

Lesson 1

SALVATION - THE FIRST STEP

What it means for You

Welcome to the family of God. Now that you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, the Bible tells us that you are a new person in Christ:

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17)

This means that you are no longer the same person *inside* that you used to be before becoming a Christian. Jesus said that to enter into a relationship with God we must be ‘born again’ by the Spirit of God:

“Jesus ... said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3. See also 1 Pet 1:23)

This ‘born again’ experience is spiritual, and comes as a direct result of confessing Jesus as Lord, and believing in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead:

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom 10:9)

‘Born again’ and ‘saved’ mean much the same thing. Salvation can come by no other means. No matter what else you may hear, or what people may think, Jesus is the only way by which men can be saved:

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’” (John 14:6)

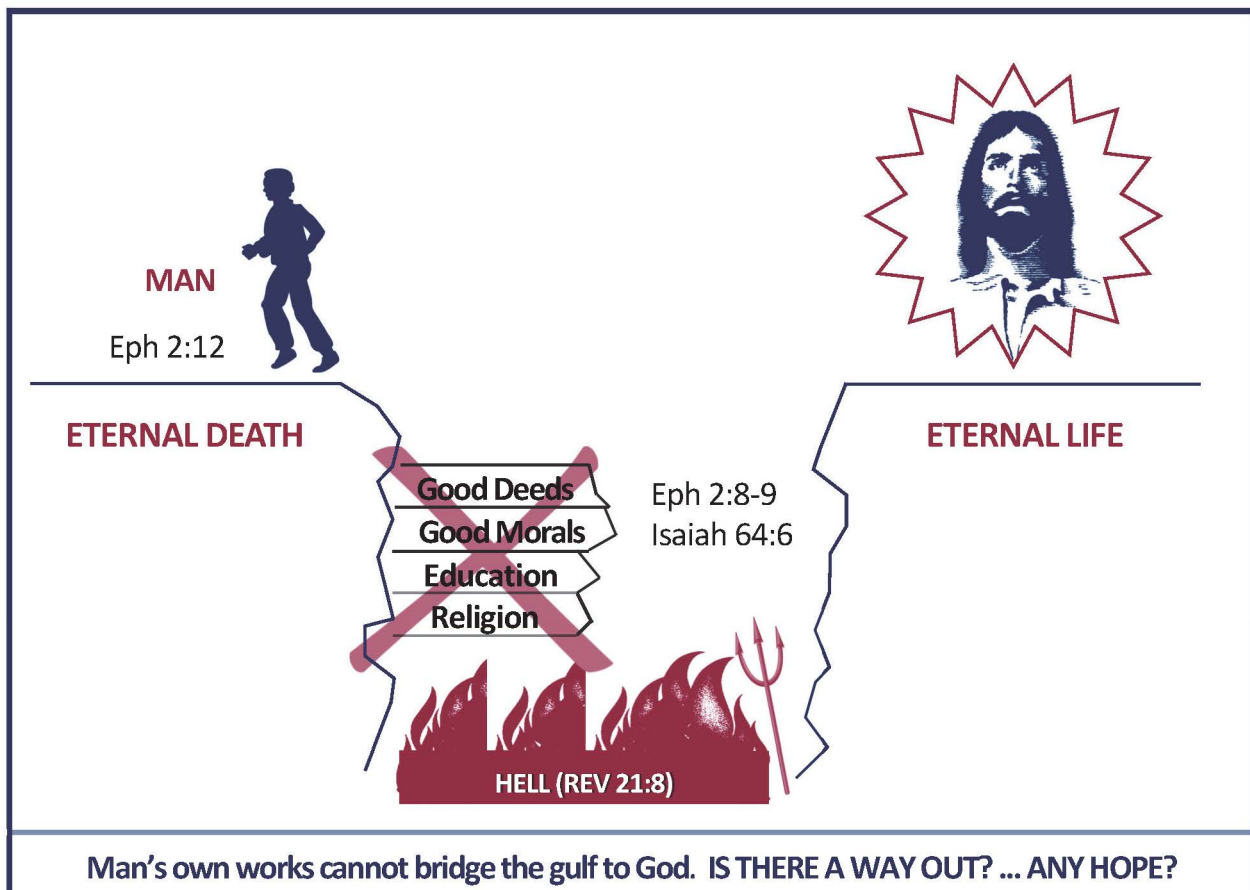
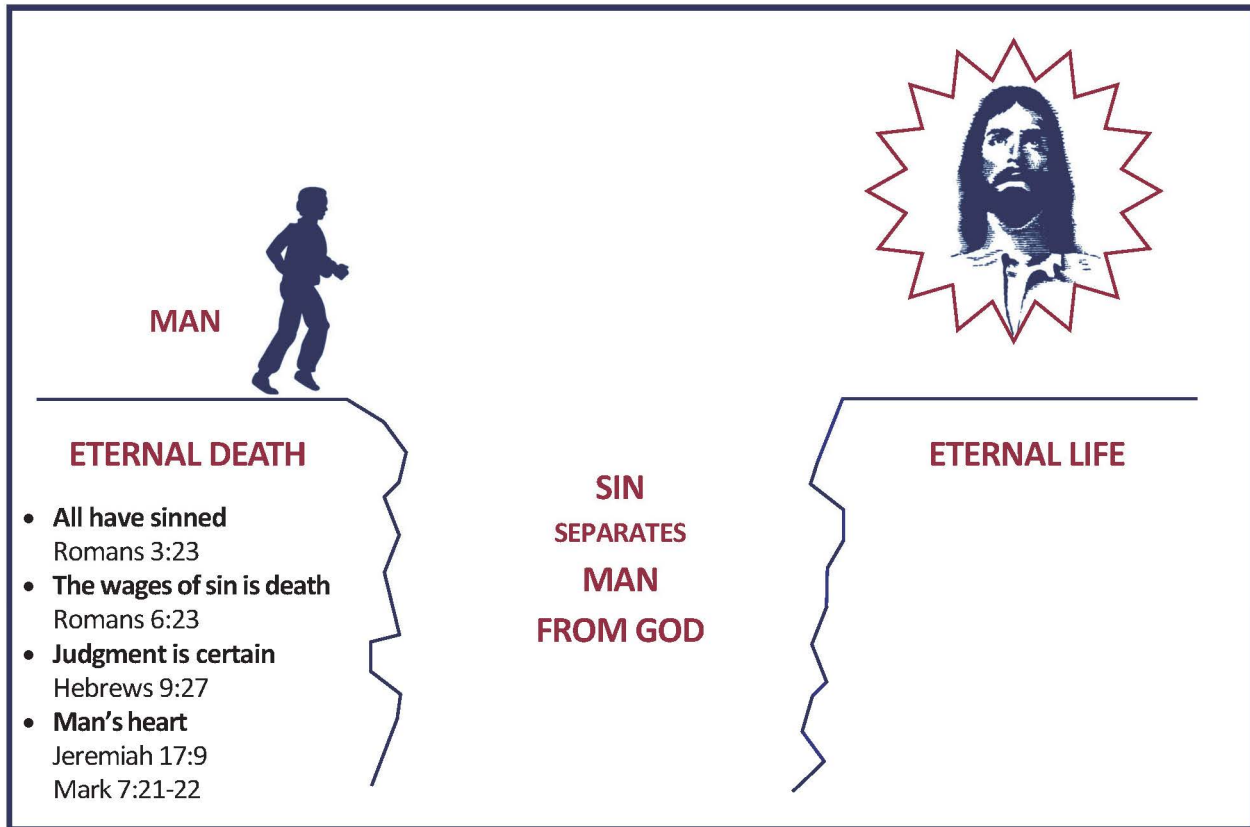
Jesus is God’s Son and is Himself God (John 1:1-5,14). He never changes.

