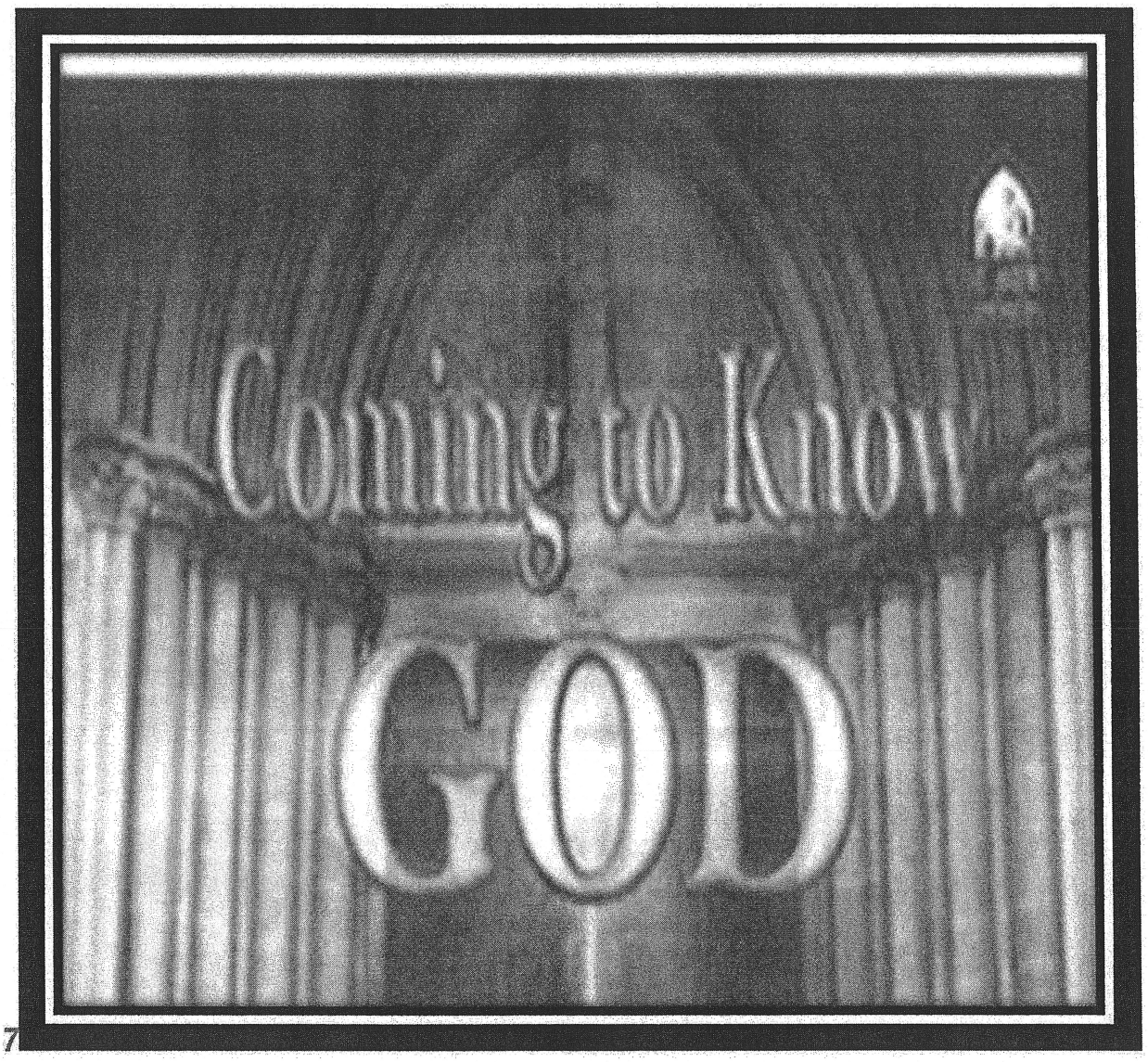


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(AN INDEPTH DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION!)

BY

RON CHRISTIAN

TO

VENITA ANN CHRISTIAN

Loving Wife

and

Faithful Co-Laborer

who has always encouraged me
to preach and to teach evangelistically

INTRODUCTION

One of the most, if not the most important, day of my life was on March 12, 1956, when I was a mere eleven year old child. On that cold winter Monday morning, as I lay in my bed, heavy of heart because of a definite conviction of sin, I looked up toward heaven and prayed a simple but earnest prayer of repentance: "O God, save my soul!". I repeated that prayer four or five times. The tears began to trickle down my cheeks, and I quickly arose from my bed and went to the kitchen of my home where I announced to my godly mother that I believed that I had just been 'saved'! My mother said something like this in reply to me, "That's wonderful, Ronny, I am glad to hear that!". She then, as I recall, continued to turn the pancakes which were frying on the grill. It was the next Saturday--six days later--that I found myself alone with my mother. It was then that I told her in more detail about my personal conversion. Assurance of sins forgiven had flooded my soul, and I was rejoicing that I was now a 'Born Again' believer. As a child, up until this time, I had been raised in the little white-framed Free Methodist Church where several of my ancestors had worshipped for many decades. My great, great grandfather was a charter member of that church, back in 1881! I had regularly attended Sunday School, had memorized Scripture, had learned many Bible stories from my mother, had regularly 'said' my bedtime prayers, and had generally lived a rather decent and moral life. But, as I prayed on that March 12th morning several years ago, I recognized that I had never personally been converted. Religious education had taken the place of spiritual conversion.

My childhood conversion was real and lasting, although I must say that there have been many subsequent commitments made to God, based on a deeper and more mature understanding of the Christian faith. Christianity involves cultivating a daily relationship of love with the Saviour.

The truths discussed in this book are the most basic, yet the most important, truths of Holy Scripture. This book is an indepth devotional study of God's Plan of Salvation--a plan that is simple enough for an eleven year old child to understand, and yet profound enough that the greatest theologians spend an entire lifetime studying the concepts contained in that Plan!

As a pastor in the Free Methodist denomination for nearly two decades, I have had the privilege of sharing God's Plan of Salvation (including many of the concepts discussed in this devotional book) with literally hundreds of people, both from the pulpit and in the classroom and around the dining room table in the homes of scores of families. I have seen hundreds of people--sometimes entire families at one time--pray the 'sinner's prayer' and wonderfully become 'new creatures in Christ Jesus' (II Corinthians 5:17)! There is no thrill like the thrill of people gaining an intellectual understanding of the basic truths of God's Word which leads to a personal faith commitment to Christ as Saviour and Lord!

The Plan of Salvation can be reduced to a presentation so simple as the following: (1) The Fact of Sin (Romans 3:23); (2) The Penalty for Sin (Romans 6:23); (3) The Insufficiency of Good Works (Ephesians 2:9, Isaiah 64:6); (4) Christ Alone is the Answer (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). In fact, this is the simple plan that many people have used and have accepted with greatest success--both in presenting the Gospel and in finding Christ in the Gospel. Whether one is on the presenting end or on the receiving end, this is an adequate and accurate profile of the simple truths of God's Plan

of Salvation. Of course, after presenting these simple facts, a human response to the divine offer of grace and forgiveness must be called for. That challenge to appropriate divinely-provided resources can be given in simple 'A, B, C' steps. What conditions must man the sinner meet in order to receive Christ the Saviour? Starting with the 'C' step: (1) 'Confess' --"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9); (2) 'Believe'-- "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31); (3) 'Accept'--"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

There is no message more important than the message of salvation that the Church must emphasize in its preaching and teaching. And yet, unfortunately, there are thousands of members in our local churches today who have never personally experienced the 'New Birth'. I have personally dealt with many who have told me, after they prayed the 'sinner's prayer', that they do not remember ever having heard a basic Bible message on 'How to Become A Christian', even though they had attended many church services. This is a tragedy, particularly when God makes it so clear in His Word (the Bible) that "unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Part One of this two-part book provides a general survey of Salvation, while Part Two deals in considerable depth with God's Plan of Salvation, as taught in the first six chapters of the great Book of Romans. Thus, Part One is a topical approach, while Part Two is an expository approach to Scripture.

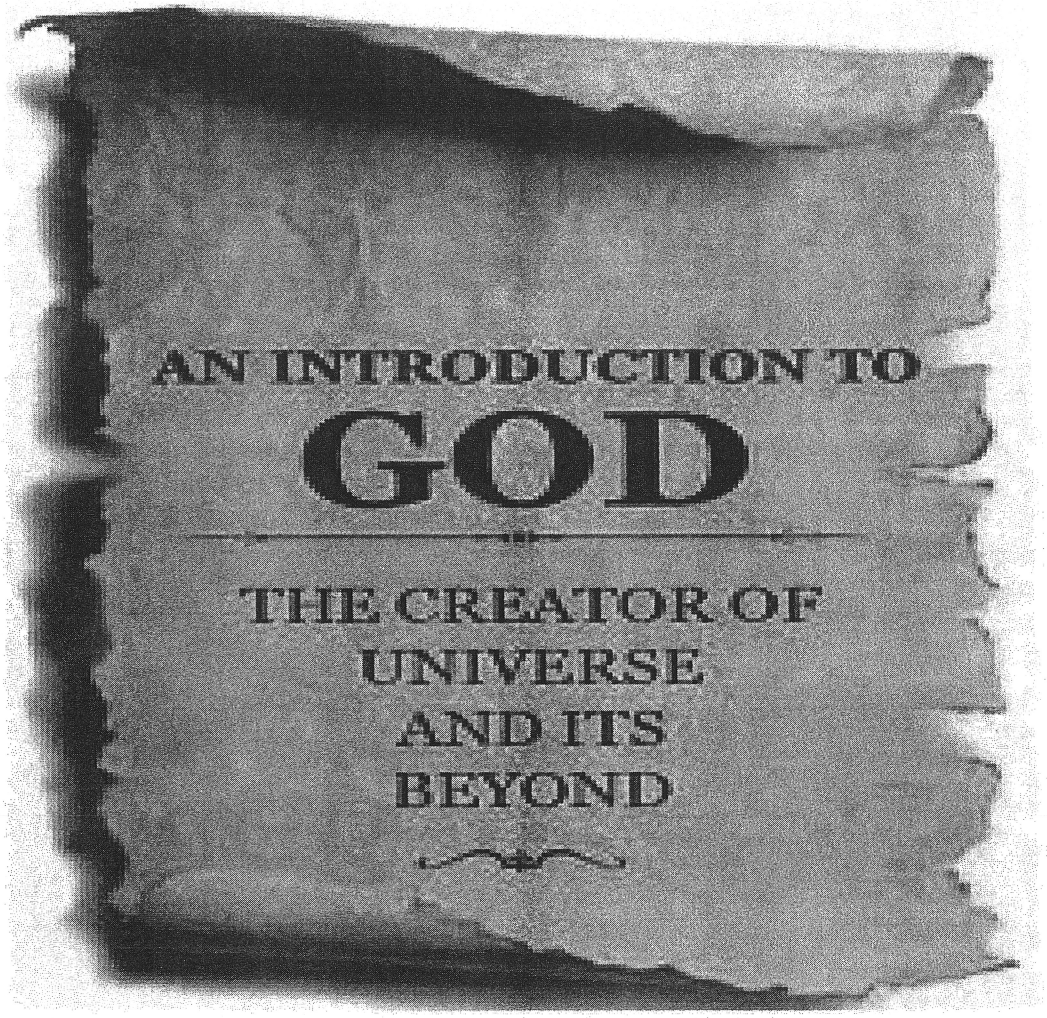
The book can be used in several ways. It can be used as a daily devotional guidebook, with the reader reading one page each day for approximately six months. Each page includes, along with the practical-oriented devotional reading, an appropriate Scriptural reference, a written Prayer For the Day, and a written Affirmation For the Day. Because the book is divided into twelve chapters, the layout of the book is designed in such a way that it can easily be used for an adult Sunday School course. The individual chapters contain enough content, and yet are short enough in length, that they could also well serve as material for small midweek study groups within a local church. There are thought-provoking questions listed at the end of each chapter, to provide class participants an opportunity to review and to discuss the main content of each chapter. Because there is a developing theme throughout the book it can also be used and read like any other 'regular' book.

There has been no book that I have more enjoyed writing and no content of any book that is more important to communicate. If all are sinners by nature and by choice, if Jesus died to provide an atonement for the sins of all people, if all humans are in a saveable state because of Christ's unlimited atonement and because of the universal gift of faith which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon all persons, if God wills that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance, if Jesus has commanded the Church to make disciples of all peoples (Matthew 28:19), if the angels in heaven rejoice exceedingly when even one sinner comes to repentance, and if it is appointed unto all men once to die, but after death comes the Judgement-- then, in light of these basic Bible truths, should we not be most concerned that all persons everywhere understand God's Plan for human redemption? God has commanded all men everywhere to repent and to come to the knowledge of the Truth. If there is a 'heaven to gain and a hell to shun', and if hell was never prepared for mankind, but rather for the devil and his demons, then it stands to reason that all persons everywhere should be urged

to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus was born to die, in order that all persons everywhere can live eternally with God in heaven!

It is my hope that, through the reading of this book, believers may deepen their understanding and appreciation of God's wonderful Plan of Salvation (the plan which was hidden for generations, but now revealed to mankind in these latter days). It is my further and even greater hope that hundreds of sincere people who are 'hungry for God' may find this book an aid in their search for God. Nothing would thrill me more than to learn that someone found their way to the 'foot of the Cross of Christ' to find peace with God, through the reading of this book. "Coming To Know God" is the greatest privilege known to mankind!

Ronald G. Christian
Fort Collins, Colorado



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PART I

GENERAL SURVEY OF SALVATION

("TOPICAL STUDY OF SALVATION")

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CHAPTER 1

"HOW DO YOU REACT TO CHRIST?"

PART I

GENERAL SURVEY OF SALVATION

("TOPICAL STUDY OF SALVATION")

Matthew 2:13-18, John 1:4-5

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE CHRIST!

Christ is the most beautiful person who ever lived! Christ is God's outstretched arm to save mankind from self-destruction. Christ is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But John records that He who made the world came into His own world to save His world, but that the world of His own people failed to recognize Him and refused to accept Him. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12 NASB)

Christ, the ever-contemporary One, confronts every person in every age and seeks entry into every life. All today, as in the days of Christ's earthly ministry, react to Christ in one of three ways.

Herod the King represents all those who react to Christ with hatred and hostility. The Chief Priests and Scribes represent all those who react to Christ with complete indifference. The Wise Men represent all those who react to Christ with adoring worship. We must look at each of these reactions to Christ.

Think first of Herod the King. He represents those who react with hatred and hostility. Herod tried to destroy Christ, but he was unsuccessful. Men can never destroy Christ or His message! The message of the Gospel may be either accepted or rejected, but it can never be eliminated. It is like a flame that can never be extinguished or quenched! Men try to put Christ out of their minds, but their conscience betrays them and it continues to speak out for Christ and for the right! The messenger of Christ may even be eliminated, but Christ and His Gospel can never be destroyed!

Reverend Richard Wurmbrand, who has suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, and who has often written about the heroic Underground Church, says "The secret police persecuted the Underground Church very much, because they recognized in it the only effective resistance left. And just the kind of resistance, the spiritual resistance, which, if left unhindered, would undermine their atheistic power. They recognized, as only the devil can, an immediate threat to them. They knew if a man believed in Christ he would never be a mindless, willing subject. They knew they could imprison men, but they couldn't imprison faith in God. And so they fought very hard" (Tortured For Christ, p. 17).

Men, like Herod, hate Christ because Christ is a threat to them. Christ will not let evil men have their own way.

"Christ, You and Your message are indestructible! The messenger may be imprisoned or even eliminated, but Your message can never be imprisoned or destroyed! It is an inextinguishable flame!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The gates of hell cannot prevail against the Christ of God and cannot kill the God in Christ!

Matthew 6:24, 10:37-39, 12:30

IS CHRISTIANITY WORTH COUNTERFEITING?

The Chief Priests and Scribes represent those who react to Christ with indifference. "They were so engrossed in their Temple ritual and their legal discussions that they simply completely disregarded Jesus. He meant nothing to them. There are still those who are so interested in their own affairs that Jesus Christ means nothing to them." (Daily Study Bible, Matthew, vol. 1, p. 21, William Barclay.)

There are various reasons why persons today are indifferent to Christ and the Gospel. Some are indifferent because they believe the Church has been a failure. As I was having my hair cut one day, a barber said to me, "My experience with church-going, professing Christians has been unpleasant, so I decided I wouldn't have anything to do with the church". A university student said to me one day: "I was once a very active member of a Protestant Church, but because I saw corruption and hypocracy in the church, I decided church was not for me. I don't believe in any organized Church. I believe that science will probably someday have all the final answers to man's problems. It may be a thousand years from now, but nevertheless science will have the final word. Look what progress science has already made. Someday Christianity will probably look simple and be archaic. What we need in Western Civilization is a liberal religion, merely as an agent of change. If you classify me as anything, I suppose that you could classify me as an agnostic. I can't say that I believe in Christ, and I'm not sure that there is such a thing as heaven or hell". A distant relative of mine said to me, rather indifferently, "There is a lot of churches, and it doesn't make any difference to me what church one belongs to. All have to live their own lives, and therefore, I don't care what other people do. Every church has its good and its bad, and you can go to church if you want to, but you don't need to if you don't care to!".

To each of these encounters, I reacted in a similar manner. I pointed out that, while the Church is important, it is not the Church, but only Christ, that can save from sin and give eternal life. Although it must be admitted that there is the superficial and hypocritical elements at times within the organized Church, there is far more of the genuine and the noble within the Church. Ten dollar bills are counterfeited because they are worth counterfeiting. Why is Christianity counterfeited? Because it is worth counterfeiting! Did you ever see a counterfeit unbeliever? No, never. Why?

"God, help me to be honest with myself. The medical profession is not judged because of a few quack doctors. I do not condemn all lawyers simply because some are dishonest. Don't allow me to deceive myself by judging Christ because of some counterfeit Christians!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Even the counterfeits of Christianity pay a great compliment to Christians, for they acknowledge that Christians are worth counterfeiting!

Hebrews 2:1-4, Luke 12:16-21

HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE IF WE NEGLECT?

The Chief Priests and Scribes represent those who react with indifference. They were too preoccupied with their own pursuits to pay attention to Christ. There are too many today who are indifferent to Christ because they are preoccupied with the cares of life. The wife of a university student replied to me when I asked her if she was attending church: "No, we are not attending church now. I have uncles who are Methodist ministers, but since my husband is a student, we don't have time to get involved in church now. In the future, after my husband gets out of college, we plan to begin coming to church".

Some say that they want to have their 'share of fun in life' while they are young, and that they will consider Christ and the church when they become older. What a false delusion to think that there is always plenty of time in the future to consider God! The old must die, and the young may die! No one knows the appointed hour of his death. The rich man (as recorded in our Scripture reading for today) thought he had a long time to enjoy his wealth, but God said, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you!" (Luke 12:20).

In one of his many books, William Barclay recounts the fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and to ruin men. The first said, "I will tell them that there is no God". Satan said, "That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God". The second said, "I will tell men that there is no hell". Satan answered, "You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin". The third said, "I will tell men that there is no hurry". "Go", said Satan, "and you will ruin men by the thousand". Barclay than asserts that the most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. He notes that the most dangerous day in a man's life is when he learns that there is such a word as tomorrow.

The Bible's exhortation is wise: "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:2-3a NASB).

Today is the acceptable time to receive Christ. Now is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may be too late--eternally too late! Someone appropriately said: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

"I have a hell to shun, a heaven to gain, a soul to save, and a God to serve! O Christ, turn my good intentions into decisive commitments! Heal me of my procrastinations!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Tomorrow never comes! I will choose Christ today!

Joshua 24:14-24

NEUTRAL YOU CANNOT BE!

Some are indifferent because they attempt to be neutral to Christianity. Some consider it a great virtue to adopt a policy of neutrality, to be tolerant to every religion. However, Christ dogmatically asserted that He was the Only Way to God. Jesus is the "Way, the Truth, and the Life". Only through the name of Christ can man approach God. "There is salvation in no one else! Under all heaven there is no other name for men to call upon to save them." (Acts 4:12 Living Bible) An indecision to follow Christ and an attempted neutrality, automatically becomes a decision against Christ. Said Jesus, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad". (Matthew 12:30) He also said, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". (Matthew 6:24) Joshua could well have been speaking to our generation when he said, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve". Christ will not share any other allegiances; He demands all. He is dogmatic in His claims, and all-inclusive in His demands. Pilate attempted to be neutral in his reaction towards Christ, but he was unsuccessful. His cowardice was a vote against Christ, and resulted in gross unjustice. The guilt that was on his hands was too great for mere water to wash it away! The blood of Christ was on his hands!

There are many nominal 'Christians' in our society and in our churches today. They are sympathetic to Christian principles, but uncommitted personally to Christ.

"Ye call me Master and obey Me not,
Ye call Me Light and see Me not,
Ye call Me Way and walk not,
Ye call Me Life and desire Me not,
Ye call Me wise and follow me not,
Ye call Me fair and love Me not,
Ye call Me rich and ask Me not,
Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not,
Ye call Me gracious and trust Me not,
Ye call Me noble and serve Me not,
Ye call Me Mighty and honor Me not,
If I condemn you, blame Me not."

-Anonymous-

It is not easy to make the right decision. Jesus knew that. In the light of the absolute obedience and faith which Christ demands, many will make excuses. Excuses today are still 'a dime a dozen'! Of course, if Christ could reign along with all other gods in our idolatrous hearts, the decision would be easier, but that cannot be! It is either Christ only, or Christ not at all. Christ is jealous of your total allegiance, and will accept nothing less!

"The right decision is a hard decision, for Your absolute Lordship demands my total surrender and my absolute obedience. But it all results in absolute freedom! Thank you for your total claims on my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Neutral I cannot be. I must make Christ the Lord <u>of</u> all or He will not be the Lord <u>at</u> all!

Matthew 2:1-12

WISE MEN SEEK JESUS!

The Wise Men represent all who react to Christ with adoring worship. The Wise Men only found Christ after they diligently sought for Him. "Where", they asked King Herod, "is the newly born King of the Jews? For we have ssen His star in its rising and we have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:2)

Centuries before, God spoke through Jeremiah and said, "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart". (Jeremiah 29:13) Our seeking must be genuine; our asking must be sincere; our knocking must be persistent. God will only be found when we seek him with our whole heart. One cannot be pretentious, proud, or half-hearted, and expect to find Christ. The Wise Men were not satisfied until they found the Christ child. Their searching was in earnest. To find the Child was their only concern.

Jesus' parable of the lost coin well illustrates the necessity for diligence in ones search for God. In another parable, the precious pearl which was found in a field caused the finder to sell all that he had in order to purchase that gem. Full surrender is essential if one is to be a disciple of Christ and in order to find peace in life.

The Wise Men offered gifts to Christ. "When they came into the house, they saw the little child with Mary, His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him; and they opened their treasures, and offered to Him gifts." (Matthew 2:11 Barclay)

The essence of true worship and adoration is self-surrender--presentation of ourselves to God.

"Who answers Christ's insistent call
Must give himself, his life, his all,
Without one backward look.
Who sets his hand unto the plow,
And glances back with anxious brow,
His calling hath mistook.
Christ claims him wholly for his own;
He must be Christ's, and Christ's alone."
-John Oxenham-

Wise men still seek Jesus!

"Jesus, if I had the whole world to give to you, that would be a present far too small! 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all'!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Like the Wise Men of old, I will today bow before Christ, 'lost in wonder, love, and praise'.

Hebrews 9:13-14

JESUS' THREEFOLD WORK--KING, PRIEST, SAVIOUR

Although the New Testament no where says specifically that there were three wise men, we assume that there were three because of the threefold gift which they brought. The significant thing is not the number of wise men, but rather the gifts which the wise men presented.

Gold is the gift for a King. The coming of a great king was a deep-seated expectation in the hearts of all Jews throughout the centuries, since the rule of David. Jesus came to be King, but not the type of King the Jews were anticipating. The Jews looked to Jesus as God's agent through whom the Jews would conquer all their enemies and enjoy an age of peace and prosperity. Their expectation reached its height when the excited Jews shouted Hosanna to Christ as He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The Jews expected Jesus to soon fulfill their nationalistic dreams. Jesus, however, came not to be a conquering king over earthly kingdoms, but He came to be the King of men's hearts. He came not to shatter the Romans, but He came to die on a cross in order that the Romans might be truly transformed, as well as all other Gentiles of the world. Christ came not to destroy, but to restore. He came not to hate, but to love. Christ came to destroy man's passion and pride and then set up his rule in man's heart.

Frankincense is the gift for a Priest. It was the work of the Old Testament Priests to act as representatives of God to man, and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. The Old Testament Priesthood was imperfect and unable to remove the guilt of sin. Christ came to be the Perfect High Priest, of which the gift of frankincense was but a symbol. In the Old Testament the common man was barred from personal access to God. It was the High Priest's responsibility to intercede in behalf of the people. On the Day of Atonement the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, the place in the Temple where it was held that God's presence dwelt. Jesus, the Perfect High Priest, became a bridge to God by which man can personally encounter God. The veil of the Temple was rent in two, symbolizing man's personal access to God.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. In the opening account of Matthew's Gospel, the purpose of Christ's coming is defined. "She (Mary) will bear a son, and you must call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21 Barclay) Our Scripture reading for today indicates that Jesus is both the Perfect High Priest and the Perfect Sacrifice for sin. The gift of myrrh symbolized Christ's death, His Saviourhood. To stop with the Babe of Bethlehem without considering the Christ of the Cross, is to miss the meaning of the Incarnation!

"Because of your threefold work as King, Priest, and Saviour, do your threefold work in my life. Rule my life, become my bridge-builder to God, forgive my sins!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because God has given the gift of His all in the form of Christ, I will give Him the gift of my all in the form of my full surrender!

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

IS YOUR GOD TOO SMALL?

We have looked at three ways in which people react to Jesus. Some, like Herod, react with hostility to Christ and attempt to eliminate the truth. Others, like the Scribes, react with indifference to Christ and attempt to avoid Christ or His claims. Still others, like the Wise Men, react with adoring worship to Christ.

In His parable of the Four Soils, Jesus described four different responses to the Gospel Message.

The first soil is the wayside soil. (Matthew 13:3-4, 19) The wayside soil is hardened and unresponsive to the seed. The wayside soil represents the close-minded person who is unresponsive and indifferent to the Gospel appeal. Some are indifferent to Christianity because they do not realize the seriousness of its demands. They classify Christianity alongside politics, art, literature, music, science, etc., and consider it only with academic interest. They have a "take it or leave it" attitude. They classify Jesus alongside Plato, Aristotle, and other great teachers, even though they assert that Jesus is the greatest teacher in history. Many would be offended if it were seriously suggested to them that Jesus was God Incarnate. Many classify the Church alongside a business, a club, or a shop, thus denying its distinctive message and purpose. To them it is a place to enhance prestige or to fulfill social needs, the same functions that a club fulfills. Indifference is manifested in such expressions as this: "If I want my shoes repaired, I go to a shoe repairman. If I want a good meal, I go to a good restaurant. If I want religion, I go to some church".

Many are indifferent to Christianity because their conception of God is too small. The Mondern-day shallow conceptions of God are effectively discussed in J.B. Phillips' excellent book 'Your God Is Too Small'. Notice what some of those misconceptions are. Some think of God as a policeman who is constantly seeking to punish. Some think of God as a harsh father, seeking to drain all pleasure out of life. Some think of God as the spineless, mild, and pale Galilean who lacks courage, strength, vitality and joy. Some think of God as an escapism for the weak and fearful. Some think of God as the one who is contained within the four walls of a church, unable to meet life in an every day, practical way. Others are bitter towards God because of an unexplained tragedy in their lives. All such notions of God are far from the Truth, but holding such notions has caused many to become indifferent towards Christ and Christianity. Such people have shut minds because they have never had a mature conception of God, and because they have never really considered seriously the demands of Christianity.

"O Christ, you are not one among many great teachers, to be admired. You are the son of the Living God, to be worshipped!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will shut my mind to immature caricatures of Christ and open my mind to the true character of Christ!

Matthew 13:20-21, Hebrews 12:1-4

SHALLOW-MINDED RESPONSE TO CHRISTIANITY

In His Parable of the Four Soils, Jesus said that some seeds fell on rocky soil. Jesus gave the interpretation: "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has not root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away". (Matthew 13:20-21)

The stony ground represents the shallow mind. Such a mind does not think deeply and seriously about Christianity. There are so many who have never really considered the cost of being a Christian. Their lives are based on a shallow sentimentality. To such people, the beauty of a church is more important then the beauty of holiness. To such people, a tear-jerking sermon is more important than a thought-provoking sermon. The stony gound represents those whose Christianity is based upon emotionality rather than upon rationality. Jesus encouraged people who were potential followers to consider seriously what it means to be a Christian. He wanted none to begin the Christian walk and then stop midway. He wanted all to seriously consider the demands of discipleship. It was Jesus who said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". (Matthew 16:24) He also said, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple". (Luke 14:26)

There are many who begin the Christian way, but many do not last, simply because the Word has not found deep rootage in their hearts. One famous evangelist said, "We have learned that it takes about five percent effort to win a man to Christ, and ninety-five percent to keep him in Christ and growing into maturity in the Church". Someone insightfully said: "It is not easy to be a Christian; but it is easy to start". Why is there such a mortality rate in the Church among young Christians? One reason is that many have failed to realize that "Christianity is a case of all or nothing". Too many have stopped short of total surrender to God.

Another reason why many who begin the Christian life wither instead of grow, is that they have never learned the importance of patience and perseverance. It is easy to start, but difficult to finish. Says J.B. Phillips: "Long preparation, careful planning and slow growth would seem to be leading characteristics of spiritual life". (Your God Is Too Small, p. 59)

"Lord, help me to respond fully to Christ's call in order that I may enjoy Christ fully. Help me to feel deeply, think clearly, and commit decisively!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am willing to take the slow, but sure road to spiritual maturity!

Colossians 3:1-17, Matthew 13:7,22

"LOST! LOST! LOST!--MY LIFE IS LOST!"

The thorny soil represents the care-ridden mind. Said Jesus, "Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them". (Matthew 13:7) A garden lot may be weeded, plowed, and racked and thus appear to be very clean and productive soil. However, such soil may be filled with weed seeds which may spring up and throttle the life out of the good seed. Jesus gave the interpretation to this kind of soil. "As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22)

It is too easy to become encumbered with the cares and concerns of making a living and in the meantime forget that we should be making a life. It is sometimes easy to become more concerned how far we made the dollar go than how far we go in living for Christ and others. In trying to maintain a material standard of living, we can easily lower our spiritual standard of service and sacrifice. Self can replace service as a standard of life. When that happens, life is literally robbed of its meaning.

"A young man, some years ago, lay dying. His mother believed him to be a Christian and was greatly surprised and distressed one day when, on passing his room, she heard him say, 'Lost! Lost! Lost!'. Immediately she opened the door and cried, 'My boy, is it possible you have lost hope in Christ, now that you are dying?'. 'No, Mother, no!' he replied, 'it is not that. I have hope beyond the grave, but I have lost my life! My life has been spent for self. I have lived for this world--and now--while dying, I have given myself to Christ--BUT MY LIFE IS LOST!'." (Shoe-Leather Faith, Merv Rosell, No. 331)

It is good for us occasionally to remind ourselves of these words: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation". (Hebrews 2:3a) How easy it is for us to neglect the most important things in life. Why? Because the intangible and invisible values of life take time and effort to cultivate. A holy life does not come automatically. It takes discipline, time and effort. A Christian must take time to pray, attend church services (Hebrews 10:25), witness, and read the Bible. The competitive loyalties of worry, riches, and pleasures can destroy spiritual life! Ask yourself: "Am I operating my life by God's agenda or by my own agenda?". Do not allow the good seed of God's Word to become choked by the weeds of worry, riches or pleasure!

"God, do not allow my heart to become overcrowded! Do not allow the 'good' to destroy the 'best' in my life! Help me to 'take time to be holy'. The 'weeds' must go in my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Money and pleasure will be <u>expressions</u> of my faith, not <u>substitutes</u> for my faith!

James 1:22-25, Matthew 13:8-9, 23

"I LIKE MY MOTHER'S TRANSLATION BEST!"

Jesus said, "Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear". (Matthew 13:8-9)

There is some soil that is rich, deep and clean of weeds. In such soil, there is a bountiful harvest. Jesus said, "As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty". (Matthew 13:23)

The good soil represents the productive mind, the mind that listens carefully to Jesus' words, reasons them out, and considers their implications. Such a person is not quick and impulsive, but deeply contemplative and reflective.

He not only listens, but he understands. Jesus' words do not fall upon deaf ears, but Jesus' words sink deeply into his heart. He ponders them until he understands their true meaning and significance for daily living.

He not only hears, he not only understands, but he applies and practices Christ's words. He knows that ultimately Christianity is a life of action and practice, not simply theory and thought. He realizes that a man will in the last analysis be judged by his actions, not simply by his words. He knows this because he understands Christ's teachings: "There was a man with two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Go and work in my vineyard today, my son'. He said, 'All right sir'--but he never went near it. Then the father approached the second son with the same request. He said, 'I won't'. But afterward he changed his mind and went. Which of these two did what their father wanted? 'The second one', they replied". (Matthew 21:28-31a)

"There is a story about four clergymen who were discussing the merits of the various translations of the Bible. One liked the King James Version best because of its simple, beautiful English. Another liked the American Revised Version best because it is more literal and comes nearer to original Hebrew and Greek. Still another liked Moffatt's translation best because of its up-to-date vocabulary. The fourth minister was silent. When asked to express his opinion, he replied, 'I like my mother's translation best. She translated it into life, and it was the most convincing translation I ever saw'." (Shoe-Leather Faith, No. 101, Rosell)

"God, help me to be a productive-minded person, one who listens carefully, understands throughly, and applies constantly the words of Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will be a doer of the Word, and not a hearer only! (James 1:22)

Luke 14:15-24

BUSINESS INTERESTS BEFORE KINGDOM INTERESTS

What a discourtesy to be invited to a meal; first accept it, and then later reject the invitation on some flimsy excuse. God invites you to His banquet. Will you accept it or will you, like the persons in the parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24) make flimsy excuses?

