices in Him. He does promise that intimacy with Him will bring delights, even in the midst of hardship.

LIE #10

# God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

Based on our belief in the value of work, we often think that God helps only those who help themselves; but this presupposes that there is actually something we can do to help ourselves, and with regard to salvation, this is not the case. The consistent message of Scripture is that God helps those who cannot help themselves. If He did not do this, we would all perish! Salvation requires the recognition that there is nothing we can do to redeem ourselves.

Apart from God, we are dead in our sins, deaf to the truth, and blind to our need. In the midst of our tremendous need, God intervenes and resurrects us. He does this in order to display His grace in us and to manifest His love and mercy toward us.

We often find it difficult to accept this free gift of grace that God offers to us through Christ. We either think of ourselves as too sinful to be accepted by God, or as too good to be in need of grace. However, it is only when we realize our need for redemption and our utter inability to provide it for ourselves that God initiates a saving relationship with us.



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