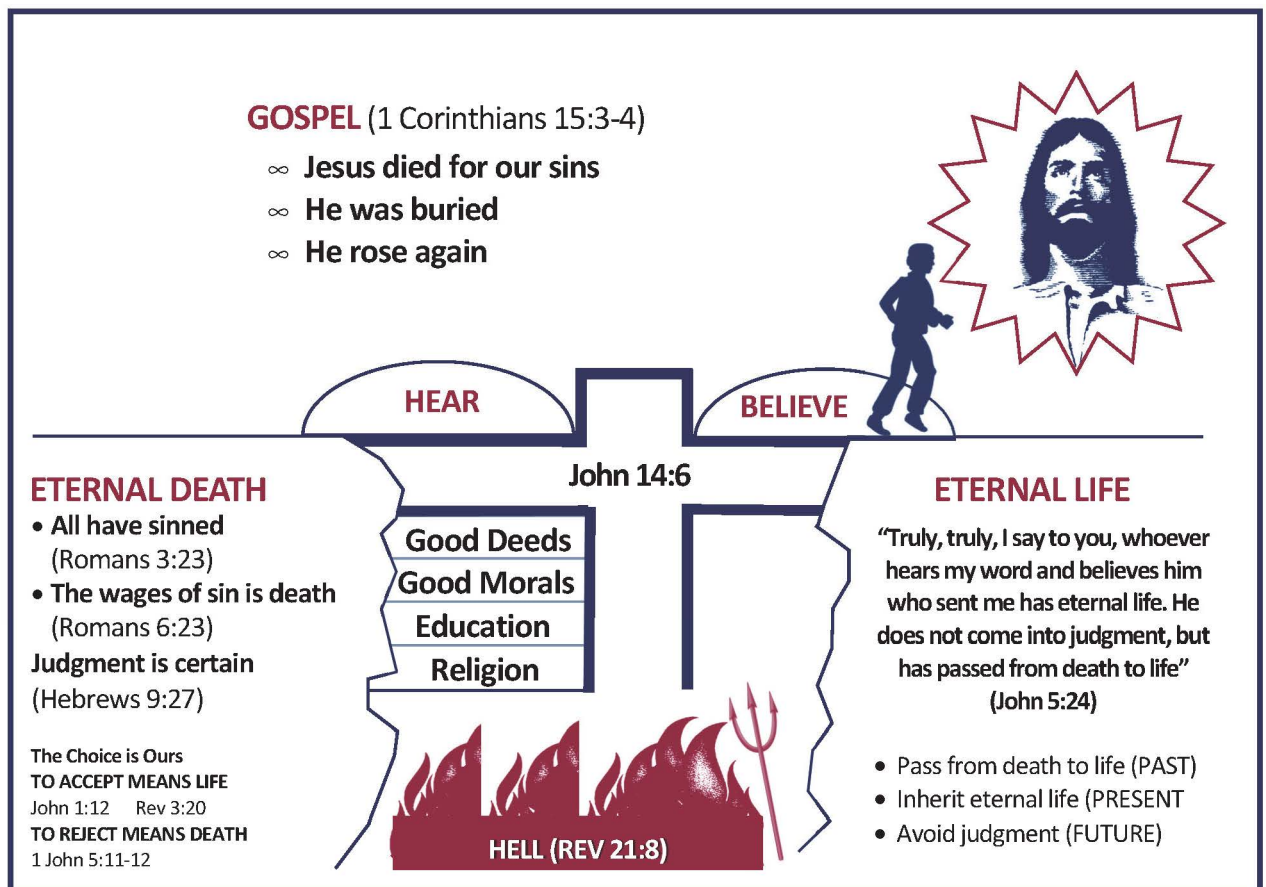
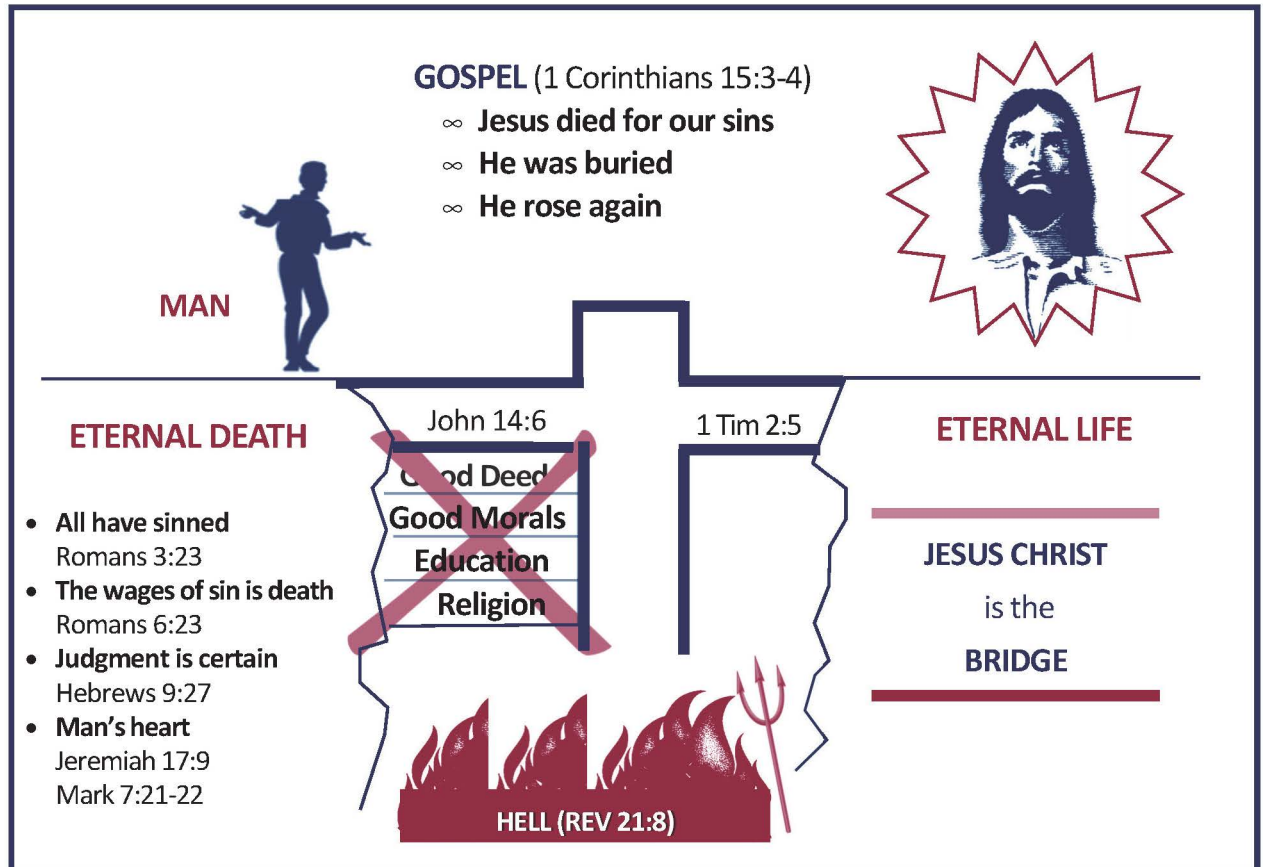
“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (Heb 13:8)