It is clear that the great Banquet stands for the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a society of men who desire to do God's will more than they desire anything else. In mercy, God has extended His invitation to every person to be a member of His Kingdom--to come to the Banquet of God! But before a person can become a member of God's Kingdom, he must accept God's invitation, putting the priorities of the Kingdom before personal, selfish interests. Each of the excuses in the parable are the same types of excuses that are heard today.

The first man put business interests before kingdom interests. "I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused." (Luke 14:18) Many there are who put their work before their church, who are more interested in making a living than they are in making a life. The ring of the cash register is sweeter to some than the quietness of the sanctuary. The glitter of gold fascinates some more than the glory of God. Bargaining at the stock market is more important to some than bargaining for the souls of men. Missing a day's work is more disturbing to some than missing a worship service. Getting ahead of the Joneses is more important to some than staying in step with God. Investing in earth's real estate is more important to some than investing in heaven's incorruptible mansions. Earning a college degree is more important to some than earning a degree in faithfulness and service.

Energy and hard work are commendable, but if misdirected can result in rejection from the kingdom. Wealth is not to be despised, if it does not result in poverty of the soul. Position in business and work is honourable, if it does not crowd God from the throne room of one's heart. If a choice must be made between more money on earth or greater treasure in heaven, there is no question as to how one should choose. "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." (I John 2:17)

"Help me to set my affections on things above, not things on earth. Help me to be wise in my investments, investing in eternity as well as in time, investing in people as well as in things, seeking God's glory primarily and my own interests secondarily."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who lives only for time will be frustrated in time and lost in eternity!

Psalms 1:1-2, 16:1-11, II Timothy 3:1-5

INTERESTS OF NOVELTY BEFORE INTERESTS OF KINGDOM

We are looking at the flimsy excuses which people give for not entering the Kingdom of God. (Parable of the Great Supper, Luke 14:15-24)

"Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out. Please have me excused'." (Luke 14:19) Sound familiar? "I have bought a new car, and I want to try it out. We are taking a trip on Sunday." "I have built a new cabin and plan to stay there over the weekends during the summer months. I'll worship God in nature." "I have bought a new camper and new fishing equipment. They say the fish are biting good. Might see you next Sunday. Depends on how the fish bite this weekend." "I have bought some new skis. The snow is just right for skiing. Got to take advantage of the snow. Besides, everyone is going to the slopes. Have me excused please." "A new TV series is starting on Wednesday night. Sorry I will miss Bible class. Have me excused." "Spring is in the air. Time to get the garden planted. Please have me excused this time."

Sad it is that the toys of sensual pleasure are more real to us than the delights of spiritual discoveries. The novelty of picking up a moon rock seems to thrill us more than picking up the Bible. Low attendance at a party is more disturbing to us than low attendance at worship services. Missing a favorite TV program disturbs us more than missing a good Bible class. The garden not growing disturbs us more than the church not growing. Learning a new recipe excites us more than learning a new verse of Scripture. Fishing for trout is more exciting than fishing for the souls of men. The excuse of the one who said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out", is the same type of excuse that many give today. The interests of novelty are more important than the interests of the Kingdom. Such people are fools, for they accept the second-best or worse, when they could have the very best! These people miss out on the delights of the Kingdom Banquet!

They miss out on the mental delights. The Christian life delights the mind! While the sinner is feeding his mind on the husks of the world, the Christian is exploring new frontiers of knowledge and wisdom!

They miss out on emotional delights. There is an aesthetic heightening in Christian conversion!

They miss out on spiritual delights. There is a great contrast between the ever-dawning hope of the Christian and the ever-increasing despair of the unbeliever. Poor indeed is the man who puts the interests of novelty before the interests of the Kingdom!

"God, you are the source of all joy! You give me all things richly to enjoy! The pleasures of sin last for only 'a season', but the 'joy of the Lord' is eternal!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will gladly accept God's Invitation to His Banqueting Table where heaven's delights are lavishly served!

Matthew 22:37-40, Luke 14:25-27

LOVE OF MAID MORE THAN LOVE OF MASTER

The third man in the parable (Luke 14:15-24) put good interests before the superior interests of the Kingdom. "Another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore, I cannot come'." (Luke 14:20) Loyalty to wife and family is commended, but if wife or husband or child becomes the object of one's deepest love, then a man is not worthy of God's Kingdom! Adam walked alone with God before Eve was created. A man must know his God intimately before he can enjoy his family completely. The love of the Master must come before the love of the Maid. Indeed, the love of the maid is enhanced by the love of the Master! "They live best together who live with God; they serve each other best who also serve their fellow men; the atmosphere of a home is most lovely when those who dwell within it never forget that they are also members of the great family and household of God." (Daily Study Bible, Luke, p. 201, William Barclay) Is your home open to fellow believers (Psalms 133:1)? Is your home open to strangers (Hebrews 13:1-2)? Are you willing to present your children to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1)?

"Two men stood on a dock in New York City. They were watching an ocean liner as it left for far-away shores. One of the men said to the other: 'That ocean liner is carrying a gift from me to the mission fields. It has on it thousands of dollars worth of supplies for a mission hospital'. The other man replied: 'That ocean liner also carries a gift from me to the mission fields. It has on it my only daughter. She is going as a missionary. I have given her to the Lord's service'. Tears came to the eyes of the first man. He said: 'My friend, you have given far more to the Lord than I have. I have given money. You have given your only daughter!'." (This Is the Will of God, by Barker, p. 57-58)

The story is told of a Sunday School class of boys who planned to have a surprise birthday for a small boy who was one of the members of the class. When the class arrived at the home, the boy's mother called in vain for her son. The class finally went ahead with the party without the guest of honor. After the party was over and the class had left, the boy came home and the mother finally got the truth out of her son. The boy had heard the mother call him, but thinking that he was being called to do some work, he ran to the barn where he hid all afternoon!

Don't run and hide from God when He calls you! Accept the invitation to the Kingdom Banquet!

"God, I have too often thought you were calling me to an unpleasant task, and I have gone to the 'barn' to hide. I have hid myself in my material pursuits, in my leisure and novelty and even in something so good as my family! Forgive me! I accept your invitation to the Kingdom Banquet!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not allow the 'good' to destroy the 'best' in my life!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'HOW DO YOU REACT TO CHRIST?'

1. What three basic types of responses to Christ are represented by Herod the King, the Chief Priests and Scribes, and the Wise Men? Are these three types of responses typical of human responses to Christ today, and if so, can you give examples from your personal observations of these three different kinds of responses?

2. Illustrate from your personal experience or from your observation of other people, how it is possible to become so engrossed in one's own affairs that Jesus Christ means little or nothing to him.

3. List various reasons why persons today are indifferent to Christ and the Gospel. Which is the worse kind of reaction to give to Christ, a reaction of passive indifference or a reaction of active hostility? Why?

4. What answer would you give to a person who says that he doesn't believe in Christianity because of the superficial and hypocritical elements which he observes within the organized Church?

5. What is meant by the statement: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions". What is one of Satan's most effective weapons in fighting against mankind?

6. What is Christ's reaction to a person who seeks to be neutral in his reaction to Christ?

7. What qualities exemplified in the lives of the Wise Men must be manifest in our lives today if we are to find and to please God?

8. List the three gifts which the Wise Men presented to Jesus, and tell what each of these three gifts symbolized in terms of the threefold work of Christ.

9. In His parable of the Four Soils (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23), Jesus describes four different responses which people manifest toward Him. List those four responses (as symbolized by the Soils), and give an illustration from your own personal life or from your observations of other people of each of these four different responses.

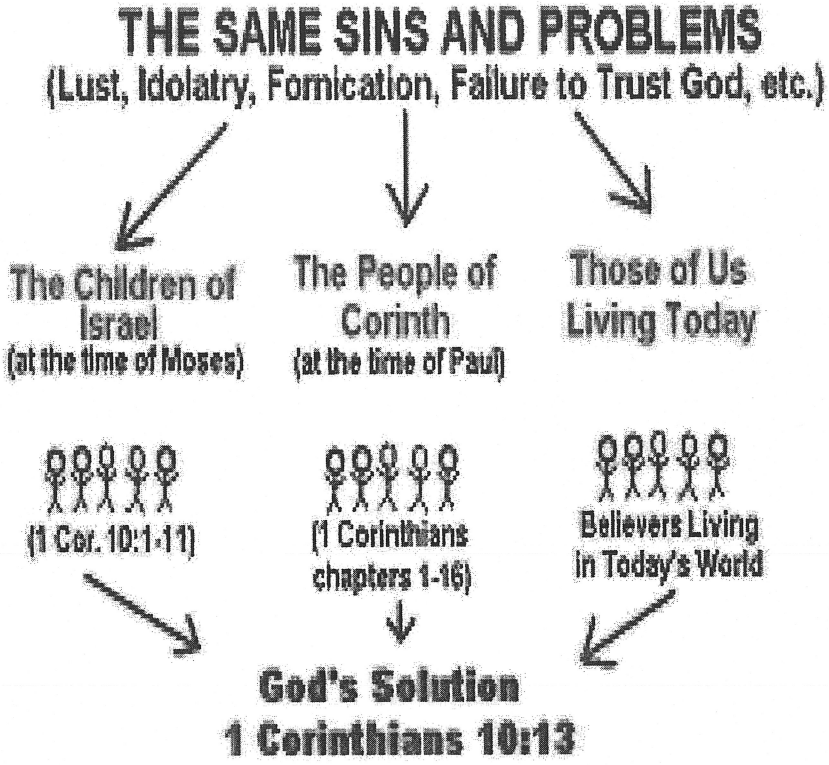
10. If indifference (as symbolized by the wayside soil) is one of the basic negative responses to Christ, give reasons why some people react indifferently to Christ?

11. List various manifestations of the shallow-minded response to Christ (as symbolized by the Rocky Soil).

12. What are some of the 'weeds' or 'thorns' that can easily choke out the believer's spiritual life (as taught in Jesus' parable of the Four Soils)?

13. How can the 'productive mind' (as symbolized by the good soil) be described? Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A man will, in the last analysis, be judged by his actions, not simply by his words". (Note James 2:12-20)

14. List the three excuses given by the three men in Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24), and share examples of people whom you have known who have used one or more of these same excuses for not following Christ.



CHAPTER 2

"WHAT IS MAN'S PROBLEM?"

I John 1:5-10

NEW LABELS FOR OLD SINS

What one thinks of man will largely determine one's total outlook on life and one's conception of God. For several decades there has been a prevailing belief in man's natural goodness with a subsequent denial of sin or at least a 'watered down' idea of sin. As a result of this belief in man's innate goodness and a denial of sin's seriousness, modern man's conception of God has become greatly distorted. The idea of the wrath of God has become repugnant, and a sentimental preoccupation with God's love has become popular. What has been the result of sentimentalizing God's love and denying God's wrath? A deterioration in morals. An increase in lawlessness. An outcropping of parental permissiveness in discipline. God's moral Law has been replaced with man's own standards. God has been made into the image of man!

The Biblical conception of man is seen in terms of a creature made in God's image, but a creature whose God-imprinted image has been marred by sin. The Bible says that man "is dead in trespasses and in sins". (Ephesians 2:1)

To have an appreciation for God's salvation, we must have an understanding of man's serious plight in sin. Sin produces guilt, alienation, condemnation, and eventually eternal death. During the next few days, we must look at these four consequences of sin.

Sin produces guilt. Man in the beginning overstepped his God-imposed limitation and disobeyed His Creator. Man failed to accept his created role and instead attempted to play the part of God! Attempting to usurp God's rightful place of authority, man fell into sin and became a rebel. The result of man's stubborn independence is sin, and one manifestation of sin is guilt and shame. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." (Genesis 3:7)

Sin is not a popular conception. Modern-man tries in vain to explain away 'Sin'. Dr. Henry Coffin once said, "Current psychology adds to these moral alibis. Men and women have themselves analyzed, and find emancipation in banishing the ugly names which vigorous religion attached to sins, where these are re-christened with labels with no suggestion of guilt".

Old sins may have new 'lables', but sin is still sin!

"God, give me the gift of honesty! Deliver me from self-deception! I am a great sinner in need of a great Saviour! I do not conceal, but confess my load of guilt! Be merciful to me, a sinner!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I deny my sins, I am deceived; if I confess my sins, I am delivered. I choose deliverance!

Jude 1:1-16, Colossians 2:8

MAN'S ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN AWAY SIN

There are several humanistic philosophies that attempt to explain away the seriousness of sin. One philosophy of sin is that it is "a principle of necessary antagonism which seems to be a part of life. Sin can be regarded as dumb-bells which have to be lifted in order to develop the intellectual and moral muscles". (The Plight of Man and The Power of God, Llyod-Jones, p. 43) Another view of sin considers sin to be the opposition of "our lingering animal instincts against the demands made by our dawning and ever increasing moral consciousness". (Ibid, p. 44) Some say that sin is not positive evil, but merely a failure of fully developing the best in us. Some say that the failure with man lies in his lack of knowledge and education and training or bad environment. Better housing, increased education and clearance of slums will cure man's problems.

All of these views of sin obviously deny the existence of real guilt in man. In fact, those who hold these views consider themselves as liberated from their forefather's bondage, morbidity, introspection, and despair which were caused from previously holding a too serious view of sin. Those who deny that guilt is a reality, are those who say that so-called sin "is just that stage of immaturity where the child has not yet become the man or where the animal has not yet become entirely human". (Ibid, p. 45)

The old line of Fraudian psychology explains away guilt through its "impulse theory". The "impulse theory" is explained (by Mowrer) like this: "As a child, the individual who is destined to be neurotic as an adult, has supposedly been so harshly and unreasonably treated by his parents that he has no alternative but to repress certain impulses, certain instincts (especially the sex impulse and the hostility impulse); and it is this act of repression or dissociation which lays the basis, according to Freud, for that special misery called neurosis". (The Crisis In Psychiatry and Religion, p. 160)

Continues Mowrer, "The alternative view here proposed is that anxiety comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not, but from acts which he has committed but wishes that he had not. It is, in other words, a 'guilt theory' of anxiety rather than an 'impulse theory'". (Ibid, p. 26) "The real evil in mental disorder. . .is the fear and guilt which result from the presence in one's life of that which one is afraid to tell." (Ibid, p. 64)

"God, help me not to explain away the presence of real guilt in my life, incurred through my willful transgression against your known laws. Help me to confess all in order to be healed of all!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To think lightly of sin is to reap heavily the judgement of God!

Psalms 32:1-5

THE WORLD'S ANTIDOTES FOR GUILT

Man still attempts to conceal his guilt, and thus hide his spiritual nakedness from God and from his fellowman. Man seeks to escape personal moral responsibility, conveniently choosing some scapegoat in the form of society, heredity, friends or background. As Llyod-Jones says, "The responsibility is taken from man and is placed in his economic conditions or his home life or early upbringing, and indeed at times in his physical make-up. The failure is to be pitied only. He is not to be blamed, he is not to be punished. We must speak nicely to him and encourage him to be nice and decent". (The Plight of Man and The Power of God, p. 45)

The world offers its antidotes for guilt. "In a city were two signs side by side. 'Go to Church. Find strength for your life'. Next to it was: 'Where there's life there's Budweiser'. These two signs represent two approaches to life--one is from the inward to the outward; the other is the outward to the inward. One depends on inward salvation from guilt and fear and conflict; the other depends on outward stimulants--pick-me-ups that let you down". (Conversion, E.S. Jones, p. 22)

The result of concealed guilt oftentimes is physical or mental disturbance. To suppress guilt is only to drive it into the subconscious mind which only compounds the problem. Concealed guilt can cause one to live a life of unreality and fantasy. Concealed guilt often causes one to minimize serious problems, when these problems should be squarely faced and solved.

Guilt may be hid from others, but it is never hid from God. There is an 'All-Seeing Eye' watching us at all times. The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out". (Numbers 32:23b) "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?, saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?, saith the Lord". (Jeremiah 23:24)

Man attempts to resolve his own guilt through self-atonement, but his attempt only complicates the problems. Some feel they can out-balance their guilt by strenuously performing good deeds. Good deeds are important, but they will never resolve guilt or appease the guilty conscience. Guilt must be resolved in some other way than through self-effort.

There is only one way to deal adequately with guilt. "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'--and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:5 NIV)

"Lord, when I keep silent about my sins, my bones 'roar' within me. When I confess aloud my sins, my heart is at peace within me. Teach me to weep now that I may rejoice then."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will live responsibly by acknowledging my personal moral responsibility.

Luke 15:11-24, Romans 3:23

SIN PAYS TERRIBLE WAGES!

We have observed that sin produces guilt. Sin also results in alienation. Man was made to be filled with God, but sin empties one of God's inner presence, and leaves one void, estranged, and lonely. The Scriptures often talk about man being lost. The ultimate consequence of sin is hell, and hell is separation from everthing that is good.

Sin drives one away from God, the very one for whom man is made and the only One who can really help man. "And they (the human couple) heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." (Genesis 3:8)

Sin always has a way of alienating. Sin alienated the prodigal son from his father. Sin alienated the woman of Samaria from society. Sin alienated the thief from his family and friends, and nailed him to a cross. Sin alienates the spirit of man from the Spirit of God. Alienation from God destroys joy and peace and causes emptiness, misery and loneliness.

Merv Rosell vividly describes what sin did to one young girl. "It was the right side of midnight in a Midwest city where I was preaching. There she was on her knees hard against the altar of a great warm church. Beside her, Christian mothers knelt as though the sobbing girl were their own child in trouble. Look at her! How quickly the commerce of sin and Satan can write "counterfeit", "cheap" and "sham" across the beautiful face of a willful child. Lips that God had once penciled with the clean brush of purity. . .now carelessly coated with the unhappy admission of loss. Fingers now yellow with nicotine and clutching for something steadfast. Clothing studded with cheap jewelry (a cry for beauty when the precious pearl of chastity is gone), yesterday's garments of laughing abandon. Hair once brushed smoothly over unburdened childish shoulders, now in bleached disarray, faded, sheenless. A face lifted with tired eyes hungry for escape. . .for truth. . .for God's love. . .for spiritual answers and hope! Out of that tight throat one heart-rendering whisper, 'Oh God, I'm sick of it all. I've seen the seamy side of life, now is there any peace and forgiveness for me and my father-less child?'. This is one picture of the results of sin that I shall never forget. Thank God we had factual, actual answers for that life. There is no impossible case with God. Today that sin-scarred heart can sing of His complete forgiveness as she stands in the sun of HIS salvation." (Shoe-Leather Faith, Merv Rosell, No. 329)

"O God, there seems to be no limit on how far sin can go! But where sin abounds, grace superabounds! Thank you! Thank you!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is no stain of sin so deep, but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet!

Ephesians 2:11-22

RESTLESS UNTIL WE REST IN GOD!

Notes E. Stanley Jones, "In India a man spoke to Rotary for an hour on 'Nothing'. . .So the empty take refuge in emptiness, but you cannot change emptiness into fullness by capitalizing it. Emptiness has to be changed into fullness by conversion. An Indian Christian said of a certain man 'He is suffering from nothingness'. Many do". (Conversion, p. 20)

Our age can be described as an age of despair and futility. "Who then speaks most powerfully to and for the men of this generation? Those poets, artists and philosophers who preach despair and sing of bleak encounter with silence and futility and nonbeing." (Ibid, p. 23)

To seek meaning in riches is to be sadly disillusioned. In 1923, nine of the world's most successful financiers met together for a very important meeting at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Twenty-five years after this meeting, things had greatly changed for these nine wealthy men. Out of those nine wealthy men three died of a suicide, one was finally released from prison, one was pardoned from prison so he could die at home, one died abroad--insolvent, one died a fugitive from justice and penniless, one died bankrupt and lived on borrowed money, and one became insane.

There is a great difference in making a living and making a life! It is a tragic thing indeed to be a man without a country, but it is far more tragic to be a man without a faith! A Japanese governor once introduced the great missionary, E. Stanley Jones, in this way: "I'm a man here tonight without a faith. I wish I had a faith. I envy those of you who do have a faith. But I'm a lost sheep. I've come here tonight to gain a faith if possible through the speaker. And I hope you will gain one too". This man was a trustee of a Buddhist Temple! (Conversion, p. 18)

Billy Graham shares the following: "When the governor of one of our states entertained us in his home, he asked to talk to me privately. We went into a back room, where he locked the door. I could see that he was struggling with his emotions, but finally said to me 'I am at the end of my rope. I need God. Can you tell me how to find God?'". (World Aflame, p. 147)

Sin alienates, but God's grace reconciles! It was Augustine who said: "Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in thee". We are made by God and for God and we will be restless until we know God! (I Corinthians 8:6)

"God, can a stranger become a friend? Can a 'nobody' become a 'somebody'? Can the lost be found? Can the disillusioned find meaning and purpose? Can the sinner become a saint? If the answer is 'Yes', then I am ready for a transformation!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Christ has broken down the dividing walls of hostility. I am coming Home--Home to God! (Ephesians 2:14)

John 3:16-21, 31-36

CONDEMNED UNTIL WE MAKE PEACE WITH GOD!

Sin causes one to live under the accusing finger of God. One of the results of sin is condemnation. Man was made to be a friend with God, but sin makes God into an enemy to be avoided. The death penalty hangs over man. "The wages of sin is death"--death to the true values to life and eternal separation from God.

The condemned human couple was driven from the Garden. "So He drove out the man; and He placed at the East of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life." (Genesis 3:24)

Nature condemns man when man tries to ignore or resist nature's laws. For instance, nature condemns the man who jumps out of the tenth story window of a building or when one takes nicotine into his lungs. Also, the spiritual laws of nature condemn a man when he lives wild and loose morally. Even the body bears in it the marks of sin and is evidence of a violation against the physical and spiritual laws of nature.

Conscience condemns man when the moral laws of God are violated. Notes Jones: "That future world is impinging on us still and will always impinge upon us, but the bite, the sting, the pressure for conversion comes from the hell of having to live with a self you don't like and can't respect, a self which you hate, but with which you must daily and hourly live". (Conversion, p. 50)

Even breaking one of the Ten Commandments brings guilt. "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." (James 2:10 RSV) Wrote Paul about the Law, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God". (Romans 3:19 RSV) The Law shows to sinful man "the exceeding sinfulness of sin", and condemns each man before God. He who does not presently believe in the Son of God stands condemned before God. (John 3:18)

The righteous become a kind of condemnation to those who are indulging in sin. William Barclay notes in one of his books that Alcibiades, the spoilt young man of genius of Athens, was a companion of Socrates, but every now and again he used to break out: "Socrates I hate you, for every time I meet you, you let me see what I am". Some feel uneasy around God or God's children because such people realize that they are in the presence of holiness. Because they have rejected the Light, they feel the heat of God's wrath upon them.

"O God, my sin condemns me. I don't deserve the least of your favor. But you came to seek and to save the lost! You came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance! Save me, even me!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus came into the world, not to condemn me, but to save me! (John 3:17)

II Thessalonians 1:5-10, Revelation 20:11-15

IS YOUR NAME IN GOD'S BOOK OF LIFE?

We have noted that sin produces guilt, alienation, and condemnation. Sin ultimately produces eternal death. Eternal death is the punishment for unrepentant, rebellious sinners--those "who have refused to submit to His plan to save them through our Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished in everlasting hell, forever shut away from the face of the Lord, never to see the glory of His power". (II Thessalonians 1:8-9)

Jesus said, "Never be afraid of those who can kill the body, but are powerless to kill the soul! Far better to stand in awe of the one who has the power to destroy body and soul in the fires of destruction". (Matthew 10:28 Phillips)

Wrote John, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. . .And whosever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire". (Revelation 20:12,15)

In hell, memory is retained. Hell is stripped of all pleasant things such as beauty, family, and children. The Bible speaks of the fire of hell. Hell is described as a place of unexpected punishment, for there will be men there who were outwardly moral, cultured and even church-going, but who were unconverted.

Sir Thomas Scott, the former Lord Chancellor of England, said on his deathbed: "Until this moment I thought there was neither God nor hell. Now I know and feel there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgement of the Almighty".

Said Voltaire in his dying words, "I am abondoned by God and man! I shall go to hell! O Christ! O Jesus Christ!". (Shoe-Leather Faith, Rosell, No. 141)

Said Thomas Paine in his dying words, "I would give worlds, if I had them, if the 'Age of Reason' had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone!". (Ibid, No. 141)

Said Francis Newport in his dying words, "Oh, that I was to lie upon the fire that never is quenched a thousand years, to purchase the favor of God and be reunited to Him again! But it is a fruitless wish. Millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer to the end of torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity, eternity! for ever and for ever! Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell!". (Ibid, No. 141)

"God, I know that hell was not prepared for me, but was prepared for the devil and his demons. Heaven is being prepared for me! Please prepare me for heaven!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is not God's will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

Psalms 8:1-9

"GOD IS TOO BIG TO BE CONCERNED IN ME"

Man is made by God and for God, thus man's greatest longing is to know God. But how can a person come to know God? A very important step in coming to know God is to face and to overcome the barriers that keep one from knowing God. We must spend some time describing the barriers that keep people--people like you and me--from really finding God.

There are many who say "God is too big to be concerned in me". This is a common barrier. William Barclay notes that in one of H.G. Wells' books there is the story of a man of affairs whose mind was so tensed and strained that he was in serious danger of a complete nervous and mental breakdown. His doctor told him that the only thing that could save him was to find the peace that fellowship with God can give. 'What!', he said, 'to think of that, up there, having fellowship with me! I would as soon think of cooling my throat with the milky way or shaking hands with the stars!'. Notes Barclay, "God, to him was the completely unfindable". (Daily Study Bible, Romans, p. 71, William Barclay)

In our human minds we sometimes become staggered at size and preoccupied with quantity. However, it is not mere size or quantity that is most important to God. It is quality that is of utmost concern to God. That means that Man, which is the highest quality in God's Creation, is most important to God.

Think of a simple illustration of this point. When a wife is watching her husband sail away to a distant land on a huge ship, is she most moved by the massive ship or is she most moved by the small figure which her eyes are fixed on as the ship sails out into the open sea? Of course, it is the small figure, for that figure is her husband! The quality of her husband is infinitely more valuable to her than the large quantity of the ship that her husband is traveling on.

We tend to be staggered by the vastness of the Universe. If we could travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second!), it would take approximately 100,000 years to travel the length of our Milky Way Galaxy! However, it is breath-taking to realize that the Milky Way Galaxy is only one out of billions of galaxies in the Universe! Considering the vastness of the Universe, it is no wonder that David asked, "What is man that thou are mindful of him?". Yet the marvellous thing is this: The Creator of the Universe if mindful of you and me, so much so that the Creator visited and redeemed the world!

"What a staggering thought, that the Creator of the universe became a Man, in order that man might become a son of God! And to think that God loves me as if I were the only one in the whole world to love! I give my little heart to God's Big Heart of Love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To know that God is great enough to rule the Universe and yet loving enough to become a Man, will keep me from saying, "God is too big to be concerned in me".

Isaiah 1:18-20, John 1:29

"I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO COME TO GOD"

There are many who feel that they are not worthy to come to God because of some failure, habit or sin. They feel that they must first give up something or break some habit or quit living such a wicked life before they come to God for help. However, this over-emphasis upon sinfulness has kept many from finding the very thing they need--peace and forgiveness.

Before my conversion, I thought I had to become a better person before God could accept me, but the longer I waited to come to God, the worse I became!

Notes J.B. Phillips, "The more you weep and wail over your sins, and possibly brood over them, the bigger they loom in your mind and the more hold they are likely to have over you. Suppose we take all that for granted and concentrate instead on the boundless resources which become available to us through Christ. To my mind Christians pay far too much attention to the fact of sin and far too little to the possibilities of becoming and living like sons of God, which is what the New Testament promises. When Paul spoke of being 'strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man', for example, I am perfectly certain he wasn't spinning words; he was speaking of actual and realisable experience. In dozens and dozens of places he writes of the shining possibilities of inward transformation by the Spirit of the living God. Surely it is far better to think of these and believe that they are capable of becoming true in our own lives, than to spend time mopping over our unworthiness and sinfulness. This is where the battle really lies, to believe that God is thoroughly capable of transforming and empowering us. Appearances, past failures, feelings, all sorts of things may try to deprive us of really believing in the resources of God. And this is where we must fight; and indeed as far as I can recollect the only battle we are ever told to wage in the New Testament is to fight the good fight of faith. We only tarnish the shining promises of God if we persist in dwelling on our own sinfulness". (Good News, p. 9-10)

An evangelist was speaking personally to a young man one night after the evening evangelistic meeting. This was the conversation. "This isn't your first visit to these meetings", said the evangelist. "No sir, I've been three times." "Are you a christian?" With a look of despair on his face, he replied, "No, I'm afraid I'm far too wicked to be a Christian". "Are you ever ill, Jack?" the evangelist asked. "I have been." "You don't go to a doctor, I suppose." "Of course I do." "But don't you feel too bad? Don't you wait until you feel a bit better?" "Of course not, I go to him to get cured. . .Oh, I see what you're getting at."

"Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot, to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Instead of being so overwhelmed by my nagging habits and sinful practices, I will get my eyes fixed upon Christ who can transform and empower me to live a new way of life!

John 16:7-11, Acts 2:36-41

"I FEEL UNEASY WHEN I THINK ABOUT GOD!"

Some don't want to think about God because this contemplation causes a sense of uneasiness. J.B. Phillips says, "I think, if the truth were told, a great many people would have to admit that they are very far from satisfied with themselves. They may still have their ideals, but it is uncomfortably true that they don't live up to them. They may know what they ought to be, but that is very different from what they actually are. Many people keep themselves very busy not only to gain money and prestige, but simply to avoid facing this unpleasant contrast. It's far easier to reflect comfortably upon all our busyness or the number of our possessions than to think honestly about what sort of people we are". (Good News, p. 3-4)

Some people can't bear to be alone, for they have too much time to think about God!

Notes E. Stanley Jones about conversion: "There is mental conflict in all conversions. Conversion demands conversion upwards. The 'ought-to-be' stands over against the 'is' and demands change. That is disturbing, for it means an alteration of life and its plans and purposes. That means emotional disturbance. It is called 'conviction'". (Conversion, p. 197)

Too many people stop at conviction without going on to conversion. Dr. Jones notes that it is at the point of conviction that there is sometimes a 'hang-up'. He gives a tragic example of this. "In a revival in Princeton University, Aaron Burr came under conviction. He went to the president who advised him to wait till the excitement died down. This was fatal advice. Burr did. Torn by this unresolved conviction, he said to Christ, 'If you let me alone, I'll let you alone'. Aaron Burr came within one vote of the presidency of the United States, but he died in disgrace, unwept and unsung. The citizens of his home town would allow no tombstone to be put up in the graveyard, but someone stole in at night and put up a single marker, 'Aaron Burr'. That was all. As I stood there beside that marker I said to myself, 'If he had only passed from conviction to conversion, what might he not have been?'". (Ibid, p. 197)

One's sense of uneasiness which he feels when he thinks of God should not be a barrier in coming to God. It is the Holy Spirit that produces this sense of need. Conviction should not be spurned but welcomed, for only when one knows that he is a great sinner is he ready to receive a great Saviour. For many weeks John Bunyan heard condemning voices before he was converted. Augustine also experienced deep conviction for weeks before he found peace. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him". (John 6:44)

"O Christ, help me to see that conviction of sin is a prelude to conversion to God, that conviction is like spiritual fever which is meant to drive me to the Great Physician for healing."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My uneasiness which I feel when I think about God, is a sign that the Holy Spirit is drawing my soul to Christ. I will allow conviction to lead me to conversion!

Jeremiah 3:6-25

"I HAVE TRIED TO LIVE FOR GOD BEFORE, BUT I HAVE FAILED"

Some feel that they have sinned away their day of grace and are thus incapable of coming back to God. Nothing could be further from the truth! The very fact that the backslider desires to know God again is evidence that God's Spirit is dealing with the person and desires the backslider to come to God for restoration.

Said God to backslidden Israel through His prophet Jeremiah, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God. . .Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings". (Jeremiah 3:12-13a,22a) God promised the same to Israel through His servant Hosea: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him". (Hosea 14:4)

To the lukewarm Laodicean Church, Jesus spoke words of hope: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me". (Revelation 3:20) The next verse tells us that God's forgiveness to the backslider is so great that the backslider will be re-established in a position of confidence and power: "He who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne". (verse 21)

Perhaps the greatest example of all of how a backslider can come to know God again and live a life of great power, is the Apostle Peter. "The outstanding apostle Peter, was himself a backslider and a backslider of no ordinary type--he cursed and swore (thereby showing that the subconscious had not been converted) that he never knew Jesus. Did Jesus clamp down on him and say, 'Your day of grace is over'? No, He looked on him with such tender compassion that Peter went out and wept bitterly. Jesus believed in Peter so much that He said: 'When you are converted, strengthen your brethern'. He believed in Peter so much even again, and not only converted again, but would be able in spite of his fall to strengthen his brethern--his brethern who did not fall the way he fell. That was a very redemptive faith in Peter. When Jesus arose from the dead the angel said to the women: 'Go tell his disciples and Peter'--tell Peter especially, a special word of love to a heartbroken man. Peter fulfilled the faith that Jesus had in him--he did strengthen his brethern and the world. An ex-backslider pushed humanity toward Christ with a stronger push than any man who ever lived, save one--Paul". (Conversion, p. 201)

"O God, heal me of my backslidings. I turn from the error of my ways. Save me from death, and cover the multitude of my sins." (James 5:19-20)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A broken bone that is healed is stronger than the unbroken places. The point where film is spliced is stroner than the strength of regular film. Where I am weakest, God will make me strongest!

John 10:22-30

"IF I GET CONVERTED, I CAN'T KEEP IT UP"

Many feel that the standards of Christianity are too high and that they are too weak to attempt to become a Christian. Such people must first realize that Christianity does not involve climbing up the ladder to God, but that Christianity involves God coming down the ladder to man! God takes the initiative. God came to save, to transform, and to empower. Christianity is not a demand but it is an offer. Christ offers new life and new power to realize the standard of Christ-like living. Christianity is not a matter of dogged determination but a matter of surrender, not a matter of trying but a matter of trusting. 'Let go and let God hold you'--that is the secret to victorious living! Christianity is not hard, it is impossible--if you try to live the Christian life by your own strength. But when you surrender and allow Christ to live His life through you, then Christ's supernatural life becomes a glorious reality in you!

Four boys from poor homes were attending a summer boys' camp and they were the only ones in the entire camp who had failed to give their lives to Christ during the camp. When the camp evangelist asked the boys why they had not received Christ, the boys were silent for a few moments, and then one of the boys spoke, "You don't know what it's like down our street, and the sort of lives we have to live. We've talked it over, sir, and we've decided that if we got converted like the others we couldn't keep it up. So you see, sir, we've decided not to be converted". The evangelist said he was completely nonplussed for a minute, but then he stretched out his hand and said to the leader, "Hold on to my hand, will you?". He put his fingers round the evangelist's wrist. "Now, don't let go." "No sir." "Promise you'll hold tight?" The boy nodded and gripped harder. The other boys watched with interest, wondering what would happen. "Now are you ready?" asked the evangelist. "Yes sir." The evangelist gave a sudden jerk and wrenched free. "Now, try again", said the evangelist. "You put out your hand this time." The boy did, and the evangelist put his big hand round the boy's all-too-skinny wrist and said to the boy, "Now, you get free". The boy pulled and twisted, losing his breath and going red in the face with the effort. He could not come unstuck. "But why not?" the evangelist asked, "we came apart the first time, now we're stuck; why is that?". "That's easy, sir; first time I had hold on you, now you've got hold on me." Said the evangelist, "That's just how it is if you come to Jesus. He is strong and He has you in His hand and says, 'None shall pluck them from my hand'". The four boys all accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord before they went home from that boys' camp, for they knew that Jesus was able to keep them, even on the street where they lived! (Story from "His Touch Has Still Its Ancient Power, Tom Rees, p. 77-78)

"When a little child is walking across a rocky riverbed with his father and the child loses his grip on the father's hand when he slips on the rocks, does the father lose his grip on the child's hand? Never! So, you, Heavenly Father, will hold onto me when I stumble and lose my grip!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I follow Christ, He has promised never to leave me nor forsake me. (Hebrews 13:5)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'WHAT IS MAN'S PROBLEM?'

1. Why has modern-day man sentimentalized God's love and denied God's wrath, and what have been some of the negative consequences of this attitude?

2. List four consequences in the life of the person who deliberately and habitually sins against God.

3. In an attempt to explain away the reality of Sin, what have some modern -day persons done?

4. List several of the humanistic philosophies that modern-day men have taken refuge in; in an attempt to explain away the seriousness of sin?

5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Christianity teaches that there are both real and false guilts, and that real guilt comes, not from acts which the individual would commit, but dares not (Freudian view), but from acts which he has committed, but wishes that he had not".

6. Note ways in which people today seek to conceal their real guilts, and list some of the negative consequences of concealing guilt.

7. What Scriptures can be cited to show that one's sins cannot be hid from God?

8. How do some guilt-ridden persons seek inadequately to deal with their guilt? What is the only adequate way to deal with real guilt?

9. Share examples from your own life or from your personal observations of others of how sin has resulted in alienation.

10. What evidence can you cite that shows that our present-day age is largely an age of despair and futility?

11. In what ways does Nature, and the Conscience, and the Ten Commandments, and the lives of righteous people all serve as standards by which ungodly men feel spiritually condemned?

12. List several Scriptural references that speak of the ultimate punishment of unrepentant persons in eternal hell. How can the place called "Hell" be described?.

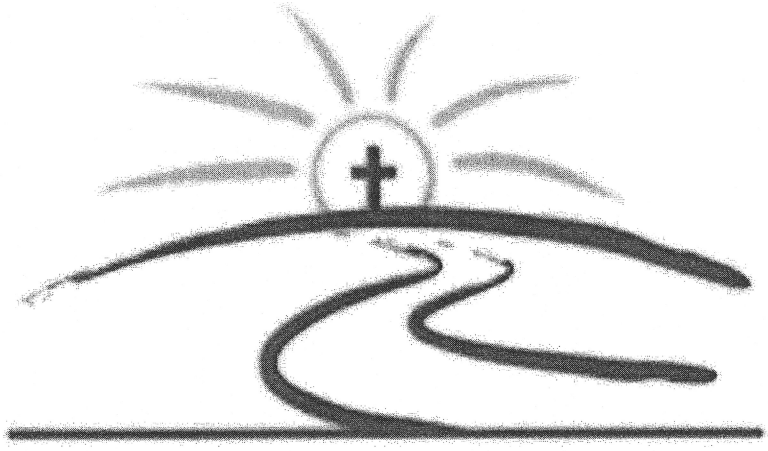
13. What response would you give to the person who has failed to know God because he feels that God is too big to be personally concerned in him?

14. What response would you give to the person who has failed to come to God because he feels that he is too sinful to come to God?

15. What is meant by religious 'conviction', and why do some people not allow conviction of sin to lead them to conversion to God?

16. What Scriptural comfort can you offer to a backslidden person who feels that his sins are too great for God to forgive? How did Jesus treat Peter when the latter failed so miserably, and how can the example of Peter serve to bring encouragement to people whose moral failures have been very great?

17. What response would you give to a person who fails to become a follower of Christ because he feels that he is too weak to live the Christian life?



Walk of Faith

CHAPTER 3

"HOW DO YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN?"

Joel 3:14-16, Jeremiah 29:11-13

STEPS IN COMING TO KNOW GOD

Notes E. Stanley Jones, "Setting up a saving relationship with Christ is not essentially different from setting up a warm human friendship. (1) The stage of drawing near. This is the tentative, explorative stage. You are not certain whether you want to give yourself inwardly to the other person. It is the stage of yes and no. (2) The stage when there is the inward decision to give yourself to the other person--the stage of decision. (3) You implement the decision--you actually make the inward surrender to the other person. (4) Having given to the other person, you are now free to take from that person. There is an exchange of selves--you belong to that person, and that person belongs to you. You are one.

There is the stage of drawing near. This is the explorative stage. This is the stage in which one has not decided to say Yes or No to God. Up until this time the person has been relatively unconcerned about God and the Church, but suddenly (or sometimes gradually) a new interest in religion and God is awakened within the person. He finds himself in the 'valley of decision'. It is not uncommon for a sense of loneliness or guilt to grip a person at this time.

A university student once called me and said something like this: "I am such-and-such. I was wondering what your church was like. I used to go to church, but I sort of drifted away. I guess I would call myself a cynic. I can't believe in the literalism of the Bible. For instance, the Tower of Babel. To think that all the languages of the world came from that! I just wondered if your church permits debate". In the very tone of this student's voice was the accent of questing and searching and hunger for Reality, and yet the student wanted to give the impression of courage, sophistication, and intellectualism.

Another came frightenly into my office to blurt out his guilt. He confessed that he was afraid he was responsible for causing his girl friend to become pregnant. Because he came from a good background he could not bear to face his parents. I turned to the Bible and prayed with him, and he found real peace with God. He later went to a Christian college, after marrying the girl. Today, he and his wife are happily married with several children.

A short time after my father's mother passed away, my father's brother and I were digging a pipe line. My uncle is a good-hearted man, but without religious knowledge or Christian experience. 'Out of the blue' he asked me, "What. . .what is the soul, and where does it go after a person dies?". My uncle was in this first stage--the stage of exploration and searching.

"You have promised that if I draw near to You, You will draw near to me. May my search end in glorious discovery!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God has been seeking me long before I began seeking Him. If I take one step toward Him, He will take a thousand steps toward me!

Joshua 24:11-15

MAKING THE DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST!

A woman called a pastor and said without preliminaries: "I'm a lost person and I've run smack into God. I want to talk with you". (E.S. Jones, Conversion, p. 207)

Once I spoke at length to a man who had shown considerable interest in spiritual matters. After I talked to him, I asked him if he understood. He replied, "I understand quite well". Then I asked him if he was ready to make his decision to follow Christ. He replied, "I want to give it some more thought". He was still at the first stage--the stage of drawing near. He was still counting the cost of following Christ. He was still weighing the various factors in the moral scales of decision. He wanted time to consider whether or not it was worth his effort and sacrifice to serve Christ.

The questions people ask today reveal their spiritual search: "What is man?" "What is the purpose of life?" "Where did I come from and where am I going?" "Is there a God, and if so, how can a person know God?" "What happens when I die?" "What is truth?"

Hopefully, these questions will lead many to pass from the first stage of drawing near to the second stage of decision-making. The second stage in the formation of a relationship is the stage of inward decision to give yourself to another person, in this case, to God. In the human-divine relationship there is no decision on God's part whether or not He is willing to receive you as His friend. God's arms are open, ready to receive all as His personal friends! God is actively seeking the friendship of man! It is "Whosoever will" with God! However, on man's part there must be an inner decision to give oneself to God. For many months a person may be debating whether or not to become a Christian. There may be a battle of the will that, on one hand, seeks to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, and on the other hand, seeks to care for the eternal soul. The point at which that battle of the will is over and the will has decided to follow God, is the point at which the first stage has passed to the second stage in the process of coming to know God. The second stage is the stage of inward decision. The person at this stage has resolved deep within himself to follow God, even if no other person knows of this decision at this time.

There may be a gradual progress to this point of decision, but when the decision is reached there is no doubt as to its reality. "The ugly larva in its cocoon spends months in almost unnoticable growth and change; but no matter how great that growth may be, there comes a moment when it passes through a crisis and emerges a butterfly. The weeks of silent growth are important, but they cannot take the place of that experience when the old and the ugly are left behind and the new and the beautiful come into being." (World Aflame, Billy Graham, p. 157)

"I see now that emotion is the feeling that accompanies the great decision, but the decision itself to follow Christ is an exercise of my will. Help me to choose once and for all to follow you!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I only have one freedom--the freedom to choose my master. I will choose to follow Christ as my Master!

Matthew 4:18-22, 10:32-39

IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST

The third stage in forming a relationship with a person is the stage of implementing the inward decision. That is, one actually makes the surrender of himself to another person. One who inwardly decides to follow God takes the necessary steps to make that decision real and visible. One who decides to give himself to God makes the giant turn of his life. He turns his back on his past and turns his present and his future over to God. This act of turning is the act of faith--faith that God forgives the past and faith that God will provide in the present and in the future. Someone said that the letters in the word 'Faith' stand for 'Forsaking All I Take Him'. Indeed so! Notes Alan Richardson on faith, "It is the act by which he lays hold on God's proffered resources, becomes obedient to what God prescribes, and abandoning all self-interest and self-reliance, trusts God completely".

Exercising faith in Christ as a result of inward decision to follow Christ, means giving one's self to Christ. "The one thing you ~~won~~ own and the only thing you ~~won~~ own is just yourself. It is the one and only thing you will take out of this world with you--you cannot take your money, your home or your loved ones, nothing but yourself. It is the only thing you own. Then you can decide to whom that self shall belong--to yourself? In which case you become a self-centered person, hence disrupted. To the herd? In which case you become an echo not a voice, a thing not a person, a nonentity. To money? In which case you become an insecure person with the insecurity of your money--you go up and down with it. To sex? In which case you become a sex-dominated person--a person of lust, hence disgust. Don't think that if you don't belong to Christ you are free. Nobody is free. We are free only to choose our own masters. It is Christ or something else, that will rule us. When you say deep down, 'I belong to Him', then you do." (Conversion, E.S. Jones, p. 191)

The fourth stage in a relationship is the stage of receiving from the other person. Having given oneself to Christ, now one has a right to receive all that Christ offers. Christ offers Himself as the Gift of gifts and when one has Christ, that person has all else that belongs to Christ, such as the gift of forgiveness (I John 1:9). To many people, forgiveness is the most beautiful word in the English language. Christ gives the gift of reconciliation in place of one's alienation (II Corinthians 5:18). Christ gives the gift of regeneration or new life in place of one's old life (II Corinthians 5:17). Christ gives the gift of adoption into the family of God (John 1:12), and also the gift of assurance of eternal life. (I John 5:11-12)

"Master of men, attune my inner ears to hear your call and give me faith to make an inner commitment to You. Let my inner commitment be outwardly expressed in my decisive following of You!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Whoever acknowledges Christ openly before men, will be openly acknowledged before the Father in heaven! I will not be a secret disciple!

Revelation 22:12-17

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

Notes C.S. Lewis, "The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start". (Mere Christanity, p. 57) By this, it is not meant that Christ's death automatically makes us right with God. That would be to exclude the subjective aspect of human appropriation of God's salvation. Preoccupation with the objective aspect of salvation--that is, Christ's work on the Cross--is to the exclusion of the subjective aspect of salvation--that is, man's appropriation of Christ's work--results in a form of universalism. The doctrine of universalism asserts that because Christ died for all men, therefore all men will ultimately be saved. But man must appropriate God's salvation.

In speaking of man's appropriation of God's salvation, it is important to distinguish between meeting conditions and earning salvation. As Stanley Walters says, "The conditions which lead into Christian conversion are necessary, but not meritorious. On one hand, you can do nothing to merit God's gift of salvation; on the other hand, God does not give it indiscriminately to everyone, but to those who want it and are willing to receive it".

For instance, a gift such as an inheritance may belong to you, but certain conditions must be met before you receive it. You did not earn the inheritance, but you must meet certain conditions to receive the inheritance. Man does not earn salvation or deserve salvation, but he must meet certain conditions to receive that salvation. It is not his automatically.

There are three conditions for salvation. There must be an awakening, which leads to genuine repentance and saving faith.

Stanley Walters notes that an awakening is a proper attitude toward yourself, repentance is a proper attitude toward your sin, and saving faith is a proper attitude toward your Redeemer. Notes Dr. Walters, "These conditions must coincide. When you meet them fully, you may be sure that God will act to justify you and make you a new creation. Confidence in God assures you of salvation (I John 1:9, 'he is faithful. . .'), although the Holy Spirit also gives assurance." (Romans 8:16)

We must carefully look at each of these three conditions for salvation. First, there must be an awakening. Before a person can be saved from sin he must acknowledge that he needs to be saved. Awakening is a collision with God, a recognition of personal, spiritual need. What causes a person who is preoccupied with worldly pursuits and pleasures to stop in his tracks and suddenly realize that he is traveling the wrong road of life? That is the awakening work of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:8)

"I cannot earn, purchase or deserve your salvation, O God, for your salvation is a gift to be received with gratitude. Help me to humble myself before you, as a little child before his father, in order that I might receive your gift."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Pride pays for a possession; humility accepts a free gift. God offers a gift! I will humble myself before the Giver!

Acts 24:10-27

"COLLISION WITH GOD"

Before a person can be saved, he must experience a spiritual awakening. He must confront God and recognize his own personal, spiritual need. This 'Collision with God' or inner awakening to personal need is the work of the Holy Spirit. "And when he has come he will convince the world of its sin, and of the availability of God's goodness, and of deliverance from judgement." (John 16:8, Living Bible)

Notes Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Though men decide not to believe in God and to put Him and His ways out of their lives, though they ignore all consequences and in a spirit of bravado decide to follow the other life, they do not therefore finish with God and truth at that point. The truth continues to remind them of its existence and to worry them. It does so most definitely, of course, in and through the conscience. It warns, it condemns, and it prohibits. The Truth is not static and lifeless. It is actually within us--there is 'the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world'. . .The truth follows us and worries us". (The Plight of Man and The Power of God, p. 51)

It is said that one of the thousands of listeners at a Billy Graham Crusade suddenly arose from his seat and became rather indignant, because he thought Billy Graham was preaching right at him specifically. He thought the evangelist was describing his own specific sins in the presence of the large crowd, and he was embarrassed and embittered. This man felt singled out because he was convicted and enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Coleridge said that he believed the Bible to be inspired because, as he put it, "It finds me". Mark Twain once said, "Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand".

It was the Holy Spirit who pricked the hearts of Peter's listeners on the Day of Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethern, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37) It was the Holy Spirit who awakened Felix to his spiritual need: "And as he (Felix) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix trembled". (Acts 24:25a)

God uses the Holy Scriptures to produce a spiritual awakening: "For the Word that God speaks is alive and active; it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword; it strikes through to the place where soul and spirit meet, to the innermost intimacies of a man's being; it exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man's heart. No creature has any cover from the sight of God; everything lies naked and exposed before the eyes of him with whom we have to do". (Hebrews 4:12-13, Phillips)

"I am naked and exposed before the eyes of Him with whom I have to do! But, God, you only reveal my sins in order to release me from my sins. You only expose my spiritual nakedness in order to clothe me with your righteousness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am not a sinner in general; I am a sinner in specific. Christ is not a Saviour in general; He is my Saviour in specific!

Luke 15:11-32

A MORAL U-TURN

After God awakens a person to his true spiritual condition, he must repent of his sins. What is repentance? To understand the meaning of repentance, we must first note some of the misconceptions regarding repentance.

Repentance does not mean self-improvement. Reformation is human endeavor; transformation is divine renewal. A person may attempt to reform a pig by cleaning him up and dressing him in clean clothes. However, until the nature of the pig is changed, the pig will go back into the mud puddle. Man's nature must be changed by God. Self-improvement is not sufficient. Man must be divinely transformed.

Repentance is not merely regret or remorse. Simply to feel sorrow about events in the past is not to change things in the present or the future. Regret and remorse are both involved in repentance, but repentance is more than regret and remorse. The mourner's bench is good, but one must do more than mourn at a mourner's bench. Combined with mourning must be a genuine change of the will and of the mind.

Repentance is "a moral u-turn. A change of mind toward sin, from one of embracing to one of separation". (Stanley Walters) Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death". (II Corinthians 7:9-10 RSV) Notes John Murray, "The change of heart and mind and will principally respect four things; it is a change of mind respecting God, respecting ourselves, respecting sin, and respecting righteousness". (Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 114)

The prodigal son is an example of true repentance. He changed his mind about sin. He saw the results of sin and came to despise his sinful way of life. He turned his back on his former way of life--he made a moral u-turn and went to his father. His repentance began with regret and remorse, but it ended up in action. Repentance is basically an action of the will--"I will go to my Father".

Repentance involves open confession of sin. Says Weatherhead, "Suppressed sin, like suppressed steam, is dangerous. Confession is the safety-valve". Said one psychiatrist who dealt with the disrupted of Hollywood at high fees, "All these patients of mine need is a mourner's bench".

"O God, allow my remorse over sin's consequences to turn to repentance over sin's commission. Help me to make a moral u-turn, to turn from my old life to Your new life! Through Jesus' power. Amen!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will no longer embrace sin, but I will embrace my Saviour! The Father is waiting for the prodigal to return home!

Luke 24:44-49

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

What is repentance? "Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor--is what Christians call repentance." (Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis, p. 59)

The Scriptures teach that repentance must be preached. Said Jesus, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem". (Luke 24:46-47)

Repentance is always the condition for healing and life. Repentance assumes that there is an honest recognition of sin in one's life. Sin is not simply breaking God's laws (10 Commandments), but sin is a breaking of God's heart! Sin is not only a violation of a law, but it is also the breaking of a relationship. To break laws is to break the heart of the lawgiver!

There can be no repentance without first recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of sin. There can be no treatment of a disease without diagnosis of the disease. There can be no healing without acknowledgement of the hurt. There is no conversion without conviction of sin. No treating of sin as a plaything, but as a serious problem.

Repentance is not only recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of sin, but repentance is also recognizing one's inability to save himself from the consequences of sin, in terms of both spiritual death and eternal death. The Bible talks about being "dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked". (Ephesians 2:1-2) Sin causes one to be dead to life's purpose and plan. Sin blinds one to the meaning of life. The consequences of sin is not only spiritual death, but also eternal death, which is separation from God forever.

To have a true spirit of repentance is to acknowledge ones personal helplessness; before one is ready to receive God's help, he must declare moral bankruptcy!

Next, repentance involves confession of sin to God. Confession means "agree with". One must agree with God's evaluation of sin and God's provision for sin. Repentance means rejecting man-made solutions for salvation, and acceptance of God's sole solution for salvation.

Repentance further involves a change of mind, from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of forsaking sin. Repentance also involves a change in actions, from a life of practicing sin to a life of practicing righteousness. Repentance does not mean, however, perfection in performance, but rather a new direction in life.

"O God, I turn my back upon my old way of life, and I turn my face towards Your beautiful face of love and mercy. I see Your outstretched arms, waiting for me. I accept Your wonderful forgiveness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I disagree with my former prideful attitudes of self-sufficiency, and I henceforth agree with God's grace-estimate of my moral condition.

Acts 3:17-26

OBSTACLES TO REPENTANCE

The Biblical message is the message of repentance. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19) Jesus said, "Unless you repent, ye shall all likewise perish". (Luke 13:3-5)

If repentance is so important according to Jesus, then why is it so hard for so many people to repent? One reason is that people have a wrong attitude toward sin.

There are many who will not repent because they deny the very existence of sin. Many call sinful actions or attitudes mere human weaknesses. Says Dr. Karl Menninger, "The word (sin) went away. It has almost disappeared--the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin? Congress voted some years ago to require the President to proclaim each year a national day of prayer, and Truman began it in 1952. The following year (1953) President Eisenhower made his first proclamation and in it he made a reference to SIN. He borrowed the words for his proclamation from a call issued in 1863, by Abraham Lincoln, the country's first Republican and most theological President:

> "It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in human sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon."

An article in Theology Today has this to say about Eisenhower's use of the word 'sin':

> "None of Eisenhower's subsequent calls to prayer mentioned sin again. The word was not compatible with the Commander-in-Chief's vision of a proud and confident people. . .Since 1953, no President has mentioned sin as a national failing." (Whatever Became of Sin, p. 14-15)

Another wrong attitude toward sin which makes it impossible to repent is that attitude expressed in these words: "I feel stupid asking God to forgive me for what I have done, for I know I will turn around and do it again". Those were the words of a young lady with whom I talked on the phone when taking a religious survey. She felt that sin was unavoidable and necessary, and to ask God to forgive her would be hypocritical! In her conversation she revealed to me three wrong attitudes toward sin which made repentance impossible for her. (1) She talked of her pleasures while sinning, failing to realize that there is only pleasure in sin 'for a season'. (2) She had no deep regret over the consequences of her sins, failing to see that whatever a person sows, that he shall morally reap. (3) She failed to see the terribleness of sin, that it was sin which crucified the most beautiful life in the universe to a cross.

"Help me, Saviour, to deny neither the reality nor the seriousness of sin! Help me decisively to forsake sin in all forms and at all times! Save me <u>from</u> my sins, not <u>in</u> my sins!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: In my life, the serpent-hissing word 'Sin' must confront the irresistibly powerful word 'Saviour'. When sin abounds, the Saviour super-abounds in my life! Glory!

Luke 9:57-62

HALF CONVERSION OR WHOLE CONVERSION?

There are, what might be called, half-conversions. That is, there are persons who are partly or temporarily changed in their behavior, but who have never really experienced a divinely-wrought transformation. Some people save face by substituting religious activities for genuine repentance. "It is doing religious acts in order to avoid an authentic return to God. It is not outright hypocrisy; it is not a deliberate outward show to convince others of religiousity. It is pirmarily an effort to convince oneself that he is right with God." (The Psychology of Christian Experience, Mavis, p. 13) Some substitute membership in a church or baptism or participation in the Lord's Supper or congregational confession for personal repentance. Writes E. Stanley Jones, "Many today are converted to phenomena surrounding Christianity, the music, the architecture, the ritual, the eloquence of the preacher, the standing it gives one in a community to be a member of the church, the keeping up of mores from generation to generation--it's the thing to do--and other such phenomena surrounding the Christian movement. But there is no vital saving contact with this saving Person. It's all secondhand and marginal. It lacks luster and vitality. It's an echo instead of a voice. They have not given themselves, so no transformed self emerges. . .Half the church members are converted to phenomena and not to Christ--arrested conversions". (How To Be A Transformed Person, p. 79)

Some are half-hearted in their repentance because of the pain of facing themselves honestly. Because repentance involves honest reflection upon one's sinful nature, repentance usually is discomforting to ones self image. It is easy to concentrate on ones good, but difficult to face the fact of ones sinful nature and sinful practices.

One who is half-hearted in his repentance is one who "seeks to make a compromised settlement of his life with God in which the Almighty receives certain areas for control while he himself retains others. . .He becomes Christian partially on the basis of a conditioned commitment. 'I will follow thee; but let me first go. . .'(Luke 9:61). . .The man with a divided heart loves God and he also resents Him. He esteems the eternal principles of righteousness, but he also has a practical regard for 'realism'. He seeks to belong to both the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world". (The Psychology of Christian Experience, Mavis, p. 16-17)

"The fear of the herd is the greatest single thing producing arrested conversions and a dead Christianity. Said a herd-bound soul to a released soul, 'Catherine, I admire your convictions, but why don't you have convictions like the rest of us?'. In other words, 'Why don't you be herd-centered instead of Christ-centered?'." (How To Be A Transformed Person, E.S. Jones, p. 81)

"Lord, don't allow me to substitute religious ritual for real repentance! Deliver me from my tendency to rationalize my sinful behavior. Help me to confess honestly and whole-heartedly!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: 'Realism' demands that I realistically face my sins, radically forsake my sins, and readily turn to my Saviour!

Ezekiel 33:7-16

IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

"It is upon the rock of halfwayness that most conversions go to pieces when they fail. We don't repudiate our faith; we reduce it to conformity with the crowd. The salt loses its savor, its destinctiveness, and for that reason is cast out and trodden under the feet of men. Men despise the people who are half-and-half, and God can't tolerate them either. . .if there is no outer difference between you and the world, depend on it, there is no inner difference." (How To Be A Transformed Person, E.S. Jones, p. 82)

God's call to His people in the Old Testamnet was repentance: "Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?". (Ezekiel 33:11)

The purpose for which Christ came (Luke 5:32), and the central message of the Gospel (Acts 3:19) is that men must repent and turn to God if they are to live. God's absolute requirement for salvation is repentance: "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent". (Acts 17:30b)

"The word (repent) orginally meant an 'afterthought', a second thought. Often a second thought shows that the first thought was wrong; and so the word came to mean 'a change of mind', but if a man is an honest man, a change of mind demands 'a change of action'. Repentance must involve both change of mind and change of action. A man may change his mind and come to see that his actions were wrong, but he may be so much in love with his old ways that he does not change his ways. A man may change his ways, but his mind may remain exactly the same. He may only change because of fear or because of prudential motives; his heart still loves the old ways and, if the chance comes, he will relapse into them. True repentance involves a change of mind and a change of action." (The Daily Study Bible, Acts, William Barclay, p. 24)

Remorse is mere sorrow because of the consequences of sin. Repentance is a godly sorrow over the sin itself, with a sincere desire to change ones life. "A Negro went to Alcoholics Anonymous, and when asked, 'So you want to get rid of drink!' replied, 'Not necessarily, I want to get rid of the thing it do'. He wanted a half-conversion with a whole result." (How To Be A Transformed Person, E.S. Jones, p. 79) True repentance means hating sin, accepting full moral responsibility for one's sinful actions, and turning completely to Christ for forgiveness and new life.

Repentance and faith must work together if true conversion is to result. Repentance is the proper attitude toward your sin, and faith is the proper attitude toward your Redeemer. Faith is putting yourself in the care of Christ who is able to change your life. Faith is a transfer of trust for salvation from yourself to Christ, who alone can save you!

"I change my mind about sin. I see now that the pleasures of sin last only for 'one season'. I change my direction in life. I see now that there is a way that seems right to men, but the end of that way is death!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Honesty demands that I must repent fully if I expect to be changed totally!

Matthew 3:1-12

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REPENTANCE

To become a Christian, one must be awakened to his true spiritual condition without Christ. Further, one must repent of his sins and exercise true saving faith.

Repentance and faith are two sides of one coin or two halves of one whole. Repentance should always be inseparably coupled with faith. Repentance is forsaking sin, and faith is turning to the Saviour. The moment one forsakes sin, he must turn to the Saviour, for sin can only loose its grip on one's life when one surrenders himself to the stronger hold of the Saviour!

One is saved by faith. Faith is a transfer of trust from one's self to one's Saviour. Saving faith is always accompanied by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin. Faith is a change of attitude toward the Saviour, from one of rejection to one of acceptance and surrender.

Says Wesley, concerning the relationship between repentance and the fruits of repentance: "God does undoubtedly command us both to repent, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; which if we willingly neglect, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all; therefore both repentance, and fruits meet for repentance, are in some sense, necessary to justification. But they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally; if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be justified without them, as was the thief upon the cross". (Wesley's Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 387)

If repentance is turning from sin, then faith is turning to God. Saving faith is "putting yourself in the care of One who can do something. It is a transfer of trust for salvation from self to Christ". (Stanley Walters)

Saving faith is more than a mere intellectual assent to the existence of God. James wrote, "You say that you believe that there is one God. Excellent! The demons also believe the same thing--and shudder in terror". (James 2:19, Barclay) The devil knows that Jesus is the Son of God, and even trembles on account of this belief, but the devil is still the devil!

Faith is the total commitment of one's total self to Christ. Faith is "not merely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart". (Wesley's Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 14)

Faith is throwing yourself upon God, like a drowning man throws himself upon the strength of the lifeguard. Only when one ceases to struggle and abandons himself to the Divine Lifeguard, is he saved.

"Help me to prove to You, O God, and to myself, and to others, that I have truly repented of my sins, by doing good deeds that befit repentance!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Turning from sin, I turn to the Saviour who, in turn, leads me to service. Conviction will lead me to conversion, sadness will lead me to gladness!

Romans 10:1-7

WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

Everyone has faith. One cannot live one day without exercising faith--faith that the driver you meet on the highway will stay on his side, faith that your employer will pay your salary at the end of the pay period, faith that your wife will not sprinkle posion on your food, faith that the sun will 'rise' in the morning, etc. Everyone has faith in someone or something. But the object of one's faith determines the value of one's faith.

The object of the sinner's faith must be Jesus Christ. Christ is perfectly trustworthy. "How did you like the airplane ride?" was asked of a nervous man who went up for the first time. "Very well," he replied, "but I never did put my whole weight down!" Faith means putting your whole weight down on God!

Says John Murray, "Faith is not the act of God; it is not God who believes in Christ for salvation; it is the sinner. It is by God's grace that a person is able to believe, but faith is an activity on the part of the person and of him alone. In faith we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation. . .Faith is a whole-souled movement of self-commitment to Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences". (Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 106-107)

Some say that it makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you are sincere. But one can be sincerely wrong! To place faith in an unreliable object (regardless of your sincerity) will result in a tragic outcome!

The Scriptures make it clear that one is saved by faith, not by his own works. Notes Wesley, "Indeed, strictly speaking, the convenant of grace doth not require us to do any thing at all, as absolutely and indispensably necessary, in order to our justification; but only to believe in Him, who, for the sake of his Son, and the propitiation which he hath made, 'justifieth the ungodly, that worketh not', and imputes his faith to him for righteousness". (Wesley's Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 55)

Faith is self-abandonment to God and rejection of all attempts at works of self-righteousness. There are some who feel they must improve themselves or their actions before coming to God. Some say, "I must first do this; I must first conquer every sin; break off every evil word and work, and do all good to all men; or I must first go to church, receive the Lord's supper, hear more sermons and say more prayers". (Wesley's Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 59)

"Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot, To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not waste God's gift of faith to me. I will exercise it repsonsibly, and as a result be saved decisively! Because the object of my faith is Christ, the value of my faith is incalcuable!

Isaiah 64:6, Ephesians 2:1-10

HOW IS MAN SAVED?

How is man saved? "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, NASB)

Says Wesley, "If thou couldest now do all things well, if from this very hour, till thy soul should return to God, thou couldest perfom perfect, uninterrupted obedience, even this would not atone for what is past . . .But suppose perfect obedience, for the time to come, could atone for the sins that are past, this would profit thee nothing; for thou art not able to perform it; no, not in any one point". (Wesley's Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 66)

The one who attempts to bargain with God and who feels that he can keep his side of the contract, soon learns how weak and corrupted he really is. He who attempts to practice the Christian virtues on his own strength, will end the experiment in despair. True faith involves a recognition of man's weak and sinful creatureship, and a resulting total dependance upon the all-together Holy Creator. "If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what it is really like. It is like a small child going to its father and saying, 'Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present'. Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child's present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction." (Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis, p. 125) Faith means that man cannot earn God's favor by giving God a gift. Faith is rather total abandonment to God in love, realizing that God is the total owner of all and that man is the grateful recipient of all.