Simply ‘believing’ in God won’t get you to heaven, or even help you much in this life. Almost everyone believes in God - it’s foolish not to. Psalm 14:1 declares, *“A fool says in his heart there is no God”*. Even demons ‘believe’, and tremble (James 2:19). Their ‘belief’, however, doesn’t do them any good! True faith in God means commitment. Commitment to follow Him and to be obedient to His Word (the Bible). True faith also leads to a desire to fellowship with other Christians in a good church.

As a new ‘born again’ believer, your life will never be the same again. You are now a *‘new creature in Christ’* (2 Cor 5:17). The Bible even calls you a *‘babe in Christ’* (1 Peter 2:1-5). As a spiritual babe you will need food, shelter and protection (security) until such time as you are able to provide these spiritual necessities for yourself. In the meantime you must rely on older and wiser Christians to guide and instruct you (Rom 15:14). In order to learn and grow correctly in the glorious and exciting new life you have received it is important to be in relationship with other Christians, learning and growing in your faith daily.

A New Beginning





We are all part of the 'Body of Christ' (1 Cor 12:12-31), His Church, and we need each other if we find our place and purpose as believers in Christ, especially as we grow to maturity in the things of the Spirit.

There is much to learn and quite a journey ahead for any new believer. The Bible talks about maintaining a humble and teachable heart:

"You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet 5:5-6)

An Interesting Statistic

In the Western countries such as Australia around 93% of people who make a decision for Christ never follow it through with any real commitment, and only around 30% of those who do actually persist in that commitment. These are troubling statistics. In the Third World, places like China, South America, Africa and Asia have a much higher retention rate and a much deeper commitment rate than Western churches in general. In the West we seem to be able to get people to make a form of commitment, but are not as successful when it comes to helping people stay the course.

The Family of God

You are now a part of the great family of God, with many brothers and sisters to get to know and fellowship with (Eph 3:14-19). You will make many new friends and find your lifestyle gradually altering to reflect your new-found status as a 'child of the living God'. Becoming an active part of a good 'Church Family' by becoming involved in a good local church is essential so that God can begin to show you some of the great things He has in store for you personally. He will teach you about life, as He wants you to live it, and about being a successful Christian in today's challenging world.

An Ongoing Experience

Being a 'born again' believer is both exciting and challenging - full of adventure and new experiences. As our relationship with Jesus develops, we discover that there is no real alternative to walking with the Lord (Gal 5:16-18). Once we taste of the goodness of God for ourselves, with hearts that genuinely search for truth, we find that we gradually lose the taste for things we have been involved with, but which are not edifying or helpful to us as Christians (Eph 4:17-25).