John Murray says that faith is three things--knowledge, conviction, and trust. Before one puts faith in anything, he must have confidence in the character of the thing. "We must know who Christ is, what he has done, and what he is able to do. Otherwise, faith would be blind conjecture at the best and foolist mockery at the worst." (Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 110) We must not only know the facts about Christ, but we must truly believe the facts to be true. We must not only intellectually know the facts about the Cross, but we must volitionally commit ourselves to those facts. If we have a strong conviction that the facts are true, then we will commit our total being to Christ. It is only when this last step is taken--the step of full commitment--that we have exercised the kind of faith that saves from sin and saves for heaven! We have come to rely upon Christ alone for salvation!

"O Christ, you are together trustworthy in your character, and faithful to your promises. Abandoning all hope for salvation in myself, I cast myself helplessly and hopefully into your mighty arms!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I make a 'leap of faith', I am not leaping into the dark, but into the light of God's everlasting love!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'HOW DO YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN?'

1. What are four stages that one must take in order to establish a warm human relationship, and how are each of these four stages like the stages that one takes in establishing a meaningful relationship with God?

2. Relating to one's quest for God, what is meant by the phrase "valley of decision"? What are some of the characteristics of persons who are in the "valley of decision"?

3. What does it mean "to count the cost" to determine if one wishes to follow Christ?

4. In your own personal life, what are some of the factors that influenced you (or that are now influencing you) to make a decision to follow Christ?

5. What is your definition of "Saving Faith"? How is one's inner decision to follow Christ outwardly manifested and demonstrated?

6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Don't think that if you don't belong to Christ you are free. Nobody is free. We are free only to choose our own masters. It is Christ or something else, that will rule us".

7. When one gives himself to Christ in total surrender, what are some of the gifts and benefits that one receives from Christ?

8. What does the doctrine of universalism teach regarding salvation? What is the proper relationship between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' aspects in salvation?

9. List the three conditions that a sinner must meet in order to be converted.

10. How would you describe 'awakening' in a sinner's life, and who is the Agent of 'awakening'?

11. What are some of the misconceptions regarding repentance? What are the characteristics of true repentance? According to John Murray, repentance involves a change of mind in what four areas? Why is the Prodigal Son (as seen in Jesus' parable) such a good example of true repentance?

12. What is the relationship between repentance and confession of sin?

13. List and describe some of the various obstacles to true repentance.

14. Cite examples of people whom you have known or have observed who have denied the very existence of sin. What rationalizations have these people engaged in, to explain away sin?

15. What is generally the motivation of people who substitute religious activities for genuine repentance?

16. Name some of the 'phenomena' to which people are converted as substitutes for being converted to Christ.

17. What are some other reasons why some people have stopped short of experiencing genuine repentance?

18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "'Realism' demands that I realistically face my sins, radically forsake my sins, and readily turn to my Saviour!"

19. What are the outward evidences of an inward work of God's grace in a person's life, as a result of genuine repentance?

20. Cite Scriptural references to support the assertion that there can be no conversion without the exercise of genuine repentance.

21. Does true repentance involve both a change of mind and a change of actions? Why or why not?

22. What is the difference between repentance and remorse?

23. What is the relationship between faith and repentance?

24. Is "Saving Faith" more than an intellectual assent to the basic truths of Christianity (James 2:19)?

25. Explain what is meant by the statement: "The object of one's faith determines the value of one's faith".

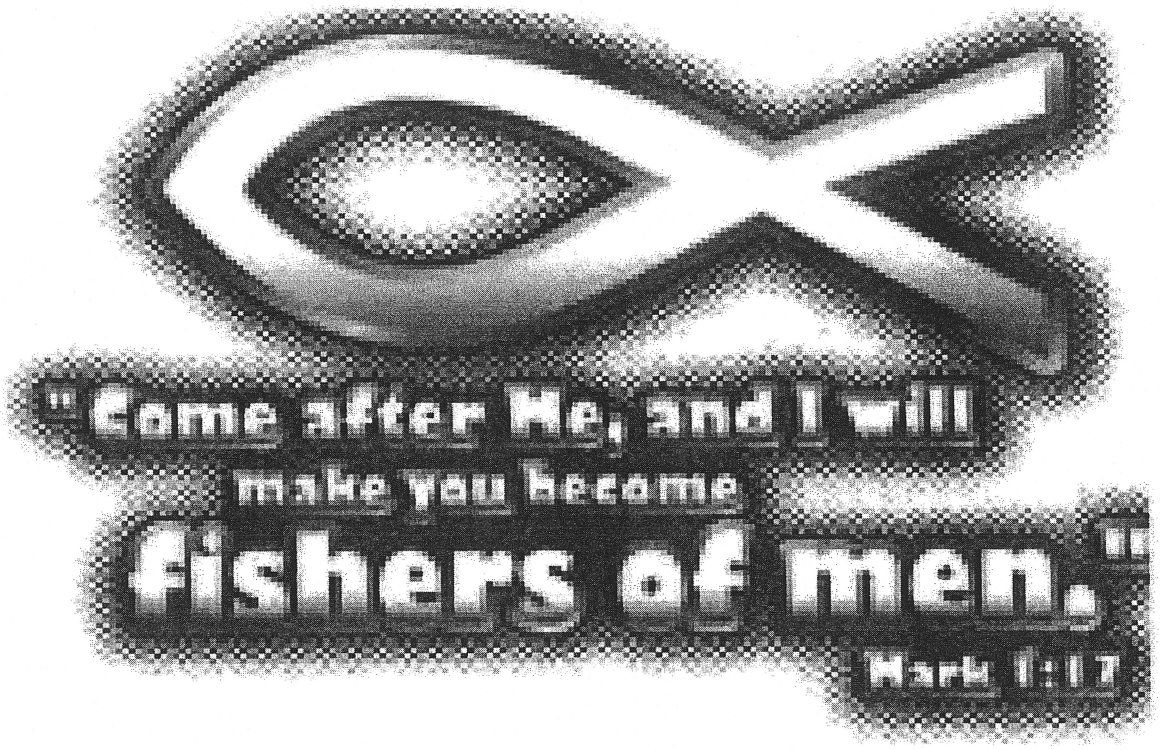
26. Describe some of the indispensible characteristics of "Saving Faith".

27. Do you believe that the following is an adequate definition of "Saving Faith": "Faith is a whole-souled movement of self-commitment to Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences".

28. What is the relationship between faith and good works as these relate to conditions for salvation and evidence of salvation?

29. Is there anything that man can do to earn, purchase or deserve God's salvation? Why or why not?

30. What three things, according to John Murray, are involved in experiencing true saving faith? Show the interrelationships between these three things.



CHAPTER 4

"WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?"

II Corinthians 5:17-21

JUSTIFICATION--'JUST AS IF I HAD NEVER SINNED!'

What happens when I become a Christian? This is the question we must try to answer. Among the words that described God's salvation of man, two words are prominent: Justification and Regeneration. These are the gifts of God given to the sinner who exercises saving faith in Christ. Each is given simultaneously, but each describes a definite aspect of Christ's saving work. We must spend a few days looking at these two great words.

Someone said that when God justifies the sinner, He treats the sinner just as if he had never sinned! Justification is a legal concept, concerned with the legal status of the believer. The great frequency with which the Scriptures discuss justification, show that the Scriptures put great emphasis upon the idea of 'Law'.

'Justify' in the New Testament sense of the word does not mean to prove a person righteous, but rather it means to treat, to account or to reckon a person as righteous. Justification in the New Testament means "to acquit" or "to pronounce just or righteous". There are four things which can be said about Justification.

First, in considering justification, it is important to realize the seriousness and sacredness of God's Law. God requires that man should live in accordance with His Law. "Moreover, it is part of the very nature of law as we know it that it attaches penalties to the breaking of the law, and in this respect the scriptural law is no exception. Again and again we are told that God views the breaking of the law with the gravest displeasure, that His wrath is extended towards the sinner, and that none can expect immunity, for there is no respect of persons with Him." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, Leon Mooris, p. 294)

Second, God must honor His holy nature, and therefore cannot automatically and unconditionally pronounce forgiveness to all men. As P.T. Forsyth so well says, "God could not trifle with His own holiness. He could will nothing against His holy nature, and He could not abolish the judgement bound up with it. Nothing in the compass of the divine nature could enable Him to abolish a moral law, the law of holiness. That would be tampering with His own soul. It had to be dealt with. Is the law of God more loose than the law of society? Can it be taken liberties with, played with, and put aside at the impulse even of love? How little we should come to think of God's love if that were possible. . .God's holy law is His own holy nature. His love is under the condition of eternal respect. It is quite unchangeable". (Ibid, p. 294)

"O God, how can you treat me as a child to be loved when I deserve to be treated as a criminal to be obliterated? How can you save me, a sinner, and at the same time honor Your own holiness? Only one way! If You, O God, take upon yourself the punishment that a criminal and a sinner deserve! Only the perfectly just can justify the totally unjust!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God respected His justice enough to punish sin, in the person of His exalted Son. God loved His mercy enough to forgive sin, in the persons of His fallen sons! I am perfectly accepted in the perfectly acceptable One!

Romans 3:24-28, 4:5

GOD CAN DECLARE MAN RIGHTEOUS!

We are trying to understand the meaning of Justification. Third, Jesus suffered for man's sin and in turn gave man a borrowed righteousness. The substitutionary death of Christ must be taken account of, if we are properly to understand the true significance and possibility of justification. God takes into account that Christ suffered for man's sin and thus, God is able to forgive mankind of its own sin. Yet, because of Christ's substitutionary death, God is able to honor His own law of holiness. God's law must be vindicated; sin must be punished. Christ took the punishment of sin and thus the demands of God's law were satisfied. In fact, because Christ has died for man's sins, God must forgive man. God acts righteously or justly in that He honors the substitutionary death of Christ, and dealing righteously, God is therefore obligated to forgive man. God forgives and yet He maintains the integrity of His character, simply because God, as a righteous Judge, cannot overlook the work of His Son on Calvary. "Even (God's) act of forgiveness which might be thought of as an act of mercy is seen to be also an act of righteousness." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, Leon Mooris, p. 273)

At the same time that God, for Christ's sake, forgives man's sins, Christ bestows upon man a borrowed righteousness. The borrowed righteousness which man enjoys is given to man by God, and is the basis of man's justification. The righteousness which man enjoys must be appropriated by faith. It is not the faith itself (the activity of man) which justifies man; it is Christ's borrowed righteousness (the activity and gift of God) that is the basis of man's justification. God looks upon the borrowed righteousness, and acquits man and judges him as righteous. God is just in justifying a sinner, on the basis of God's acceptance of Christ's atonement which makes it possible for man to enjoy a borrowed righteousness.

Fourth, the work of Christ's atonement enables God to declare man as righteous. God can declare man as righteous because God constitutes man as righteous by giving to man the righteousness of Christ. "God treats the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all. . .That means that to be justified is to enter into a new relationship with God, a relationship of love and confidence and friendship, instead of a relationship of distance and enmity and fear. . .He is not in this right relationship because he has meticulously performed the works of the law. He is in it because in utter faith he has cast himself on this amazing mercy and love of God." (The Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 13-14)

"What a sense of relief to know that I need not prove myself righteous (which I can't because of my sinful life), but that you treat me as righteous (which you can because of Christ's righteous death)! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: By placing faith in Christ, I become hid in Christ, and as a result, God no longer looks at my sinful life, but at Christ's perfect life. By becoming hid in Christ, I am found in God!

Ephesians 1:1-7, I John 3:1-3

"A WHITE RAG ON EVERY LIMB OF THE TREE!"

We have said that when God justifies a sinner, He treats him as if he had never sinned! God is able to declare the sinner as righteous, not because the sinner is at all righteous, but because Christ is righteous and the sinner, who puts faith in Christ, is hid in Christ. We are accepted in God's beloved Son.

"At the court of kings there was an official called the prosagogeus, the introducer, the giver of access, and it was his function to decide who should be admitted to the king's presence, and who should be kept out. He, as it were, held the keys of access. That is to say, it is Jesus Christ, through what He did, who brings men into the presence of God, who gives them access to God, who opens the way to God." (The Daily Study Bible, Peter, William Barclay, p. 278)

"A minister was on a train, the only occupant of the coach except a young man who seemed very ill at ease. The young man would sit in one seat and then get up and go to another, take up a book and drop it again. The minister went over to him, sat down beside him, and asked what was the matter. The boy shut up like a clam. But at last the dam broke, and he told his story: 'I've run away from home, and I've been away a long time. I've wanted to go back, and I wrote my father asking if he would take me back. But there has been no reply. So I have written my mother and told her that I am not going to wait for a reply, that I am coming home, and that If they will take me back she must hang a white rag on the crab-apple tree, down near the railroad tracks, so that I can see it when the train goes by. If I do not see the white rag, I shall understand and go on by. We are getting near and I am afraid to look--afraid the white rag won't be there'. The minister told the lad that he needn't look, that he would look for him. The boy sat with his eyes closed, the hand of the minister on his knee. As they drew near to where the tree was, the hand of the minster closed tight on the boy's knee, and he said, 'My boy, there is a white rag on every limb of that tree!'."

The Cross upon which Jesus died is covered, as it were, with white rags --the rags of reconciliation. God accepts us as friends, not as enemies, because of what Christ has done on the Cross. "And you yourselves, who were strangers to God, and in fact, through the evil things you had done, his spiritual enemies, he has now reconciled through the death of his body on the cross, so that he might welcome you to his presence clean and pure, without blame or reproach." (Colossians 1:21-22, Phillips)

"I come to you, most holy God, with no confidence in my own righteousness, but with full confidence in the Christ of the empty cross!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I can come boldly into the presence of God for I carry on my heart the blood of the reconciling Saviour!

Romans 8:8-17

REGENERATION--A SENSE OF NEWNESS

What is the difference between justification and regeneration? Justification refers to a Christian's changed status with God. Regeneration refers to a Christian's changed nature. "Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgement of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does--he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. If we are innocent he declares accordingly." (Redemption Accomplished and Applied, John Murray, p. 121)

When a person receives Christ into his life, he is made a new person. Regeneration means a sense of newness, and while the actual word is seldom used in the New Testament to denote personal salvation, the concept is implied by a variety of terms and metaphors in the New Testament. Let us look at some of those metaphors, all of which denote newness of life or regeneration.

Becoming a Christian is like passing from darkness to light. Paul received a commission from God to turn men "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins". (Acts 26:18 RSV) One college girl expressed her experience of Christ in these words: "I felt that I had swallowed sunshine!".

Becoming a Christian is like freedom from slavery. Wrote Paul, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship". (Romans 8:15) Wrote one man after he found Christ, "He lifted me out of the dungeon. . .I was truly free".

Becoming a Christian is like passing from death to life or like experiencing a resurrection unto life. Wrote Paul, "But God is so rich in mercy; He loved us so much that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins, He gave us back our lives again when He raised Christ from the dead--only by His undeserved favor have we ever been saved--and lifted us up from the grave into glory along with Christ, where we sit with Him in the heavenly realms--all because of what Christ Jesus did". (Ephesians 2:4-6) "You see how your old, evil nature died with Him and was buried with Him; and then you came up out of death with Him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God who raised Christ from the dead." (Colossians 2:12, Living Bible)

Justification establishes a person in a right relationship with God and regeneration gives an inward newness of life to the sinner. Both are the gifts of God and are simultaneously given when man exercises saving faith in Christ. Have you exercised saving faith in Christ? Are you enjoying these wonderful gifts of God? If not, why not?

"O God, give me light for my darkness, freedom for my slavery, hope for my despair, life for my death! Make me a new creation in Christ Jesus!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is not calling me to be a better person; He is calling me to be a new person! God's grace alone can make me new!

II Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:21-24

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A COMPLETELY NEW LIFE!

We are looking at those metaphors which describe God's gift of regeneration.

Becoming a Christian is called a New Birth. "Thank God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in his great mercy we men have been born again in a life full of hope, through Christ's rising again from the dead!" (I Peter 1:3, Phillips) "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." (I Peter 1:23 RSV) Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except one be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". (John 3:5) 'Water' refers to the purification from sinful pollution, and 'Spirit' refers to inner newness of life brought about by the activity of the Holy Spirit. New Testament teaching has its counterpart in the Old Testament: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh". (Ezekiel 36:25-26)

Becoming a Christian is called a New Creation. "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (II Corinthians 5:17 RSV) (See Ephesians 4:21-24 in the Living Bible.)

Becoming a Christian means becoming qualitatively different--becoming a real person. Says Maurice Bernett, "The basic concept is that the Christian life is a completely new life. It is as different from anything that went before as is the life of man from the life of a sponge. Our modern tendency has been to stress the fact that when a man becomes a Christian it need not make so very much difference, especially in our 'decent society'. We have presumed that because a fellow lives in a society that is flavoured with certain Christian ideals he is therefore a Christian, for after all he exhibits certain Christian tendencies. How utterly absurd. As though my liking for Chinese food makes me into a Chinaman. . .It is vitally important to announce this for. . .there are those who do not think there is much difference in these days between the decent, likeable pagan and the Christian. They should mark the difference as the New Testament writers saw it. The easiest thing to do is to dismiss the New Testament metaphors as exaggerations. The fact of the matter is we have never really discovered what is being offered. We have been content with a sham, a farce, a fake, watering down our Christianity and being content with an anemic substitute. Thus we know about Christianity, we sing about it, but plod along with religious burden often unchanged and uninfluenced, miserable because of the unreality of our dreams".

"God, give me the 'vision which transforms'--the vision of your holiness in contrast to my sinfulness, and the vision of your transforming power in contrast to my moral impotence."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will allow my potential to be determined by the possibilities of divine Grace, not by the limitations of human sinfulness!

Titus 3:3-8

"I FELT CLEAN INSIDE"

Out of large numbers of converts who were saved at a Billy Graham Crusade, about 2000 of these converts were asked to tell what happened when they became a Christian. The following five statements were more often given as answers to what happened when they were converted than any other answers:

First, "I felt clean inside". Sin blackens the soul morally, but Christ comes to the soul of the repentant one to cleanse from the guilt and pollution of sin. "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Paul wrote to Titus, "Then He saved us--not because we were good enough to be saved, but because of His kindness and pity--by washing away our sins and giving us the new joy of the indwelling Holy Spirit". (Living Bible)

"A woman who had gone through the mazes of psychiatrical analysis and had been left rather picked to pieces without a synthesis, experienced this change and described it this way: 'I feel all clean within. All the old hymns about cleansing which I had laid aside as outworn superstition have come back. I find myself singing them again'." (Abundant Living, E.S. Jones, p. 35)

Second, "I found peace of mind". Sin causes man to be at enmity with God. Christ has come to speak peace to the restless soul of man. Augustine talked about "our hearts being restless till they rest in Thee". Baron von Hugel has put it this way: "The passion and hunger for God come from God, and God answers it with Christ".

One lonely man in a hotel who was getting ready to pull the trigger of a gun to blow his brains out, reached for a radio dial and the speaker said, "Put down that gun! That is no solution for your problems". The man was shocked into reality and fell on his knees before God and found peace for his troubled soul.

One tragic result of sin is that it drives man from God into hiding. Christ has come to reconcile man to himself--to make peace with man. In one of his books, Barclay recalls the story of an architect who came to Plato and offered for a certain sum of money to build him a house into which none of the rooms would it be possible to see. Plato said, "I will give you double the money to build a house into every room of which everyone can see". (The Daily Study Bible, John, William Barclay, Vol. 1, p. 131) The peaceful mind is the transparent and integrated mind--transparent to all because it is cleansed by Christ's blood!

Paul's favorite title for God is the God of Peace. Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of everything that makes for a man's highest good!

"God of peace, impart peace to my troubled mind. God of holiness, impart cleansing to my polluted soul. God of love, shed abroad your love in my loveless heart! God of the New, make me a new creation! Thank you. A thousand times, thank you!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My passion for God is created by God and is satisfied with God!

Acts 26:1-20

"I AM EASIER TO LIVE WITH"

Third, "I was able to overcome vicious habits". One of the tragic characteristics of sin is that one sin leads to more sins. A practice which may appear relatively harmless can lead to a vicious habit. Sin makes a man a slave to its harsh tyranny. Christ has come to break the power of sin and to set the captive free! Christ enables a man to overcome a vicious habit!

"In London, England," writes Billy Graham, "an alcoholic was placed under the care of a psychiatrist who soon gave up because the alcoholic was getting no better. During our meetings at the Harringay Arena, the alcoholic was invited to attend. He listened in wonderment to the Gospel messages. 'Maybe there is some hope for me', he thought. One night when the invitation was given, he went forward with several others. He was converted, and new power came into his life. That night before he went to sleep, he reached as usual for the nearby bottle of liquor; but something--or rather, Someone--restrained his hand. Getting out of bed, he took the bottle and emptied it down the drain. When he awakened in the morning, through habit he reached again for his usual morning bracer. It was not there, but there was no sense of disappointment. The man called his psychiatrist and said, 'You have lost a patient. Christ has saved me from drink. I am now a new man'. The psychiatrist said: 'That sounds fine. Maybe I can find help where you found it. I am not an alcoholic, but I have my own needs and problems'. The psychiatrist began, too, to attend the meetings and he, too, accepted Christ as his Saviour." (World Aflame, p. 145-146)

Fourth, "I am easier to live with". One of the tragic results of sin is that sin not only makes the life of the transgressor miserable, but sin also makes the lives of those who are intimately associated with the transgressor miserable. The fruits of sin are hatred, fighting, jealsousy, anger, complaints, criticisms, and selfishness which is the "constant effort to get the best for yourself". (Galatians 5:20, Living Bible) Christ has come to replace these evil traits with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These God-given qualities make a person much easier to live with. Christ has come to make a person winsome and gracious, He has come to build strong and lasting relationships.

"The biggest grouch of a certain city called up a friend over the long distance telephone and said, 'Everybody is changed in _____ after that meeting in the high school with Stanley Jones last night. Everybody is different this morning. Of course, it may be that only I am different, but everybody seems different'." (Abundant Living, E.S. Jones, p. 35)

"O God, because I am powerless to break my unholy habits, I come to you for deliverance from sin's power. Heal my will that I may develop holy habits! In Jesus' powerful name!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The way of the transgressor is hard, for Man is not made to transgress! I am made for holy living!

Isaiah 61:1-3, I Peter 1:8

"I AM HAPPY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE"

Fifth, "I am happy for the first time in my life". Sin brings misery and despair. "The way of transgressors is hard." (Proverbs 13:15b) Christ has come to give real joy and happiness to man. Jesus said to his disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full". (John 15:11)

Christ has come to the human race to change the long face and to remove the depressed outlook on life. Christ has come to give us Life--Abundant Life! One man called a Negro man to a train window and said, "Uncle, is there anybody in this town enjoying religion?". The old Negro replied, "Them's that's got it is". (Abundant Living, E.S. Jones, p. 35) Those who genuinely have Christ have genuine joy! "Whosoever trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." (Proverbs 16:20b)

"In the third century, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to his friend Donatus: 'It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people Donatus, are Christians. . .and I am one of them'." (Quoted in World Aflame, Billy Graham, p. 139)

Once when I was travelling to an annual Bible Camp meeting, I visited with a man--a simple and uneducated man--who was all aglow with the joy of God. This man told me of his former and miserable life of drunkenness. His wife had left him and he went through several struggles. But God had transformed him and his testimony rang with certainty and joy. He bubbled over with enthusiasm as we rode together to camp. The joy and happiness that he found in Christ was indescribable. He was experiencing the joy of the Lord--joy that was 'unspeakable and full of glory'!

The joy that Christ gives is not dependent upon one's external circumstances. A young woman who became a Christian, lost her husband in an accident, and yet this did not rob her of her joy. Writing about a spiritually needy friend, she said, "I do wish I could share all the joy in my heart with her. She deserves it, and I have enough for ten people!". (Prayer and Life's Highest, Paul Rees, p. 79)

In the journal of a young convert of thirteen were found these words: "Oh, that I had a voice that would reach all the world. I would tell them how happy I am". (Living In Two Worlds, Mary Alice Tenney, p. 72)

"O God, your holiness is my happiness, your presence is my power, your glory is my goal! When your smile of approval rests upon me, I laugh with a holy joy!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God wills that I be truly happy; therefore, I will "rejoice evermore with joy unspeakable".

Ephesians 1:1-14

MOUNTAIN PEAKS OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Have you ever got so excited about something as you were relating your experience to someone else, that your mind got ahead of your tongue? There was so much to tell and you could not find the words to communicate your excitement!

That is what often happened to the apostle Paul. Paul was so full of Christ and the riches of Christ that he could not contain himself. Paul's letters to the Churches were love letters to dear friends. Paul was so enraptured with the riches of spiritual blessings that, in his attempt to communicate these blessings, he piled descriptive phrase upon descriptive phrase. From verse 3 through verse 14 of Ephesians 1, there is no period in the original Greek language. It is one sentence! Paul's mind races from one spiritual truth to another, as he becomes lost in 'Wonder, love, and praise'. It is not a logical statement, but a lyrical song of praise.

During the next few days I would like for us to imagine that we are aboard a spiritual airplane. There is a mighty range of spiritual mountains, with towering mountain peaks of various heights to look upon as we fly above the range. Just as a plane flies quickly over a number of mountain peaks in a relatively short time, so I would like for us to get an airplane view of some of the great mountain peaks of spiritual blessing which Paul puts before our view in Ephesians, chapter one.

To glance at the mountain peaks of spiritual blessings is to break out into a shout with Paul, and declare: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places". (verse 3)

As we 'fly' above the mountain peaks of spiritual blessings, get all excited about your spiritual heritage as a believer!

During the next few days, we will learn anew how blessed it is to be God's people. How does Ephesians One describe God's people? They are (1) Chosen People, (2) Destined People, (3) Redeemed People, (4) Forgiven People, (5) Enlightened People, (6) Enlivened People, (7) Hopeful People, (8) Empowered People.

As one who has repented of your sins and transferred your faith from yourself to Jesus Christ as your saviour, you have a right to claim your spiritual heritage! Your aspirations toward effective living are fulfilled through the 'working of God's great might'. You are a child of the King, so learn to enjoy your privileges of royalty!

"O God, open my eyes that I may see the unspeakably wonderful blessings which you wish to share with me! I am rich in Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The bitter experience of repentance leads me to the blessed experience of enjoying heavenly blessings!

Ephesians 1:3-4

CHOSEN TO BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS!

Writes Paul, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him". (Ephesians 1:3-4) Wonder of it all is that God would choose sinful man! The Infinite choosing of the finite; the all-powerful choosing the very weak! The righteous choosing the sinful! God took the initiative to choose to save humanity. Said Jesus, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you". (John 15:16)

It has been said, "Many are called but few are chosen, because few are choice". That is, God chose to save the entire human race, but only those who accept God's universal offer of salvation, become members of the choice (or elect) group.

We are chosen to be 'holy'. Chosen for the purpose of separation from the world's values and standards. Believers are to stand out as different --with values of God controlling their behavior. This means that, as believers, we are never to look at people as means to our own selfish ends. We are never to look at people as things to be used, but instead as eternal beings to be served. The 'thingification' of persons is always the tragic result in a society that considers gadgets more important than God! Christians are chosen by God to restore compassion to relationships and value to persons! As God's chosen people, we are not chosen to be separated from sinners, but instead, separated from sin.

A chosen people must be a 'select' people, that is, a 'blameless' people. This term refers to the Old Testament animal sacrifice which could only be offered to God if no blemishes were found in it. The animal must be perfectly formed and healthy before it could be used to offer to God. The offering of our lives--be it our home life, our personal life, our recreational life or our work life--must be the best possible. A chosen person must be a person who is willing to undergo the very scrutiny of God! Perfection in love and blamelessness in behavior is the high goal of Chosen People. It is a great blessing to be a chosen person, but with that privilege comes a great responsibility to be holy and blameless.

So the first description of a Christian's spiritual heritage is given in Ephesians 1:3-4. A Christian is a chosen person. Not only chosen, but also destined (verses 5-6). To this we must next turn.

"O God, like you, enable me to be separate from sin, but never separated from sinners. I cannot be faultless in behavior, but enable me to be blameless in love. For Jesus' sake! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The God who chooses me to be holy will cleanse me to live a holy life!

Ephesians 1:5-7

DESTINED TO BE SONS!

Secondly, Christians are Destined People. "He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:5-6) Even before the foundation of the world, God determined to adopt us as His children! The mark of God's ownership is stamped deeply on the soul of every person! God claims the right to be our Father, and we as His children! God has destined us to be sons, not slaves! To be called children of God is to be called the objects of God's special care, love, and attention! David asked in wonderment, "What is man that thou art even mindful of him, O God?". But we can ask with equal wonderment, "What is man that thou, O God, art willing to make him a son of the living God, through special adoption? Through that adoption, our sins are cancelled out and we are made a part of God's wonderful family!

Third, Christians are Redeemed People. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. (Ephesians 1:7-8) The meaning of redemption is 'to loose'. Man is in bondage to sin by reason of his own sinful nature and by reason of his own willful choice. Man is unable to free himself from the terrible bondage of sin. The man without Christ feels like crying out, "Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in! Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature?" (Romans 7:24) It is Christ's death that loosed men from the bondage to sin. Christ's death appeased the wrath of God, and at the same time, demonstrated the love of God for sinners. Christ's resurrection revealed God's power--a power so great that sin's chains could be broken! Christ's death was the substitutionary price of redemption, and Christ's resurrection was the availing power to set the sinner free!

Fourth, Christians are Forgiven People. "We have forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us." Guilt drains away vitality, causes mental and physical distress, marks the face, and scars the soul. Shakespeare described the terrible plague of a guilty conscience:

> "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villian."

But "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath God removed our transgressions from us".

"Dare to believe that I am a redeemed and forgiven soul, a soul whose sins are buried in the sea of God's forgetfulness, never to be remembered against me again! In Christ, my dreams become realities! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Loosed from the chains of sin, I shall forever be chained to the heart of God!

Ephesians 1:9-12

ENLIGHTENED AND ENLIVENED PEOPLE

Fifth, Christians are Enlightened People. "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Ephesians 1:9-10) The mystery or secret of God has been gloriously revealed to Christians. What is that secret? Very simply, yet profoundly, the secret is this: All of nature and all of humanity will be unified and redeemed in Christ! God is sovereign and He will make even the wrath of men to praise Him! Evil will not triumph! Rather, good and justice will have the final word! Right will be rewarded; evil will be punished! The godly will be saved; the ungodly shall perish! God both wills and desires that all men come to repentance, but those who won't repent will be punished. All of nature and all of mankind will either willingly or unwillingly bow the knee to Christ and proclaim that He is Lord of lords!

"In olden times God did not share this plan with his people, but now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his apostles and prophets. And this is the secret: that the Gentiles will have their full share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's sons; both are invited to belong to his church, and all of God's promises of mighty blessings through Christ apply to them both when they accept the Good News about Christ and what He has done for them." (Ephesians 3:6, Living Bible)

Sixth, Christians are Enlivened People. "In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:11-12) The life that is fitting into God's master plan for history is the life that brings praise and honor and glory to the Saviour. What is God's master plan for history? To bring all things and all people into unity and fellowship around the feet of Jesus! Enlivened people are reconciling people. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." Christian people should, of all people, be the most alive, for they are people of destiny, purpose. They know where history is going! "Stanley Jones said the awful events of earth did not disturb him because he knew 'how it will all come out'. Yes, of course. This is the secret of serenity in our work. The geniune Christian, in his depths, is not at sixes and sevens, for he knows that history has a goal divinely determined and that, whatever happens, Almighty God is moving redemptively to that great and grand goal." (The Minister's Ministries, Don Demaray, p. 20)

"O God, your perfect will is to save all humanity in Christ! Your permissive will is to allow those who reject Christ to live a Christless eternity! What you perfectly will--my total salvation--help me perfectly to realize! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's revealed plan gives me power to realize life's purpose--to be united in Christ!

Ephesians 1:13-23

EMPOWERED BY THE POWERFUL HOLY SPIRIT!

Seventh, Christians are Hopeful People. "In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:14-15)

We have already seen that past mysteries are revealed and present life is enjoyed in Christ. Now we see that future riches are assured. The future for the Christian is as bright as the promises of God, and to guarantee that the Christian's hope for future riches is not merely an illusion of the mind, God has given us the promised Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit "is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it". (verse 14)

On October 23, 1975, Merlin Adamson, missionary to Africa for nearly 20 years, died at the young age of 48. He died at the height of his missionary career, a victim of cancer. He was my wife's cousin. Shortly after he died, my wife and I received a small note from his wife: "Of course, we miss Merlin so very much, but it is comforting to know that he is with the One who loves him even more than we do. Heaven seems so much closer now that he is there". It is the Holy Spirit who makes heaven's future treasures real to us now, giving us a foundation for our hope. The Holy Spirit is God's promise to us that "the best is yet to be".

Eighth, Christians are Empowered People. You must read Ephesians 1:18-23 to better appreciate this. A group of students were asked if they thought Christianity was essentially a demand or an offer. How would you answer that question? After considerable thought, they realized that Christianity is an offer! God has promised that His grace is sufficient for every problem of life. God said that His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Paul affirmatively met life with a resounding 'Yes' when he shouted, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". Christ offers adequate resources to meet every crisis of life. Paul declared that we are 'more than conquerors' through Christ. Paul prayed for all believers that their spiritual eyes might be enlightened that they might see "the immeasurable greatness of God's power in us who believe". The power that works in the life of the believer, is the same power that was best demonstrated in God's workings with Christ. God's power toward Christ resulted in (1) Christ's resurrection, (2) Christ's ascension, (3) Christ's dominion (militant victory), (4) Christ's headship over the church. That same mighty power works in you!