With the Holy Spirit resident within our heart, speaking daily to our conscience, we quickly learn the difference between right and wrong in God's Kingdom (1 Peter 3:15-17). As we study His Word, we also begin to understand that God wants only the best for us. He designed us to operate in peace and security by doing things His way. As we learn to trust the truth of His Word for our lives, we will see that being obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit is the only wise choice.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Some Helpful Tips

Here are some helpful tips for the early stages of your new Christian walk, or as a reminder if you've been on the road a while. As you grow you'll learn how to pray, read and study your Bible, share your faith with others, and which church fellowship to become an active part of. Meanwhile, here are some things which you should begin to incorporate into your daily living, and practise regularly, in order to maintain a quality relationship with the Lord:

1. Talk to the Lord every day, and not just at a specific time, but whenever opportunity allows for it. Put aside some time just for prayer each morning or evening, remembering you have entered into a relationship with Jesus and you need to get to know Him better. Allow Him to speak to you also. This means fellowship with God through prayer, and sharing your heart with Him often.
2. Put aside time each day to read your Bible. Get a translation you find easy to read (Good News Bible, New Living Translation, New American Standard or English Standard Version are all excellent, as are the many study Bibles and available today for all ages). Studying God's Word is like having a spiritual meal. It provides food and nourishment for your spirit. You will grow as a Christian as your knowledge of His Word expands. To begin with, read the Gospel of John, and the Book of Acts. By the time you have finished these you will be able to ask someone what is best to read next, or you will have found out for yourself.
3. Don't be afraid to share your new-found faith with others. It is vitally important, and you will find out which of your friends are supportive and responsive to God and which are not. We are not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). He died so that we might live. In sharing what we have received with others we might see them inherit eternal life also.
4. Find a church which is growing and has good teaching you can relate to and understand, a friendly place you are comfortable inviting your friends to. Contemporary worship music is also helpful. Become part of the activities there and get involved. God wants you to find a spiritual home, so when you find a good one, stick to it. God will continue to lead and guide you as you grow strong in Him.

This is the most exciting journey of your life. As you obey the Lord, He will bless and prosper you in all your ways (Joshua 1:6-9). There is no life more fulfilling than one which has been dedicated to learning and following after the things of God. You will soon find, as you do this series of studies, that it is an exciting and challenging journey of discovery which will take you as far as you choose to go in learning and knowing about God, His Word, His Church, and where you fit in the grand design of things - the design that God intended you to be an active, constructive and integral part of.

Now turn to the interesting special article over the page entitled:

"Once Saved ... Always Saved?"

Special Article Of Interest

ONCE SAVED ... ALWAYS SAVED ?

The word '*salvation*' comes from the Greek word '*sozo*' ('*save*') or '*soteria*', which means deliverance, preservation, salvation, or to be made whole. It refers specifically to our being set free from the power of sin in our lives, along with sin's ultimate penalty, and results in what John 3 describes as the 'born again' experience.

We often hear words mentioned which we give little thought to, but which have profound meaning in the New Testament. Words such as:

- '**CONSECRATION**' meaning to perfect, or to dedicate to perfection
- '**SANCTIFICATION**' meaning separated to God, or for God's purposes

Salvation is not a once off, never to be repeated, total and complete experience that enables the fortunate recipient to have all the answers in one go, requiring no further work, personal commitment or development on the part of the individual. This is a lie propagated by Satan, and sometimes our own wishful thinking. It causes many unsuspecting and naive Christians to encounter tremendous difficulties in their walk with the Lord.

By its very nature salvation is not a passive experience. It is active, progressive, alive and vibrant. It is the essence of life itself and must not be abused or rendered useless by a cynical disregard for its importance and purpose in a person's life.

Let's look through some Scriptures and address the question:

"ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED - TRUE OR FALSE?"

The reason we cover this topic here is that some churches teach this doctrine, and it is therefore worthwhile spending some time on it to see what the Bible has to say. As you study this topic further, you will gain a much clearer understanding of what the Word of God has to say, and be able to form your own conclusions.

Accountability

In today's society, great emphasis is placed on circumstances, upbringing and background (environment or culture) when assessing a person's character development. This results in people being held less responsible for their actions than they otherwise should be, with a tendency to blame society and repressive religion (often the moral standards encouraged by Christianity) as the source of all their problems. The next logical (or illogical?) step is for people to attempt to eliminate God from the picture completely! The Bible deals much with the issue of accountability, and it is from this source we tackle this subject.