"God, send your hopeful Holy Spirit to inspire hope in my despairing soul. Send your powerful Holy Spirit to impart power to my weakened spirit. Send your inspiring Holy Spirit to cleanse my cloudy vision from earth's trivia, in order that I may see heaven's treasures alone!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What God demands, He always provides. What God provides, I will receive--today!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?'

1. What does 'Justification', as used in the New Testament, basically mean?

2. How does God view the breaking of His holy law by mankind?

3. Why cannot God, out of the motivation of His eternal love, easily and quickly forgive mankind for breaking His holy law?

4. How can the just character of God be maintained and, at the same time, unjust men be saved from the eternal damnation which their sins deserve? How is the substitutionary death of Christ an answer both to maintaining God's justice and demonstrating God's mercy? Why is God 'obligated' to forgive the sins of the genuinely repentant sinner?

5. Discuss your understanding of the following statement: "God is just in justifying a sinner, on the basis of God's acceptance of Christ's atonement which makes it possible for man to enjoy Christ's borrowed righteousness".

6. On what basis can God declare and treat a sinner righteous? Because a repentant sinner enjoys the 'borrowed righteousness' of Christ, what privilege does such a person enjoy? (Note Colossians 1:21-22)

7. What is the difference between justification and regeneration?

8. List and describe some of the metaphors which are used in the New Testament to describe the concept of Regeneration.

9. What is the difference between becoming a better person (human reformation), and becoming a new person (divinely-wrought transformation), as these concepts relate to motivation for change and quality of change in a human life? (What is the difference between being tolerant toward Christianity as a religion and being personally transformed by Christ as a Person?)

10. Cite Biblical references that describe divinely-wrought transformation of a sinner in terms of 'cleansing'.

11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Peace, according to the Biblical understanding, is not the mere absence of trouble, but it is the presence of everything that makes for a man's highest good".

12. What evidence, both from Scripture and from your own personal experience and observation, can you cite to demonstrate Christianity's claim that Christ is able to break bad habits and to make bad men good?

13. What evidence is there that a person who is converted to Christ is easier to live with and easier to get along with?

14. On what basis can a Christian be filled with joy, in spite of the changes and chances of life's circumstances?

15. God's people can be described in eight different ways, according to the first chapter of the Book of Ephesians. List those eight descriptions.

16. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God chose to save the entire human race, but only those who accept God's universal offer of salvation, become members of the choice (or elect) group". (Note Ephesians 1:3-4)

17. For what purpose are persons chosen by God?

18. To what are Christians destined (according to Ephesians 1:5-6), and why is such a destiny so amazing?

19. What is the Biblical definition of 'Redemption' and how does this concept relate to God's people (according to Ephesians 1:7-8)? Why is an understanding of the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection essential to a proper understanding of the meaning of 'Redemption'?

20. What are the consequences of Guilt, and what does God offer the guilt-ridden sinner?

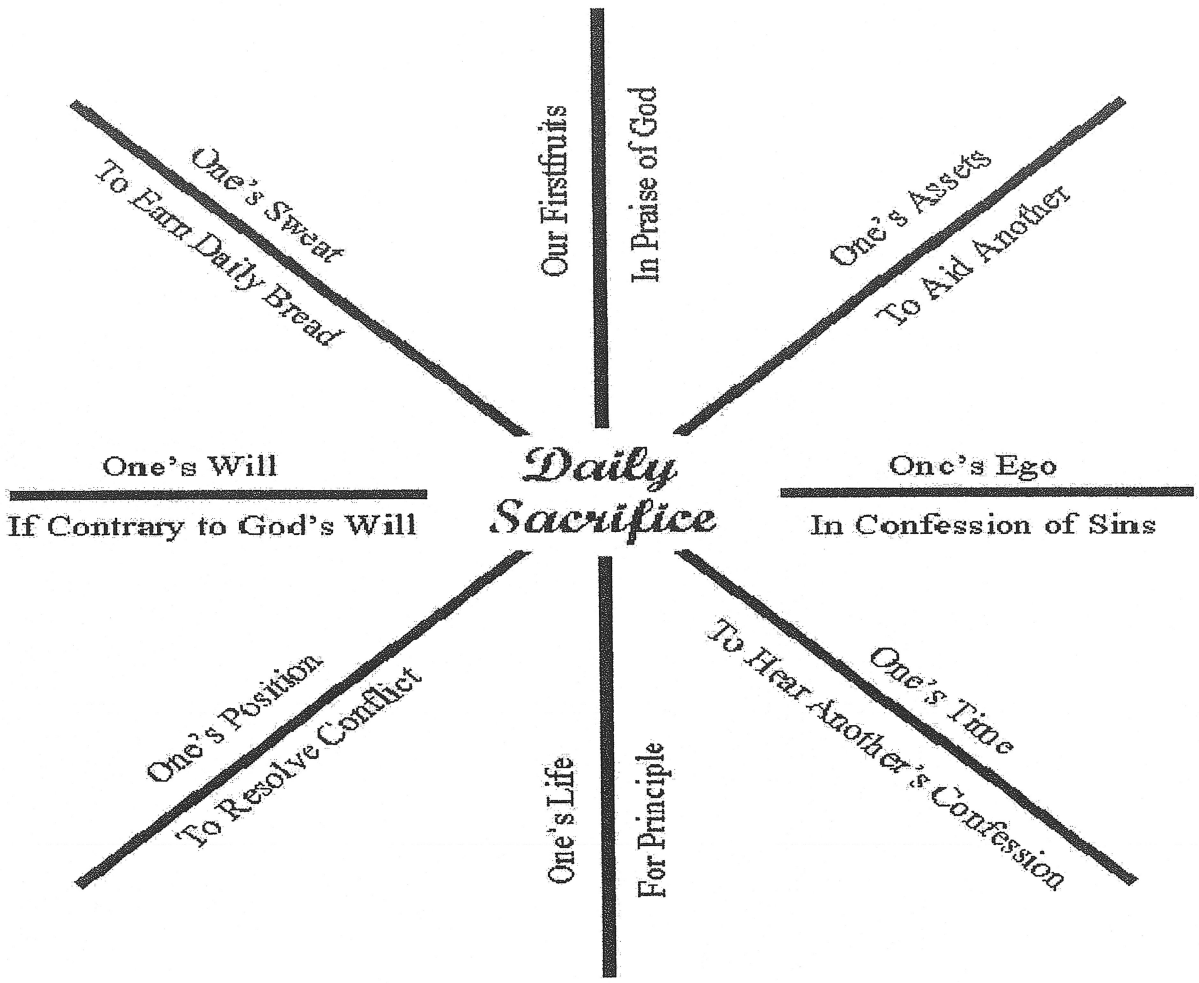
21. What is the 'secret' or 'mystery' of God which has now been revealed to God's enlightened people, according to Ephesians 1:9-10?

22. What revealed knowledge is given to God's people that motivates them to be the most enlivened people on earth?

23. What is the guarantee that the Christian's hope for future riches is not merely an 'illusion of the mind'? (Note Ephesians 1:14-15)

24. Is Christianity essentially a demand or an offer? Explain your answer, and share Scriptural references to document your answer.

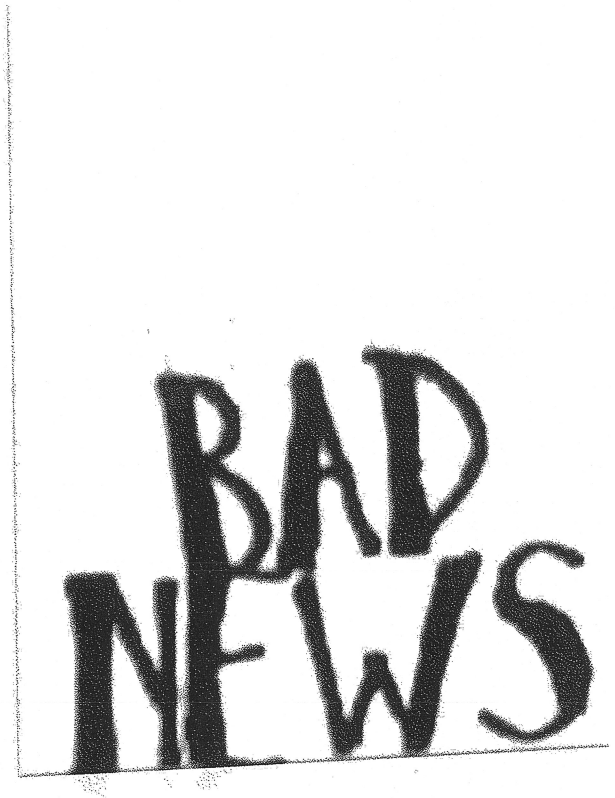
25. The power that God demonstrated in Christ, is the same power that God makes available to believers. According to Ephesians 1:18-23, in what four ways was God's power demonstrated in His relationship to Christ?



PART II

"SPECIFIC ANALYSIS OF SALVATION!"

(EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ROMAN 1-6)



CHAPTER 5

"THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD NEWS!"

Romans 1:1-32

THE COMPELLING POWER OF GOD'S LOVE

During the last four chapters in Part I of this book, we have engaged ourselves in a general survey of Salvation, in what might be called a topical overview of salvation. It is now time to engage ourselves in a specific analysis of Salvation, in what might be called a Biblical exposition of salvation. To understand the plan of God's salvation for lost mankind, there is no better book in the Bible to study than the Book of Romans. During the next several weeks, it is our plan to study carefully the first six chapters of Romans, in an attempt to understand God's wonderful plan of salvation, as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Book of Romans is God's book of Love, and it was written by one who experienced God's love firsthand. Paul, the writer of Romans, met Christ as he was travelling to Damascus where he intended to intensify his campaign of persecution against the early Christians. God struck down Paul with a bright light from heaven and Paul became a captive to Jesus Christ. The one-time persecutor of the Gospel now became the all-out promoter of the Gospel! Paul became a slave of Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1) God chose him to be a missionary to the Gentile world. Paul's vision was to take the Good News of Christ to every Gentile city in the Roman Empire. Paul felt that he owed a great debt to all men everywhere. Paul felt indebted to God's love, and the only way he felt he could discharge his debt of love was to spread the Good News of God's salvation to everyone in the world--the Gentile as well as the Jew, the barbarian as well as the civilized, the uneducated as well as the educated. (Romans 1:14)

The compulsion of love drove Paul from city to city to organize one church after another. As someone said, Paul was "always haunted by the regions beyond". Paul was on fire with the love of God. To share the Good News of God's love with everyone was Paul's passion and dream.

There are two characters upon the stage of Romans, chapter one: God and Man. The first half of Romans 1 is focused on God's character: (1) God's love, (2) God's mercy, (3) God's justice and holiness. The second half of Romans 1 unmasks the character of man and shows man's sinfulness in all of it's vivid reality.

God's love and mercy are extended to everyone everywhere. God desires all men to accept His offer of mercy and, as a result, be saved. It is only when one suppresses the truth of God and spurns the offer of mercy that he will reap the just judgement of God.

"O God, you chose not only to save me, but to use me! I am saved from sin--negatively wonderful! I am saved to serve--positively wonderful! The love of God compels me to share, and love always finds a way! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A bell is not a bell until you ring it; love is not love until you share it!

Romans 1:1-4

GOOD NEWS--PROMISED, PROVIDED, PROVEN!

The Good News of God was promised to the prophets in the Old Testament. "This Good News was promised long ago by God's prophets in the Old Testament." (Romans 1:2, Living Bible) The prophets often spoke about judgement of sin, the 'Day of the Lord'--the day of wrath and destruction. But interspersed in these judgement announcements are declarations of hope and restoration. A future day of God's miraculous deliverance through the promised Messiah is focused on--a day of forgiveness, peace, reconiliation, and the universal reign of God. Occassionally even the narrow confines of Jewish nationalism are broken, and the message of God's salvation for the Gentiles is proclaimed!

The Good News of God was provided in the coming of Jesus. The Good News (Gospel) is centered in the Incarnation (the act of God becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ). Paul declares, "It is the Good News about his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who came as a human baby, born into King David's royal family line". (Romans 1:3, Living Bible) If there had been no visitation by God, there would have been no redemption of man. One great thinker in the early Church said, "He (God) became what we are, to make us what he is". The source of the Good News is Jesus--God in human flesh--really and truly man, and really and truly God. Jesus is not a demi-god, half god and half man. He is fully God and fully Man. His sacrificial life, substitutionary death, and powerful resurrection provide the basis for the Good News.

The Good News of God is proven in the resurrection of Jesus. "By being raised from the dead he was proved to be the mighty Son of God, with the holy nature of God himself." (Romans 1:4, Living Bible) If Jesus had not risen from the dead, there would be no 'Good News'. Why? Because death would have had the final word, and would have proven to be stronger than life. To put faith in a crucified Jesus alone, is to put fatih in a great hero, but a hero powerless to deliver one from the clutches of sin and death. The Gospel is powerful because of the powerful resurrection. God had to raise His Son to life to show that the sinless Son of God could not be overcome by the sinful sons of the devil. The resurrection is the badge of Christ's authority to establish His long predicted Messianic Kingdom in the hearts and lives of people. The resurrection validates God's claim of power to change human nature, for the power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that is available to transform and to cleanse corrupt human nature.

"O God, what was promised by the prophets, provided by the Son, and proven by the Resurrection, help me to appropriate for my personal salvation. The Good News is only good for me personally when I accept it!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Good views are man's fashionable opinions; Good News is God's factual offer! I choose to believe God's facts, not man's opinions!

Romans 1:5

THE GOOD NEWS IS POURED OUT ON UNDESERVING SINNERS!

We are in the process of unmasking the characters of God and Man, as revealed in Romans, chapter one.

We have seen that God has taken the great initiative to save sinning humanity. (Romans 1:1-4) The Good News was promised to the Prophets (verse 2), provided in Jesus' life and death (verse 3), and proven in Jesus' resurrection (verse 4).

But not only does God initiate the plan, He also invites the sinner to receive the plan, personally (Romans 1:5-17). The Good News is poured out on undeserving sinners (verse 5a), promoted among receptive sinners (verses 5b-9), perfected among growing saints (verses 10-12), and personified in the Apostle's life (verse 13-16).

God not only initiates, invites, but God also evaluates (verses 18-32). God evaluates each person's response to the Gospel invitation. The last half of Romans 1 shows us that God reveals His wrath against God-rejectors. Why? Because all men are without excuse! God's character is unmistakably revealed to mankind. Therefore, man's rejection is justifiably condemned, and God's punishment will be progressively executed!

We must now look at each of these carefully outlined truths regarding God's Good News.

God's Good News (described as the kindness of God in Romans 1:5a) is poured out upon undeserving sinners. "And now, through Christ, all the kindness of God has been poured out upon us undeserving sinners." (verse 5a, Living Bible) There is nothing in mankind that merits God's attention or that deserves God's favor. Man is a sinner both by nature and by choice.

God's kindness is inherent to God's nature. God is reconciled with all of humanity regardless of man's moral condition. He loves all men unconditionally. It is not that God has overlooked sin or that he treats sin indulgently. It is that God has turned His wrath against sin upon Himself and taken the penalty of sin upon Himself upon the Cross. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself through the Cross. It was God dying upon the Cross, and dying for all sinners. He bore our sins in His own body upon the Cross. The Cross appeased the wrath of God and satisfied the justice of God. Because of the Cross, God can both be just in His nature and at the same time justify the sinner. Because of the substitutionary death of Jesus, God can pour out His kindness and unlimited love upon undeserving sinners!

"O God, what more can you do than what you have done! You have initiated the plan of salvation, invited the sinner to receive salvation, and are ready to give the gift of salvaiton to all who ask! I gladly ask and joyfully receive! Glory to God!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's wonderful salvation is given, in order that woeful sinners (like me) might become worshipping saints!

Romans 1:5-9

GOOD NEWS PROMOTED AMONG RECEPTIVE SINNERS!

The Good News (described as the mercies of God in Romans 1:5b-9) is promoted among receptive sinners. It is promoted in three ways: (1) promoted through participation in God's mercies personally (verses 5b-7), (2) promoted through partnership in God's mercies promotionally (verse 8), (3) promoted through prayer for God's mercies practically (verse 9).

God has poured out His undeserving kindness and love upon all humanity. God's love is indiscriminately and universally poured out upon the world of men. God's intention is that all men be the recipients of this poured out love. God wants every man to receive this love.

However, although this love is given universally, this love is not automatically received universally. The love that is poured out is the love that must be promoted.

Paul later writes in Romans 10: "Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? (Romans 10:13-14, Living Bible)

The message of God's kindness, mercy, and forgiveness is meant for all, but only those who hear the message, and believe the message, can enjoy the benefits of the message. Therefore the message must be spread by messengers. God's love that is poured out upon all undeserving sinners, must be promoted among all receptive sinners.

Romans 1:5b-7 tells us that the Good News is promoted through participation in God's mercies personally. Both Paul and the Roman Christians to whom he is writing had personally experienced the love of God in conversion. They had appropriated the benefits of Christ's shed blood. They were experiencing peace with God and the peace of God. Paul testifies that he was going around the world of his day telling all people everywhere about the great things God had done for him, so that others could also believe and obey Christ (verse 5). Paul's dear friends in Rome were also recipients of God's love, mercy, and peace, and were among God's holy people (verses 6-7). They were able to promote God's love because they had first experienced God's love and forgiveness.

How is it possible for a professor of religion to promote the Gospel if that professor is not a genuine possessor of the love of God?

"How can one promote what he does not possess? How can one sell what he does not use? There can be no powerful promotion without personal participation. O God, make my experience of Christ firsthand, not secondhand. Then I can promote authentically!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There can be no 'doing' if there is not 'being' first! I will minister to others out of the overflow of my personal life in Christ!

Romans 1:8-9

BORN TO REPRODUCE

We have noted that God's Good News is promoted through participation in God's mercies personally (Romans 1:5b-7). Further, God's Good News is promoted through partnership in God's mercies promotionally (verse 8).

Writes Paul to the beloved Church at Rome, "Let me say first of all that wherever I go I hear you being talked about! For your faith in God is becoming known around the world. How I thank God through Jesus Christ for this good report, and for each one of you". (Romans 1:8, Living Bible) The Good News is best promoted by the united Church--united in love and partners together in spreading the message of mercy to the unreached. Christians are born to reproduce. The faith of the Church at Rome was becoming known around the world. Others were being born into the Kingdom through their witness. So should it be in our Churches today! Vital sharing is the answer to growth!

The story is told of a great camp meeting, at which place God's Spirit was poured out in great measure, especially on the last night. Shouting, singing, and praying went on until the early hours of the morning. The next day Camp was over and many happy hearts boarded a chartered bus to take them home. All on the bus were rejoicing and praising God together. When these happy people got home, one of the leaders of the group suddenly went into a dark and dismal depression. He couldn't pray and he seemed to have lost all of the blessing of those happy camp meeting days. He couldn't understand his 'dry' spiritual condition in contrast to his overwhelming blessing at Camp. He agonized with the Lord in prayer. Finally the Lord revealed the reason for his depression. The Lord said something like this to the spiritual leader: "You greatly enjoyed My blessing, but you were so preoccupied with your own spiritual happiness and with the blessed fellowship you were having with other believers, that you forgot to share the Good News with that unconverted bus driver who drove you home from camp. While you were so happy, he was so miserable, and he could not understand the reason for your happiness. You can only be blessed when you are sharing the Good News with the unhappy and sin-sick!"

The Good News is promoted through prayer for God's mercies practically (verse 9). Prayer for the practical needs of the witnessing believers helped provide stability and solidarity in the lives of the disciples. Through prayer, Paul made disciples who could become disciplers. It is still true that the Gospel can best be promoted through the practice of discipleship multiplication rather than mere conversion addition.

"O God, Thou art the source of all love. The world of needy people is the object of your great love. Make me the channel of your love. Let your love flow from You to them through me! Thank you!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will give me as much as I am willing to give away, and no more. I must learn to give away my faith!

Romans 1:10-12

GOOD NEWS PERFECTED AMONG GROWING SAINTS

We are looking at God's Good News as described in the first half of Romans 1. We have thus far seen that God's Good News (described as Kindness) is poured out upon undeserving sinners (verse 5a). Also we have seen God's Good News (described as God's Mercies) is promoted among receptive sinners (verses 5b-9). We must now see that God's Good News (described as Faith in God) is perfected among growing saints (verses 7, 10-12).

'Saints'--an interesting title to apply to brand new Christians! The youngest believer is called, by God, a 'saint'! A young child about to enter first grade is called a 'scholar'. He is given that title and that status, not because of present scholastic attainments, but because of faith in his future potential. The youngest believer enjoys the status of 'saint', but he must go through the long school of prayer, discipline, and growth before he fully enjoys the attainments of sainthood. The young child may be called a scholar, but he will experience years of intellectual growth before he is actually a scholar. So with the young Christian. He is declared a 'saint' in a moment of time, but it will take a lifetime of growth before he becomes 'saintly'.

Paul writes, "And one of the things I keep on praying for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you and, if possible, that I will have a safe trip. For I long to visit you so that I can impart to you the faith that will help your church grow strong in the Lord. Then, too, I need your help, for I want not only to share my faith with you, but to be encouraged by yours; each of us will be a blessing to the other". (Romans 1:10-12, Living Bible)

Paul was vitally concerned that every young Christian become perfected. What is the source of Christian growth? Paul wanted to visit these young Christians in order that he might impart that faith to them which would enable their church to grow. Faith then is the source of growth. 'Faith' or propostion truth, is communicated by preaching (telling the basics about the coming of Jesus) and by teaching (telling the details of the faith regarding the Lordship of Christ in daily living). Another source of growth which Paul focuses on is the 'inspiration of sharing'. Mutal encouragement derived from one another's faith is a great impetus to Christian growth. Paul, the great saint, wanted to be cheered up in his faith, as young Christians at Rome shared their faith with him.

"O God, Thou art the Author and Completer of my faith. Thou art the Ground of my being, the Source of my life. Thou wilt complete what you have begun in my life. Your goal for me is total Christlikeness. I follow on!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who chooses to call me a 'saint' will work in me to make me saintly--in actions, attitudes, and relationships!

Romans 1:13-17

GOOD NEWS PERSONIFIED IN PAUL'S LIFE!

The Good News is poured out on undeserving sinners, promoted among receptive sinners, perfected among growing saints, and finally, personified in Paul's life.

First, note the compulsion of the Gospel in Paul's life. "I want you to know, dear brothers, that I planned to come many times before (but was prevented) so that I could work among you and see good results, just as I have among the other Gentile churches. For I owe a great debt to you and to everyone else, both to civilized people and uncivilized alike; yes, to the educated and uneducated alike." (Romans 1:13-14, Living Bible)

Second, note the proclamation of the Gospel in Paul's life. "So, to the fullest extent of my ability, I am ready to come also to you in Rome to preach God's Good News." (Romans 1:15, Living Bible)

Third, note the power of the Gospel, demonstrated dramatically in Paul's life. "For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is God's powerful method of bringing all who belive it to heaven. This message was preached first to the Jews alone, but now everyone is invited to come to God in this same way." (Romans 1:16, Living Bible) Paul was fascinated with the Gospel. He believed that all nations could be saved through its power (verse 5). None were too sinful to be transformed by its wonder-working power! Paul felt that if he could be saved, then anyone could be saved! Many times Paul recalled his former life when he cruelly persecuted the Christians: "And I persecuted the Christians, hounding them to death, binding and delivering both men and women to prison". (Acts 22:4) Paul, the passionate persecutor, became Paul, the passionate preacher. He preached with confidence that Christ could save anyone! "How true it is, and how I long that everyone should know it, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--and I was the greatest of them all." (I Timothy 1:15, Living Bible) If Christ can save the chief sinner, He can save any other sinner! That is the power of the Gospel in operation!

Fourth, note Paul's description of the Gospel. "This Good News tells us that God makes us ready for heaven--makes us right in God's sight--when we put our faith and trust in Christ to save us. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scripture says it, 'The man who finds life will find it through trusting God'." (Romans 1:17, Living Bible) The Gospel is Good News because all can be saved simply by putting trust in Jesus Christ! God is not willing that any should perish, but that all repent and be saved. Have you been saved?

"Is there any power in heaven or on earth which can transform human nature? None whatever, excepting your Gospel, O Christ! If your Gospel can change Paul the persecutor into Paul the preacher, that same Gospel can change even me!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: B.C. stands for my life 'Before Christ'; A.D. stands for my life 'After Christ'. The transforming Christ makes all the difference in my life!

Romans 1:17-20

MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S JUSTICE

God has taken the initiative to save man by sending Jesus to live a sacrificial life, to die a substitutionary death, and to provide power through a victorious resurrection.

God has poured out his mercy upon all mankind. The message of salvation is promoted through the lives and words of earnest believers. The way of salvation is made plain for all. All can be saved through simple trust in Christ.

God loves all and wants to save all. But how does God respond to those who refuse the offer of mercy and forgiveness, made possible only through the agonizing death of His only Son?

The love of God and the mercy of God must always be seen in light of the justice of God.

Romans 1:18 says, "But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, evil men who push away the truth from them". (Living Bible) The first half of Romans 1 is filled with brightness and hope! The last half of Romans 1 is filled with darkness and judgement! Why? Simply because, if people refuse God's love and mercy, then people must be inflicted with God's judgement. God's justice is compatible with God's love. Love is one coin. Mercy is on one side of the coin. Wrath is on the other side of the coin. To refuse God's mercy is to invite God's wrath! There is no neutral ground, no razor edge of non-comittal upon which man may balance precariously. Every man must choose either mercy or wrath! Either an individual responds to the call of love or he must accept the call to judgement! The God who sooths is the God who also can sear, and both actions are the actions of the holy love!

Evil men who push away the Truth from them or suppress the truth by their wickedness, incite the wrath of God. This is a deliberate act of the will, a deliberate choosing of wrong instead of right, a deliberate choosing of darkness rather than light, a deliberate choosing of Self rather than the Saviour!

The last half of Romans 1 describes the meaning of God's justice: (1) God's character is unmistakably revealed (verses 19-20), (2) Man's rejection of God is justifiably condemned (verses 20b-25), (3) God's punishment of man is progressively executed (verses 21-32).

The offer of mercy is extended to you! Will you accept that mercy, repent, and be saved or will you reject that mercy, suppress the Truth and be lost? Come to Jesus now and be saved! The Good News is for you!

"O God, to refuse your love is to accept your wrath! To accept your mercy is to receive your forgiveness! Now and forever, I choose to accept your mercy. I am saved from present condemnation and from future wrath! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There are both lines of love and lines of wrath in God's holy face. I choose only the lines of love!

Romans 1:21-23

UNMASKING THE CHARACTER OF MAN

To understand the message of Romans is to understand the dynamic relationships between God, Man, Sin, and Jesus Christ.

Romans 1 reveals the character of God: (1) God's mercy, (2) God's love, (3) God's holy justice.

Romans 1 unmasks the character of man and shows man's sinfulness in all of it's vivid reality. In this important chapter we see the unmasking of the rebel nature of man's sinful heart, the unmasking of the gross nature of man's sinful actions, and also the unmasking of the judgement of God invoked by man's wrong moral choice.

First, notice the unmasking of the rebel nature of man's sinful heart. Romans 1 makes it clear that all humanity in the beginning knew about the one true and living God. Montheism (worship of one God) was before polytheism (worship of many gods).

Social evolutionary theory teaches that man began with worship of many gods and late in his evolutionary development man conceived of worshipping only one God. Evolution teaches that man was inferior to begin with and that man has increasingly become perfected--morally, socially, and even physically.

However, the Bible teaches that man started with perfect knowledge and worship of the one true God, but that mankind has increasingly degenerated morally, socially, and even physically. This degeneration is reflected in gross immorality and cruel idolatrous practices.

"It is not that they do not know the truth about God; indeed he has made it quite plain to them. For since the beginning of the world the invisible attributes of God, e.g. his eternal power and deity, have been plainly discernible through things which he has made and which are commonly seen and known, thus leaving these men without a rag of excuse." (Romans 1:19-20, Phillips)

Man takes honor to himself rather than giving honor properly to God. Man refuses gratefully to thank God for His benefits and blessings. "They knew all the time that there is a God, yet they refused to acknowledge him as such or to thank him for what he is or does." (Romans 1:21a, Phillips)

Sin must be seen for what it is--a tragic rebellion against the self-revealed God. Sin is willful rejection of the knowledge and truth of God. To unmask the character of man is to reveal the rebel nature of man's sinful heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 RSV)

"Your revelation is both tremendous and terrible! You have revealed the perfection of God, the problem of man, and the provision of the Saviour! I, O God, am sinful--that <u>part</u> of revelation is terrible, but because your Son is saving, your <u>total</u> revelation is tremendous!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: 'Inevitable progress' (social evolutionary theory) is man's unfounded opinion; 'dramatic transformation' (divine revelation) is God's proven fact!

I Corinthians 6:12-20

UNMASKING SIN'S PERVERSIONS

In yesterday's devotional we looked at the rebel nature of man's sinful heart, as revealed by God. We must now look at the gross nature of man's sinful actions, as outlined in the latter half of Romans 1. Only when man realizes that he is a great sinner is he ready to receive Christ as a great Saviour!

We must see sin in terms of perversion--physical, mental, spiritual, and social perversion.

First, look at sin's physical perversion. Romans describes this as the shameful misuse of the body sexually. Romans 1:24b says that sinful mankind "dishonor their own bodies between themselves". "Their women turned against God's natural plan for them and indulged in sex sin with each other. And the men, instead of having a normal sex relationship with women, burned with lust for each other, men doing shameful things with other men and, as a result, getting paid within their own souls with the penalty they so richly deserved." (Romans 1:26-27, Living Bible)

Homosexuality and other sexual perversions are clearly condemned in Scripture, regardless of the liberal teachings of some modern-day clergymen and social reformers. Such a practice is not only a physical perversion, but it reflects a moral degeneration.

Homosexual tendencies as well as overt homosexual practices doubtless reflect serious and complex personality problems that call for sympathetic treatment. But, while Christian compassion is called for in such treatment, Christian tolerance and acceptance of the practice is never called for. Perversion must never be normalized in the name of Christian tolerance and broadmindedness. Sexual perversion, however it my be psychologically and sociologically explained, is always a manifestation of spiritual degeneration. The Christ who condemns such perversion is the Christ who can forgive and deliver the captive of such a practice.

Sin always pays its own penalty. People who defy the laws of God get "paid within their own souls with the penalty they so richly deserve" (verse 27). Not only is homosexual practices condemned, but any sexual perversion is both condemned and costly in terms of consequences. Notes Howard Hoffman, MD., "Today's sexual permissiveness has paralleled a marked increase in all forms of venereal disease. There are more cases of syphilis and gonorrhea each year than the combined number of all other reportable communicable diseases." (Pamphlet on VD, published by Light and Life Press)

"O God, you are everything I wish to be--whole, holy, healthy, and righteous! My body is made for you, not for sin's perversion! I exchange all my perversions for your wonderful purity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." (I Corinthians 6:13)

Romans 1:24-32

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD!

In our attempt honestly to unmask man's sinful nature and practices, as revealed in Romans 1:18-32, we are describing sin's perversions.

Secondly, look at sin's mental perversion. It is a great mental perversion when men exchange the truth of God for a lie! Romans 1:25 says that sinful humanity chooses to believe lies rather than the Truth of God! "Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies." Today there is a torrent of false doctrines and false teachers. Another evidence of spiritual degeneration!

Third, look at sin's spiritual perversion. Men serve creation rather than the Creator! When man rejects the Creator, man, who is incurably religious, begins to serve the creation! "And then, instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they took wood and stone and made idols for themselves, carving them to look like mere birds and animals and snakes and puny men. . .So they prayed to the things God made, but wouldn't obey the blessed God who made these things." (Romans 1:23,25b, Living Bible)

Many today are worshipping the things God has made, refusing to bow their knees to the God who made these things. For instance, God made money to be used to serve His kingdom, but man instead is worshipping money. Many worship the god of Materialism. God made sex to be enjoyed and used within marriage for procreation and recreation, but man has made a god out of sex. Many worship the god of Sensualism. God enabled man to discover and use the scientific method to create untold blessings and to give mankind unlimited conveniences, but man has bowed to the 'sacred cow' of science. Many worship the god of Scientism. Worshipping creation rather than worshipping the Creator--this is evidence of man's spiritual perversion.

Fourth, look at sin's social perversion. Romans describes this as total breakdown of all peaceful human relationships. Romans 1:29-31 gives a long catalogue of social sins, describing sinful man's social degeneration! "Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness and sin, of greed and hate, envy, murder, fighting, lying, bitterness, and gossip. They were backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud braggerts, always thinking of new ways of sinning and continually being disobedient to their parents. They tried to misunderstand, broke their promises, and were heartless--without pity." (Romans 1:29-31, Living Bible)

Is it any wonder that the Bible says that the way of the transgressor is hard?

"O God, I see now that there is a high cost in not serving you. To go against you is to go against myself. To honor you is to honor myself. I choose to serve you and to honor myself!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The way of holiness is the way of happiness and health! I will distain sin and delight in righteousness!

Hosea 8:1-14

SOWING AND REAPING--A SPIRITUAL LAW

Thus far in our study of Romans 1:18-32, we have unmasked the rebel nature of man's sinful heart and the gross nature of man's sinful actions. We must now unmask the judgement of God invoked by man's wrong moral choice. Romans 1 shows the tragic consequences of wrong moral choices. Every man is free to do only one thing--to make choices. "We are free to choose, but not free to choose the results or consequences of our choices. They are in hands not our own. Some go through life choosing to surrender to the right person and to submit to the right things--they get results; the sum total of reality is behind them, they have cosmic backing for their way of life. But some go through life surrendering to the wrong persons and submitting to the wrong things--they get consequences; they are up against reality, they are frustrated, in trouble, with themselves and others." (Victory Through Surrender, E.S. Jones, p. 124-125)

Whatever a man sows, that is what he shall reap! Wrote the great psychologist, William James, "The hell to be endured hereafter of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way". (quoted in Conversion, E.S. Jones, p. 33)

The high cost of not serving Christ is vividly described in Scripture. If one "sows the wind", he will "reap the whirlwind". (Hosea 8:7) No one can really break the moral law of God; one can only defy that moral law, and in the process, get broken morally.

The brilliant 19th century actor, Oscar Wilde, who won highest academic honors, fell to the temptation of unnatural vice, and finally came to prison and disgrace. In spite of his brilliance and literary fame, he sowed seeds of sin and eventually reaped a harvest of shame. He wrote, "I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes the character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace". (Victory Through Surrender, E.S. Jones, p. 13)

Sow righteousness and reap results. Sow tears of repentance and reap the joy of salvation. Sow righteousness and reap mercy. Sow total surrender to Christ and reap life-time fulfillment. Sow love and reap love. Choose Christ as your God and you will get glorious results for time and for eternity.

"O God, I see now that when I serve you I get some heaven here and a lot of heaven hereafter. The heaven I make for myself on earth will be multiplied infinitely in eternity! When I serve Self, I get some hell here and a lot of hell hereafter. I choose to be a double winner, not a double loser!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Every little action of this day either helps make or unmake my character for eternity! I will live carefully!

Genesis 6:5-8, Isaiah 1:16-20

SIN IS IRRATIONAL!

Romans 1 reveals a progression downward in sin's judgement. First, there is a distorted mind. Refusal of God first results in man's mind being emptied of God's knowledge and filled instead with darkness and irrational thoughts. Romans 1:21b says, "Their thoughts have become complete nonsense and their empty minds are filled with darkness". (Today's English Version) The Jerusalem Bible translation of this verse is: "They made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened". One of sin's own judgements is a distorted, irrational mind. Think of the irrationality of man's modern-day philosophies.

How irrational is Secularism which claims that temporal values are all important, and that spiritual values are non-existent or at least unimportant!

How irrational is Materialism which says that life consists in the abundance of things which a man possesses!

How irrational is Sensualism which says that the gratification of man's physical desires is all-important!

How irrational is Humanism which says that man is innately good and the object of worship and adoration! 'Glory to man in the highest'!

How irrational is religious Liberalism which denies the deity of Jesus, denies the virgin birth, denies the need for Jesus' vicarious atonement. Man is his own savior!

How irrational is Moral Relativism which denies the reality of any objective or absolute moral standards by which to determine right or wrong! Each man becomes a law unto himself! Every man does that which is right in his own eyes! Every man becomes his own judge in matters of moral decisions!

The mental distortions of modern-day philosophies reveal the fact that sin has taken its toll! Evil imaginations and evil systems of thought are manifestations of an evil heart. "So it was that when they gave God up and would not even acknowledge him, God gave them up to doing everything their evil minds could think of." (Romans 1:28, Living Bible)

Second, there are misplaced values. Refusal of God next results in man's preoccupation with his own worldly wisdom, which is foolishness to God. "Claiming themselves to be wise and without God, they became utter fools instead." (Romans 1:22, Living Bible) "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God." (I Corinthians 3:19-20)

"O God, there are ways that seem so right to unconverted men, but the end of those ways is death! Don't let others spoil my faith and joy with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built on men's thoughts and ideas, instead of what Christ has said. (Colossians 2:8, Living Bible)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The way of reason is the way of God. Honest reasoning leads me to the feet of Jesus!

Proverbs 8:32-36

SIN PAYS WAGES!

We are looking at the progression downward in sin's judgement. Third, there is a God-allowed moral abandonment. Refusal of God eventually results in God lifting His restraints to allow man to do his own wicked thing! One of the most frightening words of judgement in all of Holy Writ is Romans 1:24. "They gave up God; and therefore God gave them up!" (Phillips) When God releases His restraints and allows man to open the floodgates of sin, the result is a flood of filth! "God let them go ahead into every sort of sex sin, and do whatever they wanted to--yes, vile and sinful things with each other's bodies." (Romans 1:24, Living Bible)

Fourth, there is sin-inflicted moral damage. Refusal of God then results in sin bringing its own hurtful judgement to the mind and body of the unrepentant. "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." And the reaping is in this life as well as in the life hereafter. Sin pays wages, now and in eternity! The way of the transgressor is hard! The sinner gets paid within his own soul with the penalty that he so richly deserves. (Romans 1:27, Living Bible)

Fifth, there is finally God-sent death. Continued and persistent rejection of God finally results in eternal death for the sinner. We have seen that sin's judgement is progressive. The mind first becomes distorted by rejecting God's revealed knowledge and truth. Error is entertained and true values are replaced with false values. False values then lead one into a life of immoral practice. The man who persists in sin becomes calloused in his conscience, insensitive to spiritual danger, and devasting in his evil influence. "They know what God's verdict is; that those who behave like this deserve to die--and yet they do it; and what is worse, encourage others to do the same." (Romans 1:32, Jerusalem Bible)

God will eventually execute the death penalty upon all unrepentant and calloused sinners! Sin brings its own judgement in sin's devasting work on the body, mind, and spirit. Added to the this judgement will be the direct and final judgement of Almighty God on rebellious mankind.

Is there any hope for man? None, independent of God! The dark picture of man's perverted nature is matched by the bright picture of God's Good News! Man the hopeless sinner can become Man the hopeful saint! A bad man can become a good man! The hell-bound can become the heaven-bound! The perverted can become the purified! Have you trusted Christ to save you from your sins? If not, why not? To persist in unbelief is to reap judgement! To exercise faith in Christ is to reap eternal life! Come to Christ now!

"O God, sin pays wages. Sin gives the sinner what he desrves--death. But you, merciful Father, give gifts. You give the repentant person not what he deserves--eternal life! I gladly accept what you offer, not what I deserve!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who refuses to repent because of the judgements of sin in the body, must someday reap the judgements of the Saviour in the soul! I will repent in time, in order to be saved in eternity!

Luke 18:9-14, Isaiah 64:6

'DOWN-AND-OUT' AND 'UP-AND-OUT' SINNERS!

Romans, chapters 1-3, is written primarily to contrast the righteousness of God's character with the sinfulness of man's character. The universality of sin among all humanity is the devastating conclusion of these three chapters.

In chapter one of Romans "Paul had painted a grim and terrible picture of the heathen world, a world which was under the condemnation of God. With every word of that condemnation the Jew thoroughly agreed. But he never for a moment dreamed that he was under a like condemnation. He thought that he occupied a priviledged position. God might be the judge of the heathen, but he was the special protector of the Jews. Here Paul is pointing out forcibly to the Jew that he is just as much a sinner as the Gentile is and that when he is condemning the Gentile he is condemning himself. He will be judged, not on his racial heritage, but by the kind of life that he lives". (Barclay's Romans, Daily Study Bible, p. 41)

Chapter one is a description of 'down-and-out' Gentile sinners, morally perverted and grossly immoral. Chapter two is a description of self-righteous, hypocritical Jews who prided themselves in their racial descent, and claimed God's special favor because Abraham was the father of their faith.

The Jews' claim to moral excellence and spiritual eliteness is vividly described in Romans 2:17-20. "You call yourself a Jew; you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth." (NIV)

Chapter one and chapter two of Romans reveal two sides of one coin. The 'coin' is sin. One side of the 'coin' is the life of sensuality. The other side of the 'coin' is the life of self-righteous morality. Both ways of life are condemned by God. Neither the down-and-out sinner nor the up-and-out sinner can gain God's approval. Both the sins of the flesh and the sins of the spirit bring God's judgement. Irreligious passion and religious hypocrisy both bring God's sever judgement. Sinful actions and sinful attitudes are alike condemned. The sensual sins and the sophisticated sins alike are scrutinized. Neither the life of paganism nor the life of religion can gain God's approval. The repulsive life of sensual perversion and the respectable life of self-righteous morality are equally offensive to the all-holy God, and both ways of life lead to the same eternal destination!

"O God, forgive me for secretly thinking that my own 'righteousness' in some way makes me more acceptable to you. I exchange the filfty rags of my own self-righteous for the pure garments of thy holiness and righteousness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The worst enemy of Christ-centered Christianity is self-centered religion!

John 8:17-47

"GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN--ONLY CHILDREN!"

There are two major flaws in attempting to gain God's approval by a life of outward morality.

First, the man of self-righteous morality is shallow in his understanding of the nature of sin. He can easily condemn the immoral behavior of 'out-and-out' sinners. Adultery, stealing, cheating, murder, and other such actions are easily and rightly condemned. But the man of morality finds it difficult to diagnose the universal disease of all mankind--the disease of self-centeredness. "The thing that is deeply wrong with human nature is not that some people commit adultery, and some steal, but that all of us are self-centered--the decent and the indecent, the nice and the nasty. Manners, polish, refinement, and culture only cover the disease, like rouge on the face of a woman dying of anemia. They can't affect the deadly disease underneath." (Questions People Ask About Religion, William Sangster, p. 58)

The second flaw in the man of self-righteous morality is his hypocrisy. Of the self-righteous Jews, God says, "You are just as bad (as the Gentiles). When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are talking about yourselves, for you do these very same things. . .God will punish the Jews for sinning because they have his written laws, but don't obey them. They know what is right, but don't do it. After all, salvation is not given to those who know what to do, unless they do it". (Romans 2:12-15, Living Bible)

At the time of my conversion, I was an 'up-and-out' sinner. I was living a morally respectable life, with no noticable 'bad' habits, and attending Church services three times a week. I read the Bible, memorized Bible verses, 'said' prayers, and performed my share of 'good deeds'. I believed that because I was a fifth generation Free Methodist, I was morally acceptable to God and that God would automatically let me go to heaven. I, like the morally upright Jews described in Romans, felt that God favored me. I reasoned that because I didn't indulge in grossly immoral sins, that surely I was acceptable enough to God! The day came, however, when I realized that God has no 'grandchildren', only children. A second-hand experience of God, through my godly mother, would never suffice! I needed personally to repent of my sins--my sinful attitudes, my pride, my self-righteous claims, my dependence upon morality alone to save me. I realized that 'up-and-out' (religious) sinners needed God just as much as 'down-and-out' (irreligious) sinners. One kind of sinner can go to hell as quickly as the other kind!

"O God, I see from your Word that it is not the circumstances of my birth that make the difference; it is the crisis of my spiritual rebirth that determines my destiny for time and eternity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who is born once, dies twice--in time and in eternity! He who is born twice--physically and spiritually--dies only once in time!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD NEWS'

1. According to Romans 1:14, what was the scope of Paul's preaching? What was Paul's passion and dream, according to Romans 1:15?

2. According to Romans 1:2, to whom was the Good News of God's salvation promised? According to Romans 1:3, through whom is God's salvation provided? According to Romans 1:4, what event proved that Jesus alone is the Instrument of God's salvation?

3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If there had been no visitation by God, there would have been no redemption of man".

4. What is the motivation for God to pour out His kindness upon mankind? (Romans 1:5)

5. If God's love has been poured out indiscriminately and universally upon the world of men, why are not all persons enjoying God's love and salvation?

6. Is it possible (according to Romans 1:5-7) for one to promote God's love and salvation among others if he has not first personally experienced God's love and forgiveness? (Is first-hand experience of God imperative if one is to be a witness for God?)

7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God will give me as much as I am willing to give away, and no more; God will continue to pour out His blessing upon me only as long as I make myself available to God as a channel of blessings to others".

8. Tell what is meant by the phrase: "The Gospel message can best be promoted through the practice of 'discipleship multiplication' rather than mere 'conversion addition'.

9. What place does the practice of prayer have in the promotion of the Gospel among believers (note Romans 1:9-10)?

10. How (according to Romans 1:10-12) is 'faith' and 'the inspiration of sharing' each a great impetus to Christian growth amidst the fellowship of God's people?

11. What is involved in the process of a new beliver (who is called a 'saint') actually attaining the reality of sainthood as a mature believer?

12. What can you say, according to Romans 1:13-17, about the compulsion of the Gospel, the proclamation of the Gospel, the power of the Gospel, and the description of the Gospel?

13. What will persons reap if they spurn the mercy of God? What is the relationship between the love of God, the mercy of God, and the justice of God? (Note Romans 1:18)

14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The God who sooths is the God who also can sear, and both actions are the actions of holy love!"

15. What evidence (from a study of Romans 1:19-23) is there that monotheism (worship of one God) was before polytheism (worship of many gods) in the history of the human race? Is the evolutionary theory compatible with the teachings of Romans 1, especially as it relates to man's social and moral development?

16. How would you describe (according to Romans 1:23-32) the tragedy of sin's affects, in terms of physical, mental, spiritual, and social perversion?

17. What evidence is there, from an observation of modern-day society, that men are "worshipping creation rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:23, 25)?

18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We are free to choose, but not free to choose the results or consequences of our choices".

19. One of sin's judgements (according to Romans 1:21) is a distorted, irrational mind. List and describe some of man's modern-day irrational philosophies.

20. When sinful men continue to rebel against God, what frightful reaction on God's part is possible (according to Romans 1:24)? What is the final judgement of God upon unrepentant persons (Romans 1:32)?

21. List the five steps downward in sin's judgement, according to Romans 1:21-32.

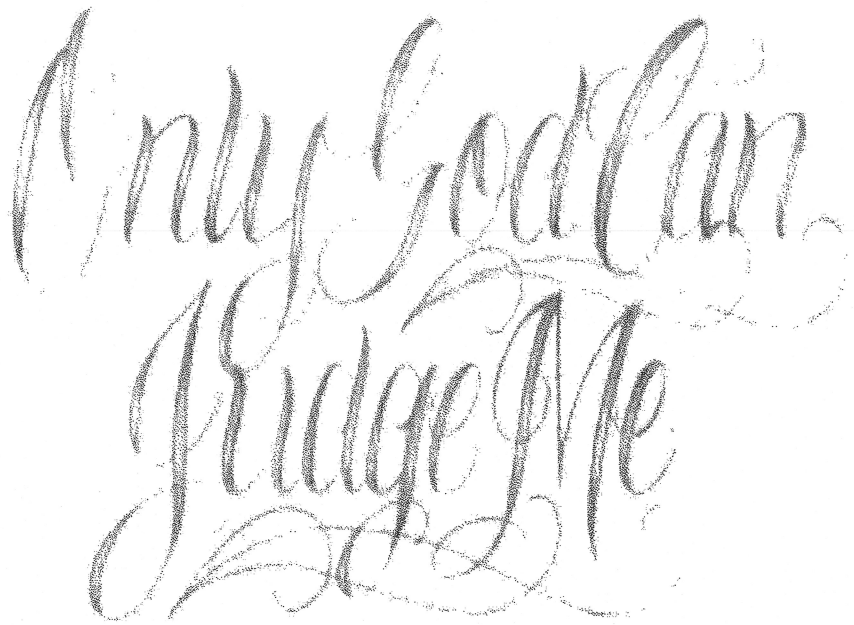
22. If chapter one of Romans describes 'down-and-out-sinners' who are morally perverted and grossly immoral, what does chapter two of Romans describe?

23. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The repulsive life of sensual perversion and the respectable life of self-righteous morality are equally offensive to the all-holy God, and both ways of life lead to the same eternal destination!"

24. There are two major flaws in attempting to gain God's approval by a life of outward morality. Describe those two major flaws.

25. What is the difference between an 'up-and-out-sinner' and a 'down-and-out-sinner'?

26. What is meant by the statement: "God has no grandchildren, only children".



CHAPTER 6

"STANDARDS FOR RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT!"

Romans 2:1-3

STANDARDS FOR RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT

Romans 1 describes both the gross nature of man's sinful perversions and the beautiful character of God's holiness. The God of Romans 1 is the God who loves; that is, He initiates the plan for man's salvation. He is the God who exercises mercy to undeserving sinners; that is, He invites the sinner to accept the plan for human salvation. But the God who initiates and who invites, is also the God who evaluates man's response to God's merciful offers. Thus, the justice of God is necessarily revealed in Romans 1 also.

There can be no initiation and no invitation without also the exercise of evaluation. To ask for a God of love and mercy is to ask also for a God of justice. And to accept a God of justice is necessarily to accept the divine action of judgement. There can be no justice without judgement.

Romans 2 describes the standards for righteous judgement. The rationale for judgement is described in Romans 1. The standards for judgement are described in Romans 2.

God is never arbitrary in judgement. "God's judgement. . .is based on Truth." (Romans 2:2) It is important to understand the principles that form the basis for righteous judgement. Romans 2 outlines the standards for righteous judgement.

PRINICIPLE 1: Genuine Possession, Not Shallow Profession (verses 1-3). Our Scripture reading today shows that the profession of the Jews was high, but the actual practice of righteousness was low. Profession and performance were miles apart!

"You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?" (Romans 2:21-23 NIV)

"Do as I say, not as I do"--that describes a great contradiction between profession and performance. What one professes ought to be an accurate reflection of what one possesses. One may not always live up to his high profession at every point, but there is always in the life of a sincere believer an attempt to close the gap between the high profession and the low performance. Hypocrisy, or deceptive role-playing, has no place in the life of an earnest believer. In the end, God will evaluate one's possession, not merely one's profession.

"I am naked and open before the One who created me and knows me! O God, you see me as I really am, not what others think I am! I confess that often I profess more than I possess. Fill me within and I shall be authentic without! Amen!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will help me to close the gap between my profession and my possession! My life and my lips will combine in one harmonious praise to God!

Romans 2:4-5

GOD'S KINDNESS SHOULD LEAD TO REPENTANCE!

PRINCIPLE 2: Repentant Response, Not Contemptible Rejection (verses 4-5). Our Scripture reading today teaches us that God's kindness, tolerance, patience, (in bestowing material blessings and spiritual knowledge) are meant to provide evidence of God's love and mercy, to incite man to heart-felt repentance. But too often the material blessings and spiritual blessings are looked at by man as evidence of man's independent genius and self-earned achievements. Instead of God's blessings inciting a repentant response, too often the blessings are attributed to man's achievements. Such a response equals a contemptible rejection of God's mercy. How a man responds to God's acts of kindness will provide the basis for God's judgement of that man.

Failure to repent is contemptible and tragic. Failure to repent assumes that God overlooks sin and sin's consequences. Failure to repent is taking advantage of God's forbearance. There are those who think that, because God's judgement has not immediately descended upon them after they have sinned, they are safe. However, God's forbearance in restraining immediate judgement is man's opportunity to repent and to amend his ways. Failure to repent is failure to understand the purpose of God's forbearance.

Paul, in effect, is saying, "Do you think that the fact that God does not punish you is a sign that he cannot punish you? The fact that his punishment does not immediately follow sin is not a proof of his powerlessness; it is proof of his patience. You owe your lives to the patience of God". (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 42)

God's kindness is meant to lead man to true repentance. Repentance means genuine sorrow over sin. It means turning one's back on sin and renouncing a life of sin. For instance, suppose a young girl breaks the heart of her parents through her sin. But suppose the parents of the girl genuinely forgive her. The forgiven daughter can either take advantage of that mercy and repeat the sin or she can be moved to wondering gratitude by the free forgiveness and spend the rest of her life seeking to be worthy of that forgiveness.

Heine, who had no worry about the future world, was asked why he was so confident. He answered, "God will forgive". When asked why he was so sure, he replied, "It is his trade". What a tragic presumption on God's mercy and love! Such a person is storing up wrath against himself for the day of God's wrath, when God's judgement will be revealed (verse 5).

"O God, let me never presume upon your love and mercy! Let me be gripped by the costliness of your forgiveness. So costly that the most beautiful life in the universe had to be nailed to a tree to make my forgiveness possible!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Christ is tender to those who repent, terrible to those who reject! I resolve always to maintain an attitude of repentance.

Romans 2:6-8, James 2:14-24

FAITH AND WORKS ARE TWIN SISTERS!

We are looking at the standards for righteous judgement as revealed in a study of Romans 2.

PRINICPLE 3: Goodly Persistence, Not Self-Seeking Pleasure (verses 6-8). It is not enough initially to repent of sin, but it is also necessary to persist in righteousness. Persistence in a life of righteous deeds ("doing good") and in a life with righteous goals ("seeking glory, honor, and immorality") will form the basis for God's righteous judgement. Romans 2:6-8 reveal two important points regarding the determination of one's eternal destiny: (1) It is not mere knowing, but doing that determines one's eternal destiny. (2) It is not mere starting, but finishing that determines one's eternal destiny.

In considering principle three (as stated above), first note that it is not mere knowing, but doing that determines one's eternal destiny. Religious knowledge without righteous practice is futile. Paul applied this truth to the Jews who were very knowledgeable of the Law, but who were disobedient to the Law. Writes Paul, "Being a Jew is worth something if you obey God's laws; but if you don't, then you are no better off than the heathen. And if the heathen obey God's laws, won't God give them all the rights and honors he planned to give the Jews? In fact, those heathen will be much better off than you Jews who know so much about God and have his promises, but don't obey his laws". (Romans 2:25-27, Living Bible) This passage emphasizes the importance of performance, of 'doing'. However, it does not declare that man is saved by performance of good works.

Man is not saved by works. That is the declaration of all of Scripture, especially of Romans. It is impossible to get into Heaven on the basis of one's good deeds. Why? Because "at your finest, you are an unprofitable servant. There is something to be forgiven in the best things you ever do. If you put all your service into one scale--all your good turns and all your kind thoughts--and, in the other scale, your mean thoughts, your unkind words, your shabby motives, your gross selfcenteredness and all your bad turns (which you have probably forgotten) can you doubt which way the scale would go down? Can you hear the righteous sentence 'Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting?'". (Sangster's Daily Readings, p. 359)

What this passage does teach is this: While no man is saved by good works, man is saved for good works. Man is saved by grace through faith, for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). Works are important to God. The Bible says so (Revelation 20:12-13, Titus 2:7, Matthew 5:16, Hebrew 10:24, I Peter 2:12).

"O God, I now understand that a saving faith is a working faith. Faith that does not issue forth in a life of holy actions is dead and useless! Help me to prove my faith by my good works!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I cannot be saved by good works, but neither can I be saved without good works!

Romans 2:6-8, Luke 12:42-46

STARTING, PERSERVING, FINISHING!

We continue to look at Principle 3 in our study of God's Standards for Righteous Judgement. We saw yesterday that is not mere knowing, but doing that determines one's eternal destiny. We saw that the Scriptures teach that a saving faith is a working faith. "Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds." (Titus 2:7 RSV) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24 NIV)

In considering Principle 3, we must also say that it is not mere starting, but finishing that determines one's eternal destiny. It is only those who persist in doing good that will reap eternal life. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." It is only he "who works out to a finish that which is good" (Romans 2:10, Wuest), that will ultimately be saved. (Note: The present tense verbs are used in Romans 2:7-10, thus showing the importance of continuation in good works in order to guarantee a good verdict at the final Judgement of God).

It is not the starter of a race who will be rewarded, but the finisher of a race! "He that endures to the end will be saved."

Among those who will be found in the Lake of Fire (according to Revelation 21:8) will be "cowards who turn back from following me, and those who are unfaithful to me". (Living Bible)

"It may be that a righteous man turns away and does wrong; he will die for his sin; the righteous deeds he has done will not be taken into account." (Ezekiel 3:20) Does this sound like there is no security for the believer? There is plenty of security for the believer--but only for the believer, i.e., the one who persistently trusts the Saviour!

Jesus' parable in Luke 12:42-46 emphasizes the importance of faithfulness to the end. He who is not found faithfully performing his God-given task when the Master returns, is subject to severe judgement.

So, any who practice self-seeking pursuits rather than godly pursuits are in for trouble. (Read Romans 2:8) Starting in the faith must eventuate in finishing in the faith. Jesus is the author and the finisher of our Faith; therefore, He will enable us both to begin and to finish our life-time pilgrimmage of faith. To such a person, the Master will say at the Judgement, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant".

"O God, Thou art the author and the finisher of my faith! Thou who hast begun a good work of faith in me, wilt thou faithfully continue that work until it is complete? Then I will be ready for heaven! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's faithfulness cannot avail for my unfaithfulness! Only as I persevere in faith will I be saved in the end!

Romans 2:9-11, Acts 10:34-38

GOD HAS NO FAVORITES!

Romans 2:9-11 reveals another of God's standards for righteous judgement of mankind.

PRINCIPLE 4: Equalitarian Justice, Not Racial Favoritism (verses 9-11). "There will be sorrow and suffering for Jews and Gentiles alike who keep on sinning. But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who obey him, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. For God treats everyone the same." (Romans 2:9-11, Living Bible)

Jesus is the Universal Christ--the Christ of all the nations, regardless of cultural, social or political differences. Christ does not destroy legitimate cultural practices. Christ is universally adaptable to men of all nations. There is no favorite race of people. Red, yellow, black, brown, and white--Jesus loves them equally. "God is no respector of nations". He created all peoples, therefore all are responsible to Him and will be judged by Him. (Acts 17:24,26,29-31)

God created all nations. Nations differ in the degree of light they have received. All nations are urged to leave behind idolatrous practices and serve the true God. All nations will be judged justly and righteously by the resurrected Christ at the end of the world.

Not the color of one's skin, but the condition of one's heart--that will be the thing that God will look at during the Great Judgement. "For you are not real Jews just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish initiation ceremony of circumcision, but he is looking for those with changed hearts and minds. Whoever has that kind of change in his life will get his praise from God, even if not from you." (Romans 2:28-29, Living Bible) God has no favored race of people and no nation has special privileges. One's national descent does not guarantee a special badge of honor.

But many Americans feel that they are God's 'favorites'. Many Americans feel that they are not only superior in terms of geographical location, natural resources, political system, and way of life, but that they are superior because they are God's specially chosen people, the objects of God's special purposes, privileges, and destiny. But the Scriptures declare to both the Jewish nation and to the American nation--'Equalitarian Justice, Not Racial Favoritism'. "For God treats everyone the same", whether American or Asian or African!

"O God, you are just and righteous in all your judgements! You do not show favoritism, but accept men from every nation who fear you and do what is right." (Acts 10:34-35)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God judges me, not by the color of my skin, but by the condition of my heart!

Romans 2:12-15, Luke 12:47-48

JUDGEMENT ACCORDING TO OPPORTUNITY

PRINCIPLE 5: Relative Opportunity, Not Absolute Uniformity (verses 12-15). There are differing degrees of rewards and there are differing degrees of punishment. There are differing degrees of spiritual light of truth given to humanity. Also there will be different standards for judgement at the end of the world. Says James, "When we teachers of religion, who should know better, do wrong, our punishment will be greater than it would be for others". (James 3:1, Living Bible)

"God will punish sin wherever it is found. He will punish the heathen when they sin, even though they never had God's written laws, for down in their hearts they know right from wrong. God's laws are written within them; their conscience accuses them or sometimes excuses them. And God will punish the Jews for sinning because they have his written laws, but don't obey them. They know what is right, but don't do it. After all, salvation is not given to those who know what to do, unless they do it." (Romans 2:12-15, Living Bible)

The light of Truth comes in different degrees, and each man will be judged according to the degree of response to the light that he has personally received.

The knowledge of the Truth of God is communicated through a variety of means--orderly nature, individual conscience, witness of the Church, printed Word of the Bible. All men are not fortunate enough to have available to them all of these forms of Revelation.

The degree to which one obediently responds to the revealed truth that he has received will determine the degree of one's reward or punishment. "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:47-48 NIV)

These truths help provide the answer to those who wonder what standard of judgement will be applied to those who lived before Jesus entered the world or to those millions in our present-day world who have never had the opportunity to even hear the name of 'Jesus'.

Jesus is a just and fair judge. Much will be taken into account and consideration by the Lord at the Final Day of Reckoning. Judgement will be based on 'Relative Opportunity, Not Absolute Uniformity'.

"O God, help me to live with a sense of accountability, always realizing that I am accountable for all the light of Truth which you have allowed me to receive. Help me to be true to the highest that I know!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I resolve to walk in all the light of Truth which God shines on my pathway today! (I John 1:7)

Romans 2:16, Psalms 139:23-24

GOD LOOKS ON THE HEART!

PRINCIPLE 6: Hidden Motive--Not Outward Appearances (verse 16). Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart. The words of a popular song express this: "People often see you as you are outside; Jesus really sees you as you are inside. How about your heart, is it right with God? That's the thing that really counts!"

It is possible to imitate the real thing. It is possible to know the right terminology without experiencing the reality which that terminology describes. It is possible to be religious without being converted. It is possible, as Paul reminded the Jews, to be outwardly circumcised on the body without being inwardly circumcised in the heart. It is possible to affect an outward change of reformation without experiencing an inward change of transformation. It is possible for the head to be trained without the heart being changed.

Religious observance without religious conversion is not enough. Nicodemus appeared to all to be religiously adequate and orthodox, but appearances are deceiving. Only he who is born again can enter heaven!

It is not enough to be a religious spectator; one must be a personal participant in the grace of God! Religious analysis is not enough; there must be religious appropriation. Going through the motions of Christianity without experiencing the reality of a personal relationship with Christ, is a tragedy indeed. It is not outward adherence to moral laws, but inward obedience to spiritual truth that is evidence of a genuine Christian.

It is possible to fool others by outward appearances, and worse yet, even to fool oneself. One can rationalize his behavior to the extent that his hidden motives become buried in his deep subconscious. Self-deception is a peril to be avoided by heart searching and repentant prayer.

Jesus penetrated the surface of outward pretenses and discerned the hidden corruptions of the heart. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matthew 23:27-28) In one of Jesus' parables he talked about wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The wheat and tares look alike as they are growing, but Jesus will harvest both and separate them at the end of the world.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalms 139:23-24)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is possible to be proper without and polluted within! I resolve to be pure within that I may be productive without!

Luke 12:2-3, Matthew 7:21-23

"EVERYBODY TALKIN' ABOUT HEAVEN, AIN'T GOIN' THERE!"

We must spend another day looking at the sixth principle for God's righteous judgement of mankind: 'Hidden motive--Not outward appearances'. Romans 2:16 says that "God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ". (NIV)

Jeremiah declared that the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9) Yet the Psalmist declares that God "knoweth the secrets of the heart". (Psalms 44:21) God alone can truly and accurately discern the thoughts, motives, and intents of the human heart. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:13)

Jesus alone is qualified to be the judge of mankind, for he alone knows all and can judge all without prejudice or distortion. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgement also, because he is the Son of man." (John 5:26-27)

Said Jesus, in warning against the hypocrisy and secrecy of the Pharisees: "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops". (Luke 12:2-3 NIV)

It is possible to perform great outward works of religion, and at the same time have inward concealed sin in one's life. The tragic story is told of a woman who confessed her deep sin to an evangelist. She had shamefully been the partner in an adulterous affair with her preacher! When the evangelist confronted the preacher with this sordid revelation, the pastor rather shrugged off the whole thing, and replied, "Well, even though I have engaged in adultery, I have preached greater sermons than ever before!".

We shudder at the very thought of such a hypocritical life! But let us remember that Jesus said there would be religious wonder-workers who would stand guilty before the Final Judgement Bar of God! The Negro spiritual says "Everybody talkin' about heaven, ain't goin' there!". Said Jesus, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven". (Matthew 7:21) "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." (I Samuel 16:7)

"O God, outward appearances can deceive, but you know the secrets of a man's heart. 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me'." (Psalms 19:12-13)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I want to live so authentically that what I am in secret can shamelessly "be proclaimed from the housetops". (Luke 12:3)

II Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 9:27

TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION!

We have carefully looked at the six standards for righteous judgement, as outlined in Romans 2. (1) Genuine Possession, Not Shallow Profession (verses 1-3); (2) Repentant Response, Not Contemptible Rejection (verses 4-5); (3) Godly Persistence, Not Self-Seeking Pursuance (verses 6-8); (4) Equalitarian Justice, Not Racial Favoritism (verses 9-11); (5) Relative Opportunity, Not Absolute Uniformity (verses 12-15); (6) Hidden Motive, Not Outward Appearances (verse 16).

Life is but a dressing room for heaven. Life on earth is life on probation, that is, life on trail. Who we go after here in this life will determine where we go hereafter. Man is given the awesome responsibility of choosing his own eternal destiny! There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. The Judgement of damnation for the sinner; the judgement of evaluation for the saint!

Choose ye this day whom you will serve, and choose carefully! For who you choose to serve in life will determine where you will live in eternity! To serve the Saviour means Heaven. To serve Satan means Hell.

Christ has already judged your sins on His cross. He now offers eternal life and hope to you. Come to him now! "Today is the day of salvation; now is the acceptable time."

The story is told of a young man who was considered by all of his friends to be a most dedicated Christian. He was raised in a godly home. He rigidly adhered to religious discipline, attending church regularly, memorizing Scripture, and living a clean life. This young man was very interested in missions. In fact, so interested in missions that he learned to prepare meager meals for himself so that he would have extra money to give away to missions! From all outward appearances, he was the epitome of Christian devotion and discipline. But one day, this young man heard of the Gospel plan of salvation presented in a very simple and compelling way. When learning of God's grace and love, the young man melted. He realized that during his years of religious training as a child, he had learned about Christ, but had never truly given his life to Christ. His outward life of religious respectability could never suffice for the inward corruption of his heart. He needed inward cleansing which only Christ could give!

Once when I was cutting firewood, I noticed a fallen tree. The tree outwardly appeared healthy and strong, but I was dismayed to observe that the inner core of the tree was hollow--the result of inner rotting! How is your inner life? Are you healthy within or are you spiritually rotting within?