Ezek 18:23-31 God was very hard on the righteous man who turned his back on what he knew to be the truth, then wantonly and wilfully committed sin.

Luke 12:47,48 Jesus highlights this same principle - of those to whom much is given, much will be required.

Consequences of continual disobedience

- John 9:39-41** Jesus said those who claim to see and know the truth are held accountable for that which is revealed to them.
- James 4:17** When a person knows the difference between right and wrong, yet chooses the latter, they have sinned, and will be held accountable for it.
- Matt 12:31-37** We are accountable - by our words we will be justified, and by our words we will be condemned.
- 1 John 5:16,17** There is sin which is 'mortal', and we are not to pray for that. An interesting comment from the Apostle John.

The Bible has a lot to say about accountability, and the consequences of our continual refusal to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of our consciences.

- Eph 2:8** Always remember that it is the grace (undeserved favour) of God, and not anything we have done or could do, that has earned us this great salvation.
- 1 Cor 6:19,20** We are not our own, we were bought with a price.
- Heb 2:3** How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?
- Num 15:27-31** He who sins with a 'high hand' shall be 'utterly cut off'.
- 2 Tim 2:3-7** An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.
- 2 Peter 2:20-22** It is better not to be saved than to backslide!
- Heb 10:26-31** If we sin deliberately after receiving a knowledge of the truth, the consequences are severe.
- Heb 4:6,11-13** There are those who will receive the 'Good News' but fail to enter into God's rest because of disobedience.
- Heb 5:7-14** Even Jesus, as a man, had to undergo times of testing and trial, learning obedience through what he suffered.
- Heb 6:4-8** It is impossible to restore again to repentance ...

One of the great blessings we receive as Christians is the ability, through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, to come into the presence of God and communicate with Him intimately as our Heavenly Father (1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9). Our conscience does not (and should not) condemn us as we fellowship with Him:

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"
(Heb 9:14. See also Heb 10:22)

This doesn't mean that God wants to 'expel us from heaven' for being naughty children. Rather, it is His will that all people should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It's just that God hates sin, and must protect the rest of the sheep in his fold from those who **persist** in delusion, and the deception that they can do what they want and get away with it, because God will always find a way to forgive them!

This concept is simply not supported by Scripture!

If, as Christians, we persistently disobey God, and thereby grieve the Holy Spirit, we back God into a corner. We need to come into His presence pure and undefiled. Fortunately, the arm of God is not short - He is gentle and patient. But why press Him when we have a choice?

God's love and mercy will always reign supreme throughout, but there are times when God's patience is tested to the limit, and there is no longer any place for mercy, only judgment. In Revelation 3 Jesus said to the church at Laodicea that, because they were neither hot nor cold, he would *"spew them out of his mouth"*. Hardly the Words of a God who would allow sin to pile upon more sin; or would still continue to forgive anyone who persistently refused to change their ways!

In Matthew we find the following sobering passage from Jesus Himself:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matt 7:21-23)

Clearly He is speaking about people who believe, and who go so far as to be involved with other believers to the extent that they are able to prophesy, which is essentially a public proclamation (not something usually done in private), cast out demons and perform miracles. Yet they don't make it in the final judgement! Why is this? Because they were lawless, unaccountable, a law unto themselves, not submitted to legitimate spiritual authority - ***'mini-gods in the house of rebellion'!***

They were probably nice people, believed themselves to be right (and probably everyone who disagreed with them to be wrong), and practiced their own form of religious zeal. But they were deluded and deceived, and ultimately made a fatal error when it came to what God thought about what they were doing. What a tragedy to go through life and find out we were on the wrong path all along!

We need to prayerfully consider these Bible passages. Not to use as excuses for giving up, nor as ammunition against those considered close to the brink, for the Bible says to gently lead our brothers back to the path of righteousness, taking care not to fall prey to sin ourselves in the process. Rather we are to take the content of these Scriptures as sober warnings.

We are no longer our own, but have been bought with a price. Salvation has nothing to do with our being worthy of it, but rather it is a free gift from God, lest any man should boast. It is precious, and cost God the best that he had - His only Son, Jesus.

Take strength from Hebrews 10:32-36. We have need of endurance in order to receive what God has promised.