"O God, I realize that it is not all of life to live nor all of death to die, but after death comes the Final Judgement. Help me always to be so prepared to die that I might be ready to live--here and hereafter! Through Jesus' atonement! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: All will be judged, none excepted! The sinner--the judgement of damnation; the saint--the judgement of evaluation! I resolve to live only for the latter!

Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1, Matthew 7:13-14

REMEMBER NOW THY CREATOR!

Ecclesiastes 12:1 tells you to "remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'". The Bible tells us that there is pleasure in sin only "for a season". Shortlived! One is never too young to make a choice to serve Christ! In his autobiography, E. Stanley Jones tells about the wrong choice of his boyhood friend. "I must pause long enough to tell about my chum who did not see any 'treasure' in what I saw. He looked elsewhere. When I said, 'Ras, I'm going to give myself to Jesus Christ. Will you?' and he replied, 'No, I'm going to see life first', we parted. He was to see life through his own desires; I was to see life through the desires of Christ. After thirty years we met again: 'Do you remember the night we parted? You said you were going to see life, and I said I was going to see Life. We've had thirty years in which to test our ways. How did you come out?' His eyes dropped, he looked confused, and then said: 'You wouldn't approve of the way I'm living'. And when he told what he was doing (following the races), I replied, 'No, I'm sorry I can't'. 'But', he added, 'it looks as though you've found Life'. 'Yes, I have', I replied, 'And I found it the night I found Christ'. 'Well, I'd better come over on your way', he added. 'You should have come over thirty years ago. You've worse than wasted thirty good creative years'. He took the way of chance, and I took the will of Christ. He came out at dissatisfaction, and I came out at satisfaction, the deepest that Life can know. And conversion made the difference." (Song of Ascents, p. 30-31)

Many talk about the high cost in serving Christ, but have you ever considered the high cost in NOT serving Christ? The way of the transgressor is hard! There is no peace unto the wicked! "The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble." (Proverbs 4:19) "The years of the wicked will be short." (Proverbs 10:27) "Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked; for the evil man has no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out." (Proverbs 24:19-20)

Romans, chapter three, describes the Christless life and the high cost in living that kind of life. The benefits in serving Christ must always be seen in contrast to the tragic consequences of not serving Christ.

"O God, ever save me from wrong moral choices. There is the broad road which seems easy at first to travel, but that road becomes rough and finally ends in perdition. Help me to take the narrow road which seems difficult at first to travel, but which leads to an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Every person is offered a choice--either the 'low' road or the 'high' road. I resolve to travel the 'high' road!

Romans 3:1-4

THE HIGH COST OF NOT SERVING CHRIST!

We have said that Romans 3 describes the Christless life and the high cost in living that kind of life. Romans 3:1-20 relates at least three spiritual laws: (1) Special privilege equals special responsibility; (2) Opportunity shunned equals condemnation earned; (3) Christless choices equal Christless consequences. During the next few days we must look at these three principles.

First, Special Privilege Equals Special Responsibility (Romans 3:1-4). God estabilished a covenant with Abraham that the descendants of Abraham would be blessed beyond measure. To Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, God gave the rite of circumcision which is a sign and seal of God's choice of the Jewish nation for divine purposes. The Jews rested comfortable in this covenant relationship and believed themselves automatically to be favored by God because they descended racially from Abraham. The Jews failed to realize that God's blessing on Israel depended upon Israel's maintenance of the faith of Abraham. Those who did not nurture the faith of Abraham, forfeited their rights to claim the covenant promises. 'Faith' not 'race', was the criterion to judge the privileged people--the people of God!

God further demonstrated His favored treatment of the Jewish people, because "God trusted them with his laws". (Romans 3:2)

The covenant at Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments, was a conditional covenant. God's promises were given conditionally. God promised to be faithful in fulfilling His promises, if man would be faithful in obeying His commands. With promises to be fulfilled always comes commands to be obeyed! God's faithfulness is never in question. Man's faithfulness is always in question. "True, some of them were unfaithful, but just because they broke their promises to God, does that mean God will break his promises? Of course not! Though everyone else in the world is a liar, God is not." (Romans 3:3-4a, Living Bible)

God gave special privileges to the Jews. God spoke directly to them through Moses and through the prophets. They had a special privilege to know and to do God's revealed will.

However, the Jews who knew so much rejected so much. They who saw God's steadfastness, failed themselves to be steadfast and faithful to God. They failed to see that special privilege always means special responsibility! They failed to see that special choice means special duty!

"O God, I see that you are perfectly just and yet tenderly merciful! The greater my opportunities, the greater my condemnation if I reject those opportunities! Help me to accept my 'golden' opportunities!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God elects to save all, but only those who respond to God's grace-offer, become in reality elected! I choose to respond to God's love call!

Romans 3:5-8

OPPORTUNITY SHUNNED EQUALS CONDEMNATION EARNED!

We have seen that special privilege equals special responsibility. (Romans 3:1-4) God is faithful to the promises of His covenant. God fulfills to the extent that man obeys. God is also true to the warnings of His covenant. God executes judgement to the extent that man is unfaithful to the covenant. God's faithfulness and God's justice are not to be questioned. It is man's faithfulness and disobedience that renders God's promises sterile! Not to meet the conditions of the covenant is to reap the judgements of the covenant. God is faithful in punishing the disobedient as well as faithful in rewarding the obedient. To reject the opportunities of great privilege is to reap the penalties of great judgement! To reject light is to reap darkness! To reject life is to reap death!

Second, Opportunity Shunned Equals Condemnation Earned (Romans 3:5-8). The high cost in not serving Christ is a low estimate of sin's seriousness, sin's nature, and sins's consequences. He who is rejecting Christ is he who is perverted in his understanding of sin. Such a man sees sin as a virtue! "They will be condemned, as they should be." (Romans 3:8, Today's English Version)

There are those, according to Romans 3:5-8, who would pervert the justice and the mercy of God through their sinful practices. There are those who would like to indulge in sin without taking the consequences of their sins. There are even those who would minimize the seriousness of sin by seeking to maximize the mercy of God.

Strange and perverted is the argument which says: "It is a good thing to break a parent's heart, because it gives the parent a chance to show how much he loves the child!"

Say those who want to make sin a virtue: "It is a good thing to sin, because it gives God a chance to forgive. It is a good thing for man to be bad for, by contrast, God's goodness is seen to be that much greater! It is a good thing for man to be wicked for this simply advertises the goodness of God! It is a good thing for man to engage in falsehood for this gives opportunity of the truth of God to receive greater honor!" But such reasoning is the reasoning of perverted man who wishes to sin and, at the same time, wishes to escape God's judgement and wrath!

God is not motivated by pride. God is motivated by holiness! God is a holy God, and thus, He hates sin! Sin is not a virtue! God has no desire to show His great righteousness in contrast to man's great sins!

"O God, help me always to see the seriousness of sin--sin's pollution, sin's power, and sin's consequences! Save me not only from sin, but from sinning! In Jesus' powerful name! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I must take sin most seriously if I am to take the Saviour most seriously!

I Samuel 1:21-28

THE PREVENTING GRACE OF GOD

"What kind of God would he be to overlook sin?" (Romans 3:6, Living Bible) If sin is really a virtue because it enables God's righteousness to stand out in bolder colors by contrast, then how could God ever condemn anyone for sinning? "For he could not judge and condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty brought him glory by pointing up his honesty in contrast to my lies. If you follow through with that idea you come to this: the worse we are, the better God likes it! But the damnation of those who say such things is just." (Romans 3:6-8, Living Bible)

Yes, God will always forgive, but that fact does not reduce the seriousness and tragedy of sin. Those who lightly view sin and see sin as a virtuous opportunity to demonstrate the power of God's grace and mercy and righteousness, have no conception of the damnableness of sin or of the holiness of God! The Bible never encourages man to become a great sinner to prove that God is a great Saviour!

A young man who was raised in a Christian home and who early in his life had accepted Christ as Saviour, heard a famous evangelist vividly describe the marvellous transformation of dope addicts and other great sinners. The Christian youth began to bemoan the fact that he was not saved from such a terrible life of sin. The Christian youth, as it were, felt that God's grace in saving him from sin was not as greatly or dramatically demonstrated as when God saved the drug addicts.

It is true that God's grace is marvellously demonstrated when sin abounds. When sin abounds, God's grace much more abounds! Praise God! God can save the foulest! There is no stain of sin that has gone so deep, but what Christ's blood can go deeper yet! But let us also remember that the grace that prevents one from becoming a great sinner is as great as the grace that saves a great sinner. Sin is never a virtue. We need not become a great sinner to prove that there is a great Saviour!

I have never heard an individual say that he regretted that he was a Christian, but I have heard scores say that they regretted that they did not become a Christian earlier in life! God forgives sin, but the scars of sin (sin's consequences) often remain long after the sin has been forgiven! The preventing grace of God is as great as the healing grace of God!

"O God, I cannot come to you soon enough! To know you is to experience happiness, health, and holiness! Save me not only from sin, but also from sin's telling consequences!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My payoff in serving Christ early in my life will be greatly received late in my life. The longer I serve Him, the Sweeter are His blessings!

Romans 3:9-18

CHRISTLESS CHOICES EQUAL CHRISTLESS CONSEQUENCES

One of the universal spiritual laws is this: Whatever a man sows, that also shall he reap! Romans 3:9-18 is a description of human nature in its Christless state. It is a description of the universality of human sin. All are sinners--both Jews and Gentiles. "There is none righteous, not even one". (verse 10)

This passage describes what in theology is called 'original sin'. Man is a sinner because he is born in sin. What is original sin? "It is that evil tendency with which every individual is born, a tendency which disposes him to do wrong and thus to become not only by nature, but by personal choice a sinner. This is explained by the universal law of natural generation that like begets like. Adam, by the personal exercise of his own free will fell into sin, thus becoming a sinner. The son born to him was like him not only in physical structure, but in his moral image as well. From Cain to the present all his descendants have inherited from him a nature depraved and prone to sin like his own. . .By his separation from God, man is first of all deprived of the life of God in the soul. The deprivation leads naturally to his being depraved to the point that every part of his nature is affected. It is very much like a child who is first of all deprived of nourishments necessary to the building of strong bones. The result of his being deprived of these substances is that his skeletal structure becomes twisted and out of natural shape. Man is sufficiently far gone from righteousness as to be 'inclined to evil and that continually'." (The Mature Church Member, Donald Bastian, p. 31-32)

Human nature is corrupted at the core. "All human nature is self-centered--even the nature of 'nice' and 'decent' people. Education makes no difference to this self-centeredness--except to put a veneer over it and make it less obvious. An observant man can see this self-centeredness every day--in himself, as well as in other people." (Questions People Ask About Religion, William Sangster, p. 57-58)

Does a small child need to be taught to be selfish? No, for he is selfish by nature. The patient parent painstakingly teaches the child to be unselfish, but nothing less than conversion will cure the problem. Adults, as well as children, manifest selfish traits, evidence of a nature uncleansed of original sin. All mankind is inflicted with the universal disease--self-centeredness! We choose sin because we are sinners by nature!

"Am I a sinner because I sin or do I sin because I am a sinner? Now I see! There is something deeply wrong with my human nature. I am a sinner by nature! I choose wrongly because I am inclined towards the wrong! O, God, give me both forgiveness and deliverance!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My first (physical) birth gives me an inclination to do wrong; my second (spiritual) birth gives me an inclination to do right. I will live in the power of the second birth!

Psalms 51:1-10

MANIFESTATIONS OF ORIGINAL SIN!

We have said that Romans 3:1-20 relates at least three spiritual laws: (1) Special privilege equals special responsibility; (2) Opportunity shunned equals condemnation earned; (3) Christless choices equal Christless consequences. It is this last principle that we are now studying.

Third, Christless Choices Equal Christless Consequences. We have said that Romans 3:9-18 declares the Universality of sin. Every man is born in sin. David declared in Psalms 51:5, "I have been evil from the time I was born; from the day of my birth I have been sinful." (Good News Bible)

However, while the Bible teaches the doctrine of original sin, the Bible does not teach the doctrine of original guilt. The human race is not guilty for Adam's sin, even though the human race has inherited the moral pollution as a result of being born to Adam's race. Guilt is the result of the wrong exercise of choice. An infant is incapable of exercising intelligent moral choice.

Original sin untreated becomes sin manifested outwardly. The roots of sin (original sin) produce the fruits of sin (acts of transgression). Sin which is allowed to become the master makes the sinner its slave.

Look at the manifestations of original sin--the corrupt fruits of an unregenerate life:

(a) Corruption In The Character
- (1) Ignorance--"There is no one who understands." (verse 11)
- (2) Crookedness--"All have swerved out of the way." (verse 12)
- (3) Indifference--"There is none who seeks the Lord." (verse 11)
- (4) Unprofitableness--"All together have gone bad (sour)." (verse 12)

(b) Corruption Of The Tongue
- (1) Destructive--"They practice fraud with their tongues." (verse 13, Barclay)
- (2) Deceitful--"The posion of asps (snakes) is under their lips." (verse 13, Barclay)
- (3) Malignant--"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." (verse 14, Living Bible)

(c) Corruption Of Conduct
- (1) Oppression--"Their feet are swift to shed blood." (verse 15)
- (2) Injuriousness--"Wherever they go they leave misery and trouble behind them." (verse 16, Living Bible)
- (3) Restlessness--"They have not known the way of peace." (verse 17, Barclay)

"O God, I see that the ultimate cause of human suffering is rejection of Christ and Christ's powerful provision for man's sin problem! Why should I continue to suffer in sin when you have provided a solution to sin? The blood, the blood of Christ is my healing and my health!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My double need has a double solution in Christ--forgiveness and cleansing. (I John 1:7) Glory!

II Corinthians 6:1-2

NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION!

Let us briefly retrace our steps which we have taken during the last few days. Romans 3:9-18 declares certain facts about man and his sin. Every man is born in sin. Every man is involved in the moral ruin caused by Adam's sin. Original sin left untreated manifests itself in outward (and many times, violent) sinful practices. We have noted the corruption of human character, speech, and conduct--the outward expression of original sin.

Further, we learn from studying Romans 3:18 what the root difficulty of mankind is: "There is no reverential respect and worship (fear) of God." Those who don't give to Christ the place in their hearts which he already enjoys in His universe--Sovereign place as Lord of all--are those who fall into sin's hurtful trap. Wrong choices result in wrong consequences. The wages of sin is death!

Sin has consequences for both time and eternity. I once had the joy of leading a middle-aged man to Christ--a man who earlier in his life was a heavy 'drinker' and a heavy user of tobacco. After surrendering his life to Christ, he lived radiantly. He was an inspiration to all who knew him. Nevertheless, only a few years after he was converted, I had the sad experience of burying him. He died from lung cancer, apparently caused by years of cigarette smoking.

It is never too early to come to Christ! Sin soon takes its evil toll on the body, mind, and spirit. The atonement of Christ provides for both forgiveness of overt sins and also for cleansing from original sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all righteousness." (I John 1:7)

Man may be bad, but man is never too bad to be saved. It is never too late to be saved. Sin may leave scars, but the redeeming God can turn the scars into stars! The description of man's sinful nature is not given to lead us to despair, but it is given to show us man's need for a great Saviour and a great Cleanser! Sin may abound, but grace always superabounds! "Now God says he will accept and acquit us--declare us 'not guilty'--if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we can all be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like. Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us 'not guilty' of offending him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in his kindness freely takes away our sins." (Romans 3:22-24, Living Bible)

"O God, it is never too early and never to late to come to thee. As long as there is physical breath, there is hope of receiving eternal life. Today is your day of salvation. Tomorrow may be too late! I place my full trust in Christ's atoning blood to save me from the guilt of my sins and to deliever me from the pollution of my sinful nature."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's grace is all-sufficient--to resolve my guilt, to cleanse my nature, and to redeem my scars!

Romans 3:19-26

"BUT NOW"--GOD'S 'NEVERTHELESS'

The key phrase which introduces God's one and only plan for man's salvation is the phrase 'But Now'. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law." (Romans 3:21a) Man is sinful, helpless, and hopeless--But Now--God provides a hope and a righteousness for man. The phrase 'But Now' is 'God's Nevertheless'. It is saying that, in spite of man's terrible predictament (as outlined in the first three chapters of Romans), God has an answer and hope for sinful mankind!

Let us spend some time looking at this important phrase 'But Now'. When can it be said? Why can it be said? By whom can it be said?

First, 'But Now'--When can it be said? When you are speechless before the Law. "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:19-20) Only when you are hushed, and speechless, and stand guilty before a just God can you sense the importance of the words 'But Now'.

Why is it that no person can be justified in God's sight by the works of the law? For several reasons. One, because the Law is perfect and mankind is imperfect. Romans 8:3 tells us that man is weak and sinful to keep the perfect law. Two, because possession of the Law without performance of the Law is a curse. The Jews prided themselves in possessing the Law. "You Jews think all is well between yourselves and God because he gave his laws to you. . .You are so proud of knowing God's laws, but you dishonor him by breaking them." (Romans 2:17,23, Living Bible) No fault is to be found in God's perfect Law. The fault is found in the weakness of sinful humanity which is unable to keep the Law. The Law reveals God's perfect standards and man's consequent failure to keep those standards. Three, because breaking some of the Laws is to be totally guilty as a Law-breaker. Mistaken are those who, like the Jews, think that if they keep the majority of the Law, they will be acceptable to God. James wrote, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all". (James 2:10) Four, because attention to the letter of the law without obedience to the spirit of the law is useless. Even if it were possible to keep the external requirements of the Law, the internal spirit of the Law could still be broken. The spirit of man needs cleansing before he can keep the spirit of the Law!

"A mirror can reveal dirt, but a mirror cannot remove dirt. Your Law, O God, is like a mirror. It reveals my sin, but it cannot remvoe my sin. For by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20), but only by the Son is the knowledge of sins forgiven!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My speechlessness before my sin and before God's holiness shall give way to shouting before God's mercy and before God's forgiveness!

I Timothy 2:3-6, I Peter 1:18-19

A BRIGHT PICTURE AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND!

The universality of sin (Romans 3:9-18) among all humanity is the dark, hopeless, and sombre background against which Paul begins to paint a bright picture of hope (Romans 3:19-26). Conviction of sin is necessary for conversion to God. Until one senses his desperate plight in sin, he does not sense his desperate need for a Saviour.

'But Now'--when can it be said? When one senses his need for God. When one is speechless before God. When one recognizes his guilt before God and senses his need for a Saviour. When one realizes that the Law can diagnose sin, but it cannot destroy sin.

'But Now'--this phrase introduces the subject of God's marvellous plan of salvation, against the background of man's miserable failure--the failure of the Gentiles without the Law and the failure of the Jews with the Law.

'But Now'--these two words introduce God's ingenious plan to save the fallen race of mankind!

Second, 'But Now'--Why can it be said? Because God has provided an answer to man's helplessness. 'But Now' is the 'Nevertheless' of God. 'Nevertheless', in spite of man's predictament in sin, God took the initiative to put man right with God! God's plan to save mankind is found in Jesus.

One, Jesus provides for man's justification (verse 24). God treats the sinner 'just-as-if-he-had-never-sinned'. Justification is a term that paints a picture of one who is guilty before a judge. Justification means that the Judge treats (reckons or accounts) the guilty one--the sinner-as if the had never sinned. The kind of love which treats a sinner as if he were innocent is the kind of love that changes the total relationship of a sinner to God. Sinners "are justified by his grace as a gift". (Romans 3:24a)

Two, Jesus provides the sacrifice for mankind. "God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as a means of saving us from his wrath." (Romans 3:25, Living Bible)

Three, Jesus provides for mankind's deliverance (redemption). The sinner is saved through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (verse 24). Common to the idea of redemption is freedom--the result of paying the ransom price. When a ransom was given for a slave, the slave was freed. The Bible defines man as a slave to sin, and it describes Christ's death as a death to ransom man, to free him from the bondage of sin.

"My sin is like quicksand. The more I struggle to get out of my sin, the deeper I sink into its mire! Thou, O Christ, art the extended hand of God! Thou alone canst save me from my sinking death! Taking your hand, I take Salvation and Life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "On Christ the Solid Rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand!"

Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 11:6

'FAITH'--THE UPWARD REACH OF MAN'S HAND!

Romans 3:19-26 describes man's needs and also outlines Christ's provisions in terms of justification, sacrifice, and deliverance. It is now left for man to respond. Self-righteousness cannot gain God's favor. Only the righteousness which comes through faith is sufficient--"The righteousness of God through faith in Christ for all who believe." (Romans 3:22)

Here is the answer--faith in Jesus! It is Jesus who saves us. It is not our faith which saves us, but it is Jesus who saves us! However, without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6) It is impossible to be saved without the exercise of faith. Faith is the upward reach of man's hand toward the downward reach of God's saving hand! The man who is sinking in the quicksand is saved by the man who is on the solid rock nearby. However, the sinking man cannot be saved without extending his hand to the strong hand of the man on the rock. It is not the extension of the hand which saves, although one in such a state could not be saved automatically without cooperating with the man on the rock. Christ is our Saviour, but He cannot save us automatically. We must reach out with the hand clasp of faith!

All this is brought out strikingly in Mason's well-known hymn:

Lord, I was blind; I could not see
In Thy marred visage any grace;
But now the beauty of Thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.

Lord, I was deaf; I could not hear
The thrilling music of Thy voice;
But now I hear Thee and rejoice,
And all Thine uttered words are dear.

Lord, I was dumb; I could not speak
Thy grace and glory of Thy name;
But now, as touched with living flame,
My lips Thine eager praises wake.

Lord, I was dead; I could not stir
My lifeless soul to come to Thee;
But now, since Thou has quickened me,
I rise from sin's dark sepulcher.

Lord, Thou hast made the blind to see,
The deaf to hear, the dumb to speak,
The dead to live; and lo, I break
The chains of my captivity.

"Faith is being sure of what I hope for and certain of what I do not see. (Hebrews 11:1) O Lord, in thee my hope for deliverance from sin finds fulfillment! In thee my vision for new life finds realization! Faith tells me that the best is yet to be--full redemption in Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The downward reach of God's steadfast hand of mercy is always longer than the upward reach of my struggling hand!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'STANDARDS FOR RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT'

1. Tell why (from a study of Romans 1) you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There can be no initiation of love by God and no invitation to salvation from God, without the exercise of evaluation of human response by God". (Why is it impossible to ask for a God of love and of mercy without also asking for a God of justice?)

2. In seeking to understand God's standards for righteous judgement, will God judge a person on the basis of his high profession of faith or on the basis of his actual performance of faith? What will a sincere believer do when he recognizes that there is a gap between his high profession of faith and his lower performance in faith? What is the Biblical definition of hypocrisy, as this term relates to this discussion?

3. For what main purpose does God bestow material and spiritual blessings upon sinners (according to Romans 2:4)? How do sinners too often respond to the blessings they receive from God?

4. Man's continuing failure to repent reveals what wrong attitudes in man, and incites what ultimate reaction from God? (Romans 2:4-11)

5. What does it mean to presume upon God's mercy and love?

6. According to Romans 2:6-8, what (in addition to man's exercise of initial faith in the saving power of Christ) is necessary if a person is ultimately to enjoy eternal life hereafter?

7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "While no man is saved by good works, man is saved for good works; man is saved by grace through faith, for good works". (Ephesians 2:8-10)

8. How important are good works to God? (Note Revelation 2:12-13, Titus 2:7, Matthew 5:16, Hebrews 10:24, I Peter 2:12) What is meant by the statement: "It is not mere knowing, but doing that determines one's eternal destiny".

9. Why is it impossible to get into heaven on the basis of one's good deeds? Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I cannot be saved by good works, but neither can I be saved without good works!"

10. What is the significance of the use of the 'present tense' verbs in Romans 2:7-10, as these relate to an understanding of the conditions for final salvation in heaven? (Also note Revelation 21:8, Ezekiel 3:20, Luke 12:42-46) From a study of these Scriptures (and many others) would you conclude that the Bible teaches conditional or unconditionally 'eternal security'?

11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God's faithfulness cannot avail for my unfaithfulness. Only as I persevere in faith will I be saved in the end!"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'STANDARDS FOR RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT' (continued)

12. What does Romans 2:9-11 reveal regarding God's standards for righteous judgement?

13. What Scriptural basis can you give (especially in the second chapter of Romans) for supporting the following statement: "The Light of Truth comes in different degrees, and each man will be judged according to the degree of response to the light that he has personally received". (Is there a Scriptural basis to say that there will be degrees of punishment and degrees of rewards, based upon the degree or response by mankind to the various kinds of revelation given by God?)

14. What are several ways by which the knowledge of God's Truth is communicated to mankind?

15. On what basis will God judge a human being at the Final Judgement, according to Romans 2:16? (Note Hebrews 4:13, Matthew 13:24-30, Luke 12:2-3)

16. Is it true that every human being will be judged? If so, what kind of judgement will sinner and saint experience? (Note II Corinthians 5:10, II Thessalonians 1:8-10)

17. What Scriptures can you cite that indicates that there is a higher cost in NOT serving Christ than there is in serving Christ.

18. Was God's covenant at Mount Sinai with His people (the Israelites) a conditional or an unconditional covenant? Before God's promises to mankind can be fulfilled, are there always commands to be obeyed? While God's faithfulness and sovereignty are never in question, is man's faithfulness (in his probationary state on earth) always in question?

19. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God is faithful, both to the promises and to the warnings of His covenant. God fulfills His promises to the extent that man obeys His commands; God executes His judgement to the extent that man is unfaithful to God's covenant requirements".

20. What arguments do people use (according to Romans 3:5-8) when they wish to turn sin into a virtue?

21. Give your interpretation of the following statement (as it relates to Romans 3:6-8): "The preventing grace of God is as great as the healing grace of God!"

22. Can you cite illustrations, either from your own life or from observations of others, to show the truthfulness of the following statement: "God forgives sin, but the scars of sin (sin's consequences) often remain long after the sin has been forgiven!"

23. What is meant by the term 'Original Sin'? What evidence, from common everyday life, is there that demonstrates the reality of Original Sin? Do you agree with the following statement: "We humans choose to sin because we are sinners by nature!"

24. Because a man is a sinner by nature and by choice, what is God's two-fold cure for man's two-fold sin problem? (Note I John 1:7)

25. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The atonement of Christ provides for both forgiveness of overt sins and also for cleansing from original sin".

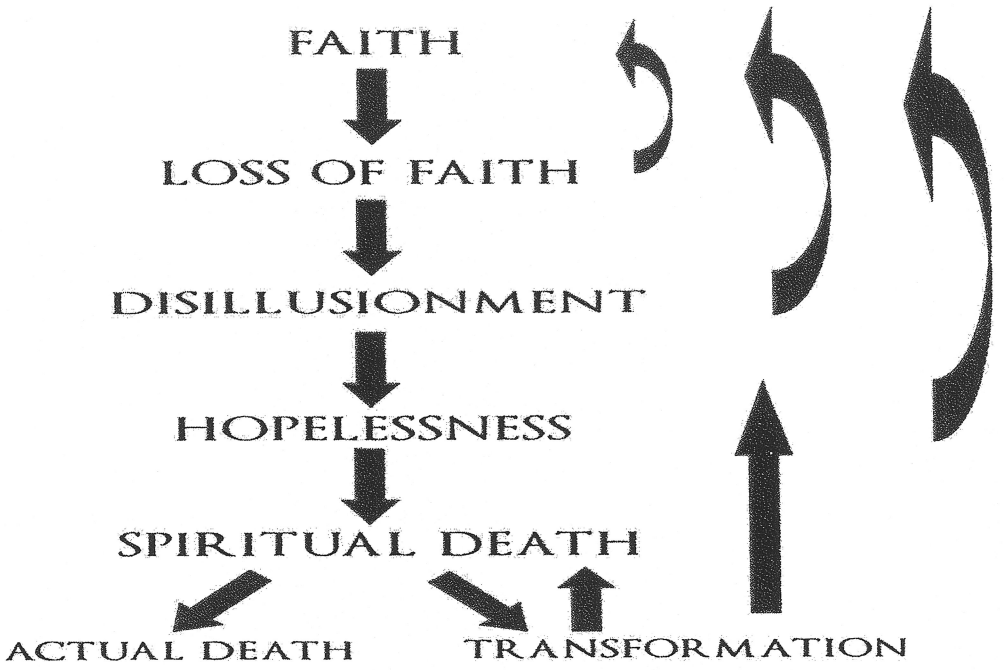
26. In light of the fact of man's moral predictament, what is God's answer, according to Romans 3:22-24?

27. Can you share a personal testimony to document the truth of the following statement: "God's grace is all-sufficient--to resolve my guilt, to cleanse my nature, and to redeem my scars!"

28. Give four reasons why no person can be justified in God's sight by the works of the Law.

29. In light of man's helplessness, name three things (according to Romans 3:24-25) that God, through Christ, has provided for mankind.

30. What is your definition or description of 'saving faith' (as the latter is given as God's required condition for salvation from sin)?



CHAPTER 7

"FATHER OF OUR FAITH AND FAITH OF OUR FATHER!"

Romans 4:1-12

FAITH PERSONIFIED

Faith is the great theme of the Book of Romans. Paul uses various approaches to prove his thesis that a man is put into a right relationship with God by faith--not by the works of the Law.

Instead of speaking about Faith abstractly, Paul points to faith in action, faith embodied in a person. Abraham is called the father of faith, because Abraham embodied faith.

Because of the majority of the Jewish Rabbis were so greatly in love with their theory of works, most misinterpreted the story of Abraham, and claimed that Abraham was chosen by God because of his works. However, Paul argues instead that Abraham was not chosen by God to be the father of the nation of Israel and the one who was declared righteous before God, because of good works, but because of obedient faith. Hebrews 11:8 further confirms this conclusion and defines faith as a faithful and obedient response to God's call to action. "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8 NIV)

What puts one into a right relationship with God? Faith in God and in Christ. Faith has been defined in a variety of ways: (1) Taking God at His word; (2) Trust in the trustworthiness of God's character; (3) Obeying God's commands without arguing or hesitating; (4) Complete trust in God; (5) Willing abandonment of one's life to God; (6) Commitment of one's will to do God's will; (7) Belief that God's promises are true, and casting oneself upon those reliable promises; (8) Acceptance in simple trust of the love which God offers to man. All of these descriptions of faith find concrete expression in the life of Abraham.

The Jews mistakenly believed a man was justified before God by keeping the Old Testament Law and by the rite of Circumcision. But Paul makes it clear that Abraham was justified by faith long before the Law was given to Moses. Further, Paul notes that Abraham did not even receive the circumcision rite until fourteen years after he had answered God's call and entered into the unique relationship with God. (Genesis 15:5, 17:10)

Therefore, the Law of Circumcision had nothing to do with putting Abraham into a right standing with God. It was faith--not the Law or circumcision--which justified Abraham before God. Faith personified is seen in Abraham. Faith obeys without debate, waits without despair, and separates without escaping reality. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:3)

"God, help me to exercise true faith, the kind of faith which Abraham exercised. Help me faithfully and obediently to respond to Your call to action in my life. Help me to be a living embodiment of faith. In Jesus' name. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Saving faith is obedient faith. I will take God at His word today, and step out in faith to do His will.

Genesis 12:1-5

FAITH WHICH SEPARATES

"Now the Lord has said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." (Genesis 12:1) Whatever Abraham's personal relationship with the true God was in his youth, in the midst of this prosperous, pagan culture, God called Abraham to leave his country and kindred and follow Him.

Many persons, like Abraham, have doubtless been criticized for leaving their home and country to obey a divine call. "There were two boys in the Taylor family. The older said he must make a name for the family, and so turned his face toward Parliament and fame. The younger decided to give his life to the service of Christ and so turned his face toward China and duty. Hudson Taylor, the missionary died, beloved and known on every continent. 'But when I looked in the Encyclopedia to see what the other son had done', said one, 'I found these words, "The brother of Hudson Talyor"'." (Shoe-Leather Faith, Merv Rosell, No. 35)

The faith which separates always separates for a purpose--a redemptive purpose. The 'holy' man is the separated man--separated to perform a great task for God and for man. David Livingstone was such a man. He obeyed God's call to go to Africa where he established a number of missions over a period of several decades. Livingstone, like Abraham, was separated from his home and country, but his separation was for the purpose of service to God and to man.

Abraham's separation from his home and country gave opportunity for his faith to develop and to become strong. When earthly 'props' are taken away, there is even a greater need to depend upon divine 'supports'.

Sometimes faith means separation from one's employment or job to become involved in 'full-time Christian service'. My aunt and uncle lived on a farm and they greatly enjoyed this kind of life. However, God called my aunt to go into the pastoral and evangelistic ministry. At first she resisted, thinking that her husband would not be willing to leave their farm. God continued to call her however, and finally she and her husband together decided to leave their farm and go into active ministry. That decision was made years ago. After spending many fruitful years in the work that God had called them to, they retired and are today filled with joy that they obeyed their Lord by separating themselves from their former way of life on the farm.

When God called Abraham to leave his home and country, He made a promise to Abraham: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing". (Genesis 12:2)

"Father, thou art faithful to me. There is no shadow of turning with Thee. Help me in turn to be faithful in obeying Your call on life, even if obedience to that call means a change of direction in my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Faith separates me from sin and selfishness, in order to separate me to sincerity and service.

Hebrews 11:8-12,17-19

FAITH IS SEPARATION FROM COMPLACENCY

God chose Abraham in order that He might have a human instrument through who He could prepare the world for the coming of His Son. In the chaos of darkness and ignorance, God intervened in human history to choose a man through whom He might begin to unfold His plan of redemption and reconciliation of mankind.

Israel, the descendant people of Abraham, was especially chosen as the bearers and the conveyors of God's message to the world, which was culminated in Jesus Christ. In reality, all the peoples of the earth are blessed in Abraham, for Christ came from Abraham, and through Christ all mankind is provided salvation. Abraham was chosen for this purpose, that through one of his descendants, the Son of God could come upon the stage of human history in a human form, to bless all the world through His compassionate life, redemptive death, and victorious resurrection.

If Abraham would have been complacent to God's call, we would never have heard of Abraham. God may have chosen another man, but the purposes of God through Abraham would have been frustrated. Complacency is most costly. It can result in adversely affecting many future generations. "One tremendous instance of that happened in 1271. Nicolo and Maffeo Polo were at the court of Kublai Khan, whose empire stretched from the Urals to the himalayas, and from the Danube to the China Sea, and Kublai Khan said, 'I want you to go back to the Pope and I want you to ask him to send a hundred missionaries, and I'll become a Christian and all my great men will become Christians, and all my country will become Christians, and you will have more Christians in the east here than ever in the west'. So they went back and they asked the Pope, but the Pope was too busy playing politics. For eighteen years nothing was done and then a few missionaries were sent, just a handful; too late and too few. Now think what might have happened if that chance had been taken. China would have been Christian; Japan would have been Christian; the Middle East would have been Christian; Turkey would have been Christian; even India would have been Christian--the face of the world would have been changed. But the Church refused the chance." (The Life of Jesus For Everyman, William Barclay, p. 94-95)

It was not easy for Abraham to obey when he could not see immediate results. Abraham left his home and went into an unknown future. Between God's first promise to Abraham and its fulfillment in the birth of Isaac, there was an elapse of more than twenty years! Then after Isaac was born, Abraham experienced his severest test when he was told by God to sacrifice his only son. But, while obedience may not be easy, its rewards are great!

"God, help me to walk boldly into the future with you. Take away my fear of the unkown. Help me to realize that what you promise, you always fulfill--in your own time and way!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Whatever I sow, I will reap. If I sow complacency, I will reap destruction. If I sow faith, I will reap a mighty harvest of fruitfulness--for myself and for future generations!

Romans 4:13-17

FATHER OF OUR FAITH

George Washington is considered the Father of the United States. He was the great Commanding General during the Revolutionary War, and later he became the first President of the United States. When we think of Washington, we think of everything America stands for--freedom, democracy, patriotism, human dignity, deep piety. George Washington was not the only one in the early days of America who stood for these great qualities, but he is the one man who best personifies and demonstrates the spirit of Americanism.

George Washington was early called the "Father of his Country". He helped shape the beginning to the United States. He was so deeply admired in early America, that his army officers would have made him king if he had let them. Said Thomas Jefferson about Washington, "His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known. He was indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good and a great man".

Abraham is considered the Father of Faith. "The central declaration (of Romans 4) is that Abraham is the father of all who believe. He is the father, the pattern, the leading example, the archetype, the first in a great succession. To put it in another way, it is in the case of Abraham that God defines righteousness and establishes and declares explicitely the principle on which anyone is made righteous. We must not think that Abraham was the first man to be justified; that would be patently wrong. People like Abel and Enoch and Noah and others were equally justified in the sight of God, but it is in the case of Abraham that God makes plain and clear and explicit the way in which He justifies men." (Romans, Atonement and Justification, Lloyd-Jones, p. 185)

So, just as George Washington is the personification of Amercianism, Abraham in a similar way, is the personification of Faith.

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Abraham was declared righteous, not on the basis of his own merit or goodness, but on the basis of obedience to God's call. The faith which justified Abraham was the faith which separated Abraham from his homeland, from his kinsfolks, from his pagan worship. Abraham's faith was a faith which separated him <u>from</u> the negative influences and which separated him <u>to</u> the positive pathway of obedience. It is not by works of the law, but <u>by</u> the simple repsonse of faith as shown in the life of Abraham that justifies a man in God's sight. Romans 4 contrasts the way of faith with the way of works, and declares Faith as the only pathway to God. The example of Abraham is the example for every man to follow.

"O Father, how can I get into a right relationship with you? How can my terrible estrangement be taken away? How can I find peace and forgiveness? 'Not the labours of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands.' Is there any way to be put right? Now I see! Only one way! The way of Faith!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My biggest problem--sin--is adequately met by God's greatest solution--salvation--and is found by life's simplest method --faith!

Romans 4:18-25

FAITH OF OUR FATHER

The first half of Romans 4 speaks of the 'Father of our Faith', and the last half of Romans 4 speaks of the 'Faith of our Father'. Romans 4 contrasts the way of faith with the way of works, and shows that one can be justified in God's sight by Faith only. Because Faith in contrast to Works is a major theme of the book of Romans, we must spend some time on this theme.

In the 'Way of Works', man seeks to acquire merit in the sight of God through doing works which the law prescribes. This method depends on human effort. In the 'Way of Faith', man accepts the free gift of God's love which is forgiveness and peace, without any attempt to merit that gift. This method depends on divine grace. "It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes from faith." (Romans 4:13) "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." (Romans 5:1-2)

In attempting to achieve God's favor through human effort, there is always uncertainty as to how close one is coming in attaining the desired goal. One tends to think, "Perhaps a little more effort and work will gain God's favor and put me in good standing with God". Such attitudes of the mind and labors of the hand, lead to stress, strain, anxiety and misery. Simply recall Martin Luther's agony of soul when he tried to earn God's favor by religious labors and performance. However, in contrast to the 'Way of Works', the 'Way of Faith' is simply the acceptance of God's free forgiveness and loving favor (grace), and is not based upon human performance and achievement. It has nothing to do with seeking to appease an angry God or seeking to outbalance one's bad works with good works. The way of faith leads to quiet confidence and rest in God.

The way of works is the way of law. The more one focuses upon works, the more one focuses upon law. The law then becomes the focus of attention and the standard for harsh judgement. Fear becomes the motivation for behavior. Performance of good works to avoid God's judgement becomes the goal of life. However, the way of faith is the way of grace. The more one focuses upon faith, the more one focuses upon grace. God's love then becomes the focus or attention and the standard for merciful evaluation. Love becomes the motivation for behavior. Performance of good deeds to express love to God and love for man becomes the goal of life.

"For too long, O God, I have tried to gain your favor through human merit. I have tried to outbalance my bad works with good works. It has all led to uncertainty and restlessness. I come to thee now with an empty heart and with open hands. I receive your grace in simple faith!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The labors of my hands shall henceforth be, not to work for God's love, but to love God's works!

Galatians 3:1-9

THE WAY OF WORKS VERSES THE WAY OF FAITH

The 'Way of Works' is weak; the 'Way of Faith' is strong. What the law forbids, the sinful heart desires, resulting in condemnation. "It is human nature that when a thing is forbidden it has a tendency to become desirable. 'Stolen fruits are sweetest.' Law, therefore, can actually move a man to desire the very thing which it forbids. The essential complement of law is judgement, and so long as a man lives in a religion whose dominant thought is law, he cannot see himself as anything other than a condemned criminal at the bar of God's justice." (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 69) "For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression." (Romans 4:14-15) The way of works is based on human obedience to law, with the tragic consequence of a long series of transgressions waiting to be punished. The man who is law-oriented seeks to resolve guilt by compensation of accumulated good works.

The way of faith is the only way to God. What love commands, grace provides, resulting in loving fellowship. As long as the human heart is unconverted, the holy law of God is impossible to keep. However, when God's grace and power changes human nature, the converted human nature becomes compatible to the holy commnads of Divine Love. What Divine Love commands, converted human nature demands. Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Therefore, result is divine-human reconciliation and warm loving relationship and fellowship. The law magnifies sin and condemns the sinner. Grace forgives sin and receives the sinner. The law condemns the sinner in his sin. Grace changes a sinner into a saint. The way of works leads to judgement and wrath. The way of faith leads to forgiveness and peace. The way of faith is based on human submission to divine love, with the result of repentant adjustments to God's revealed will in the unfolding love relationship. The man who is grace-oriented resolves guilt by resort to confession and faith in Christ's atoning blood.

The way of law and works was futile, even for those who carefully adhered to the prescriptions of the Mosaic system of sacrifice and atonement. (Hebrews 10:1-4) However, the way of faith and grace is the workable, all-inclusive and universal way, for God's provision of forgiveness has been made for the entire human race. (Romans 4:16) The way of faith is open to us all, for the atonement of Christ was all-inclusive and final. (Hebrews 10:11-12) The way of the law, under which the Jews lived, was the way of narrow exclusiveness. The system of law, which was misapplied by the Jews, led to pride, judgementalism, and aloofness.

"O God, the more I attempt to justify myself by law, the more condemned I feel! The law is perfect, but I am polluted; therefore, I can't keep the law. What the law forbids, my corrupt human nature desires. Is there no hope for me? None, if my human nature can't be changed! But, thanks to God's power, I can be changed! I can be converted! I can be cleansed! All through faith in Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What God commands, my God-created nature demands, and Christ's grace supplies! Glory!

Galatians 3:10-14

DOES FAITH FACE THE FACTS?

The 'Way of Works' believes the possible is confined to the visible and the reasonable, accomplished by human effort, genius, and power.

The 'Way of Faith' believes the seemingly impossible and unreasonable is possible because of the power of a miracle-performing God. Romans 4:17 tells us that Abraham believed God's promise of descendants, in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances. "As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations'. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'. Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb also was dead." (Romans 4:17-19)

In 'The Way of Works', confidence and assurance is based on the ability of man's performance and the trustworthiness of material circumstances. In the 'Way of Faith', confidence and assurance is based on the reliability of God's promises. In spite of the contradiciton of human circumstances, and the seemingly impossible content of God's promises, Abraham was "fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised". (Romans 4:21)

In the 'Way of Works', the claim to realism is unfounded, for only part of reality--the material--is accepted.

In the 'Way of Faith', the claim to realism is solidly founded, for all of reality--both the material and the spiritual--is accepted. "That brings out the vital element in faith, that it is not something that refuses to face facts. There are some people who think of faith in that way, and the result is that the man of the world says, 'What you Christians call faith I call escapism'. That is what the clever men of the world say about Christians. They say that Christian people are not realists, that they meet together in their buildings and will pull down the blinds and shut out the world and its problems, and then persuade themselves of certain things. They say it is all wishful thinking and escapism, that such people do not face the facts of life, but run away from them. One man reads a novel, these others believe the Christian message, they say, but it is all escapism. Here we have the answer to that; Abraham faced the facts, he reminded himself of his own age, as the Apostle tells us here; and also of Sarah's age. He looked at the facts as they were, at their very worst; and yet, though he did that, he was not at all weakened in his faith. . .he looked at Someone else. The trouble with unbelief is that it only looks at the difficulties." (Romans 4, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 216-217)

"O God, I want to be a 'realist'. I cannot escape the hard facts of life! But to face all of life realistically, I now see that I must look at the spiritual as well as the material, I must look at the invisible support of the divine as well as the visible supports of the human, I must consider the limitless possibilities of divine power as well as the human limitations of human weakness. Now I see! The man of faith is the true 'realist'. He sees reality through God's eyes!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Through my faith, my human problems will become divine projects, and God has never yet failed in His projects!

Galatians 3:15-20

FAITH IS THE WAY OF HUMILITY

The way of works inevitably leads to pride and boasting. "For by grace are ye saved by faith, and that not of yourselves, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) The way of works depends upon man's performance and achievement; therefore all glory is ascribed to man alone. "Glory to man in the highest" are the words of the boasting heart, which has made human performance the object of praise.

The way of faith and grace depends upon God's working; therefore all glory is ascribed to God alone. "What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" (I Corinthians 4:7) "Abraham did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God." (Romans 4:20) Anyone, like Abraham, who believes the seemingly impossible promises of God, a person who affirms the power and majesty of God, and thus, such a person glorifies God--that is, gives glory to God. "Glory to God in the highest" are the words of the humble heart, which has made the mighty works of God the object of praise.

The work-oriented man is the man who bases his faith in human performance, hence pride and boasting. The grace-oriented man is the man who bases his faith in the all-powerful, all-loving God, hence humility. He submits in humility to God's power and God's performance.

In the 'Way of Works', hope is based on what man can do for God. Hence, man's work is the focus of attention, which leads to pride and boasting. In the 'Way of Faith', hope is based on what God can do for man. Hence, God's power and love is the focus of attention, which leads to humility and worship of God.

In the 'Way of Works', rewards are based on man's calculations of earned achievements. The works-oriented person seeks to make God his debtor. In the 'Way of Faith', rewards are based on God's gifts of unearned and undeserved favor. The grace-oriented person recognizes that he is an eternal debtor to God.

The works-oriented person demands justice, and receives justice. Such an individual is spiritually-blinded, not realizing the consequences of his request for justice, which is divine wrath, judgement, and retribution. The grace-oriented person begs for mercy and receives mercy. Such an individual realizes that he comes short of the glory of God and falls short of the perfect standards of holiness. He finds mercy, forgiveness, justification.

"O God, my request shall be mercy, not justice. My motivation for labor shall be love, not fear. My accomplishments shall be God-given, not humanly achieved. My boasting shall be in God's perfect glory, not in man's passing glory. My rewards shall be humbly received, not pridefully demanded. I shall take the way of faith, not the way of works!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The way of justice is the way of harsh judgement; the way of mercy is the way of lavish love. I choose mercy!

Galatians 2:15-21, 3:21-25

THE POSSIBILITIES OF FAITH!

We noted yesterday that the 'Way of Works' leads inevitably to pride, while the 'Way of Faith' always leads to humility. In the spirit of pride, the self-sufficient soul unsuccessfully seeks to obtain righteousness by accumulating meritorious works. In the spirit of humility, the self-effacing soul successfully attains righteousness by simply taking God at His word.

In the 'Way of Works', justification is based upon accomplishments of human feats. The man who is spiritually blinded thinks that the works of the flesh can please God and put him in right standing with God! There are those yet who mistakenly think that certain things will save them, such as morality, religion, baptism, church membership, culture, natural birth, charitable deeds or mere sincerity. Declares the Bible: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6) The works-oriented person seeks subjectively to create his own reconciliation with God, earned by human performance and achievement.

In the 'Way of Faith', justification is based upon faith in God's greatest feat of power--the resurrection of Jesus. "This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness'. The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him (Abraham) alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (Romans 4:22-25) It is not faith in man's works, but faith in God's work on the cross that justifies a sinner in God's sight. The sinner's hope must be built on 'nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness'. The grace-oriented person accepts God's reconciliation which was objectively made possible by God's grace-initiative, in the cross, independent of man's moral efforts or failures.

The works-oriented man has a pessimistic outcome, for human experience has taught man the grim lesson that his own efforts can achieve very little. Despair, cynacism, defeat, and moral impotence are the final consequences of human effort independent of God's enabling power. The final outcome is eternal separation from God.

The grace-oriented man has an optimistic outcome, for "with God nothing is impossible". Think of Abraham again. What was humanly impossible, became possible by God's grace and power.

"O God, my good works are not good enough to save me. But the good work of Christ on the cross is altogether sufficient to save me to the uttermost! Reconciliation is the divine, objective accomplishment, ready to become a human subjective experience through faith in the resurrected Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God does not wait to be reconciled to me. He waits for me to be reconciled to Him! I don't earn His favor, I simply accept His favor!

Galatians 3:26-29, 4:1-7

FAITH IS THE WAY OF OPTIMISM!

The 'Way of Works' leads to a pessimistic outcome. The 'Way of Faith' leads to an optimistic outcome. Faith translates aspirations into realizations, translates the ordinary into the extraordinary, translates the impossible into the impossible, translates the vision into the reality. The great 'Faith Chapter'--Hebrews 11--demonstrates this. The feats of faith are amazing! The common human vessel is changed into the channel of God's powerful performances. God specializes in things which others think 'impossible'. The deadness of Sarah's womb becomes the recepticle of God's fulfilled promises. The object of faith determines the value of faith. Faith centered in a miracle-performing God is faith rightly centered! He is the "God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were". (Romans 4:17)

Faith elevates all of life to a plane of exciting possibilities. To see life through the eyes of faith is to see life as a 'field brimming with countless opportunities'. The man of faith sees problems as projects, and he sees stumbling blocks as stepping stones. He who walks with God (as Abraham did) dare not put a ceiling upon the possibilities of grace!

"The essence of Abraham's faith in this case was that he believed that God could make the impossible possible. So long as we believe that everything depends on our efforts, we are bound to be pessimists, for experience has taught the grim lesson that our own efforts can achieve very little. When we realize that it is not our effort, but God's grace and power which matter, then we become optimists, because we are bound to believe that with God nothing is impossible. It is told that once Saint Theresa set out to build a convent with a sum the equivalent of twelve pence as her complete resources. Someone said to her, "Not even Saint Theresa can accomplish much with twelve pence". "True", she answered, "but Saint Theresa and twelve pence and God can do anything". A man may well hesitate to attempt a great task by himself; there is nothing which he need hesitate to attempt with God. Ann Hunter Small, the great missionary teacher, had a favorite saying: "A church which is alive dares to do anything". That daring only becomes possible to a man and to a church who take God at His word." (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 71)

The possibilities of grace are limitless. Through faith, man can become a 'son of God', and can become 'united with Christ', and can become an heir to the promises of God! (Galatians 3:26-29) He who takes the way of faith is taking the way of Abraham, and think of what God gave to Abraham by faith!

"O God, elevate my life to a new plane of exciting possibilities. Help me to raise my sights to see my potential in Christ. Give me and my fellow seekers 'the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead'. Give us 'the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen'." (Hebrews 11:1, Living Bible)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am a 'realistic optimist', for the vision which God gives <u>to</u> me is the same vision which God, through faith, will realize <u>in</u> me!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'FATHER OF OUR FAITH AND FAITH OF OUR FATHER'

1. Is Faith an attitude or an action or both? Give Scriptures to document your answer. How would you define Faith? (Note the eight different ways that 'Faith' is described or defined in the chapter.)

2. How did the Jews mistakenly believe a person was justified before God? Using the example of Abraham, how did the Apostle Paul refute the Jewish view of 'Justification'.

3. Considering 'Faith in Action' in the life of Abraham, how do you interpret the following statement: "Faith obeys without debate, waits without despair, and separates without escaping reality".

4. Can you cite examples from your own life or from the lives of people you have known, to illustrate the truth of the statement: "Faith results in separating one from his former way of life or from his former employment or from his home and country or from something else that was formerly dear to his heart".

5. How did Abraham's obedience to God (to leave his country and kindred, and follow where God would lead) result in bringing a blessing upon all of mankind?

6. Illustrate from the life of Abraham, the truth of the following statement: "While obedience may not be easy, its rewards are always great!"

7. In what ways did Abraham personify faith?

8. Name as many contrasts you can between the 'Way of Faith' (Grace) and the 'Way of Works' (Law).

9. What is meant by the following statement: "What God commands, my God-created nature demands and Christ's grace supplies!"

10. Is taking the 'Way of Faith' compatible with facing reality and the facts of life or does taking the 'Way of Faith' result in escaping from reality? (Note Romans 4:17-19) (Do you agree with the following statement: "The man of faith is the true 'realist'. He sees reality through God's eyes!")

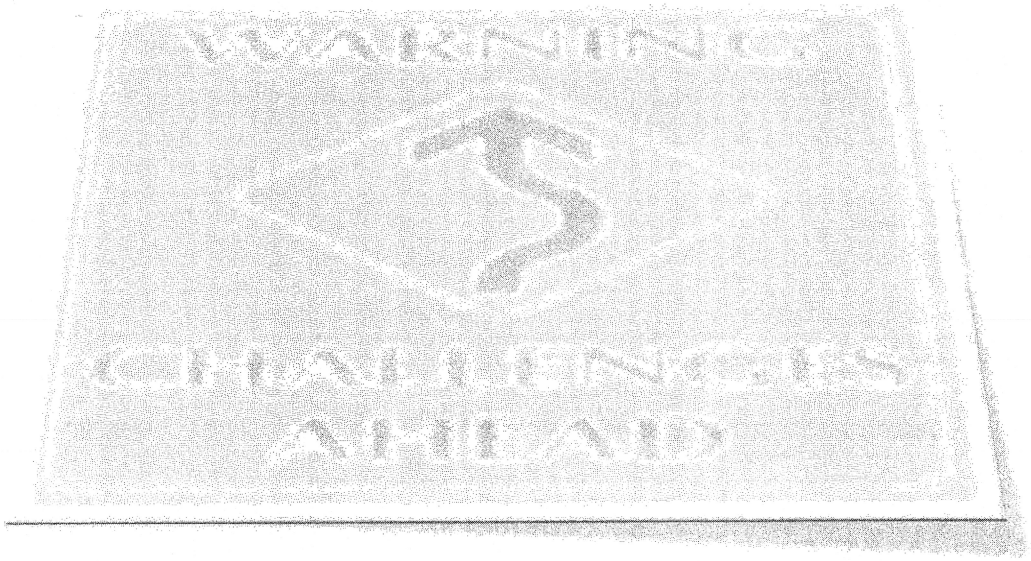
11. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The work-oriented man is the man who bases his faith in human performance, hence pride and boasting. The grace-oriented man is the man who bases his faith in the all-powerful, all-loving God, hence humility".

12. What are some of the things which the 'Works-oriented' person resorts to, in an attempt to earn his salvation? What is the answer of the Bible (in Isaiah 64:6, Ephesians 2:8-9) for such an attempt?

13. What must a person do in order for God to declare him as 'righteous'? (Romans 4:22-25) Do you agree with the following statement: "It is not faith in man's works, but faith in God's work on the cross that justifies a sinner in God's sight".

14. Give examples from Hebrews 11 (the great 'Faith Chapter') that illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith translates aspirations into realizations, translates the ordinary into the extraordinary, translates the impossible into the impossible, translates the vision into the reality".

15. Why does the 'Way of Works' lead to a pessimistic outcome and the 'Way of Faith' lead to an optimistic outcome?



CHAPTER 8

"THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH!"

Romans 5:1-2

THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Have you ever noticed that one who is writing a love letter, repeats the name of his lover over and over again in the love letter? He seems never to be tired of mentioning the name of his lover. He loves the sound of his name.

Have you noticed how often the name 'our Lord Jesus Christ' is mentioned in the first four chapters of Romans? After naming the name of Jesus repeatedly in the first four chapters, why does Paul begin to talk of 'our Lord Jesus Christ' in Romans 5:17? Because all hope is based on Jesus' character and power and person, all of which is represented of Jesus (by the name of 'our Lord Jesus Christ') that man finds 'peace with God'. Only through Jesus can one find a standing and a status and a position before God. To find peace with God is to find an entry and an access and an audience with God! And it is through 'our Lord Jesus Christ' that this is made possible!

'Peace with God' (Romans 5:1) speaks of God's grace producing conversion and reconciliation of the sinner to God. 'Peace of God' speaks of the subjective experience of the believer when he learns to overcome anxiety and fear and worry. One cannot experience the 'peace of God' until he has first experienced 'peace with God'. One must be 'born of God' before he can 'grow in God'. One must become a 'member of God's family' before he can enjoy the 'benefits of God's family'.

There is no way to experience Christian growth before one has experienced Christian conversion. Whether that conversion is dramatic and dated or undramatic and undated, it is the result of God's grace and of man's faith in Jesus Christ. One must be introduced to grace before he can become well acquainted with the workings of grace in his life. Birth is always the prerequisite to Growth.

The Grace of God which produces justification (right standing with God--conversion--Romans 5:1-2) is the same Grace which produces growth and Christlike maturity.

In the first four chapters of Romans, Paul details the dynamics of justification. In detail he shows that all men are sinners--Jews (chapter 2) as well as Gentiles (chapter 1). He declares that all men can be saved, even though all men are sinners (chapter 3), and he describes God's grace-initiative and man's faith response. He spends much time in developing his theme that men are justified by faith alone (chapters 3-4). Now in the opening verses of chapter 5, Paul concisely describes the dynamics of growth in the Christian life.

"O God, there is no name more precious to me than the name of our 'Lord Jesus Christ'. There is none other name under heaven whereby I can be saved! That name both convicts me and comforts me. Responding to His convicting power, I find 'peace with God'. Responding to His comforting presence, I find the 'peace of God'. Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because I have 'peace with God', I have a right to enjoy the 'peace of God'. Isn't a 'worry-worn Christian' a contradiction in terms?

Romans 5:3-5

"LIFE IS JUST THE 'STUFF' TO TRY THE SOUL'S STRENGTH ON!"

Having described the glorious entrance into the presence of the King of Kings and entrance to the haven of God's grace (Romans 5:1-2), Paul immediately shows what being and growing as a believer involves. (Romans 5:3-5)

As a realist, Paul quickly shows that in his life Christians are oftentimes 'up against it'.

Becoming a Christian does not resolve all problems. In some cases it may cause problems. Jesus is not only the great Uniter of people, giving peace where there had been disharmony. But Jesus is also the great Divider. Said Jesus, "Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth. No, rather, a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's worst enemies will be right in his own home". (Matthew 10:35-36, Living Bible)

Paul declares that there are many things which press in upon the Christian--troubles, trials, problems. But Paul triumphantly declares, in the face of all problems, that the challenge of Christian growth is meant to be a joyous experience. Joy admist suffering--that is the great Christian paradox. "We also rejoice in our sufferings." (Romans 5:3) Why? Because the stumbling blocks are meant to be used as stepping stones to further growth and to produce greater maturity in the life of the believer! Every problem is meant to become a project of divine grace!

Christian growth does not involve an escape from life's problems, but rather a creative use of life's problems. Not running from problems, but facing and conquering the problems. Yes, even transforming the problems into possibilities and projects!

The challenge of Christian growth means using all of life's experiences as the raw material from which to create Christlike character. Remember: Heat applied to cold, raw cake ingredients produces a tasty, flavorable cake. Life's trials can produce a Christian life with flavor and texture!

"The place of disciples is in the company of those strong souls who, in every age, have borne the buffetings of circumstance with fortitude and cheerfulness, and who say with Browning:

> 'I count life just a stuff
> To try the soul's strength on, educe the man'."
> (Sangster's Daily Readings, p. 168)

"Master of life, enable me to live masterfully! Help me to use all of life's experiences as the raw materials from which I make a Christlike life! Help me to see that my happiness does not depend upon my happenings; but upon my reaction to my happenings!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is not what happens to me that matters. It is what I do with what happens to me that makes the difference!

II Corinthians 11:23-30

WHY REJOICE IN SUFFERINGS?

Paul outlines the steps in the process of Christian growth. The five steps are outlined in Romans 5:3-5: "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patience; patience, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us".

Here are the steps to Christian growth: (1) Trials Encountered; (2) Patience Developed; (3) Character Perfected; (4) Hope Produced; (5) Love Experienced.

First, Trials Encountered. Paul was no stranger to troubles. He recounts his trials in II Corinthians 11:23-30. (Have you read it?)

Paul spoke of glorying his weaknesses and in his infirmities and troubles. He saw his troubles, not as obstacles to defeat, but as opportunties for growth. He saw temptation, not as the penalty of being a man, but as the glory of being a man.

He never saw God as the author of suffering, but he knew God allowed suffering for redemptive purposes. Out of every mess, Paul salvaged a message. Out of every tragedy, Paul salvaged a triumph.

Paul believed that God was never aloof during human suffering and human perplexities. He saw Jesus as a man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief, and yet he saw Jesus transforming the cross of torture into a symbol of victory. God is with us during our suffering, and the power that vanquished death is the same power that conquers man's unconquerable problems.

The believer encounters a variety of problmes and trials. In fact, a vital faith may give birth to bitter persecutions. The heros of the faith were not exempt from problems: "Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. . .they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated--of whom the world was not worthy--wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth". (Hebrews 11:36-38)

Why rejoice in sufferings? "We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance." (Romans 5:3) "Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow." (James 1:2, Living Bible) "I do not like crisis", said Lord Reith, "but I do like the opportunities they provide." (quoted by William Barclay, Daily Study Bible, Romans, p. 74)

"Father, my natural tendency is to run from my problems. Help me, instead, to face my problems with You. Help me to conquer my problems through the power of your all-sufficient grace! Through Your Almighty Name! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am committed to save, not to waste, my life. God will enable me to salvage good out of all my life's experiences!

James 1:2-4,12

PATIENCE TURNS TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH!

Second, Patience Developed. Trials properly encountered can result in the development of patience and endurance and fortitude. The Greek word that is translated 'Patience' is a very important word (Hupomone). It means more than 'mere endurance'. "It means the spirit which can overcome the world; it means the spirit which does not passively endure, but which actively overcomes the trials and tribulations of life." (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 73)

"It is the spirit which can bear things, not simply with resignation, but with blazing hope; it is not the spirit which sits statically enduring in the one place, but the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory; it is not the patience which grimly waits for the end, but the patience which radiantly hopes for the dawn. . .It is the virtue which can transmute the hardest trial into glory because beyond the pain it sees the goal." (New Testament Words, William Barclay, p. 144-145)

What is the Christian answer to the problem of suffering? It is NOT to explain suffering. That is the way of Philosophy, and this way leaves many unanswered questions and many embittered souls. It is NOT to explain away suffering. This is the way of Christian Science, and this produces minds which are 'disillusioned' and bodies which are suffering needlessly.

The Christian answer to suffering is not to explain it or to explain it away, but to allow God to redemptively use suffering. It is possible to take broken pieces of colored glass and shape a beautiful colored cathedral window. It is possible for God to take the broken pieces of a man's life--his broken dreams, disappointments, tragedies, losses--and produce a beautiful life.

"Christianity teaches that suffering can be USED; that even while a full understanding of origins and purposes eludes our mind, the brave and the bold (by the help of God) can turn the disaster into triumph and force the loss to yield a gain. . .Tragedy is often fruitful of good. Lighthouses are built by drowned sailors. Roads are widened by mangled corpses. Frustration and testing have had a major part in the higher triumphs of our race. And if anybody enquires how Christians came to believe that tragedy can be USED, the short answer is that they learned it at Calvary. In Christ upon the cross they see God meeting sin with love; wresting earth's worst to heaven's best." (William Sangster, Daily Readings, p. 87)

"Help me to know Your love in all dimensions. Make me to realize that the pains of love, as well as the pleasures of love, are for my benefit. May the blows of life not destroy my life, but instead shapen my character. In Jesus' name. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I cannot always explain my sufferings, nor dare I explain away my sufferings. With God's help, I will learn to USE my sufferings!

Philippians 1:12-14

HIS PRISON BECAME HIS PULPIT!

God is able to transform tragedy into triumph, to change a Dark Friday into a Good Friday, to make a Death produce Life, to turn a despised Cross into a cherished symbol. Through the fearful death of crucifixion, God cleansed away fear and brought life. "Forasmuch then as the children (human beings) are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver to them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14,15)

The believer must train himself to ask, when facing problems: "What good does God intend for me to salvage out of this problem and trouble? How is this problem to be used for the development of my character?"

Paul used his prison experience in Rome for his good and for God's glory. "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly." (Philippians 1:12-14)

Be thankful, along with Paul, that God providently watches over you, and can use you to witness regardless of your circumstances. Paul's imprisionment became Paul's opportunity for unprecendented witnessing to unlikely persons--Roman guards! His prison became his pulpit! His captive audience was Roman soldiers--the 'cream of the crop'--who were chained to Paul's wrists all day long! Paul recognized that God providently allowed him to be in Roman custody in order that he might boldly preach the Gospel to Gentile pagans!

His preaching in prison resulted in advancing the Gospel (Philippians 1:12) and in inspiring timid believers to witness (Philippians 1:13-14)!

Be thankful that God can use any of your experiences--good or bad--to advance the cause of Christ and to encourage the lives of other Christians! Be thankful that God can enable you to get the best out of the worst! If Paul's prison experience resulted in Roman pagans being converted, in timid Christians being encouraged, and in the Gospel message being spread, what do you suppose your 'prison' experiences could result in? Look up and be thankful for God's providence during trials!

"God, I am beginning to learn that it takes both sunshine and rain to produce 'fruit'--the fruit of a Christlike life. Help me to know that the best fruit is produced in the 'valleys'!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's grace will enable me both to enjoy my 'mountain-top' experiences, and to learn from my 'valley' experiences!

II Corinthians 1:3-7

"I PROPOSE TO CHOOSE THE COLOUR"

John Bunyan was imprisoned for several years because of his religious beliefs, but he patiently endured, that is, he used his prison experience for the glory of God and for the good of men. He wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress' while he was in prison! This classic has been cherished more than any other book, second only to the Bible!

'Patience' (Hupomone) refuses to give up even when circumstances are hard and obstacles are great. Thomas Edison was never discouraged. He had an endurance that was amazing! It is reported that when about 10,000 experiments with a storage battery failed to produce results, a friend tried to console him. "Why, I have not failed", Edison said, "I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." That is the spirit that is determined to be the 'master of circumstances'.

"When Beethoven was threatened with deafness, that most terrible of troubles for a musician, he said: 'I will take life by the throat'. That is hupomone. George Matheson, who was stricken in blindness and disappointed in love, wrote a prayer in which he pleads that he might accept God's will, 'not with dumb resignation, but with holy joy; not only with absence of murmur, but with a song of praise'. Only hupomone can enable a man to do that." (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 73-74)

Someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: 'Sorrow fairly colours life, doesn't it?' Back came the reply: 'Yes, and I propose to choose the colour'. That is hupomone.

When William Booth, the great founder of the Salvation Army was told by his son that he would lose his eye sight, William Booth was first sober and quiet, and then said to his son, "Are you telling me that I shall soon be blind and will never see your face again". "That is what the doctors are saying", replied his son. Replied William Booth, "I have served God for many years with my eyesight. I shall now serve God without my eyesight." This is hupomone--patience, fortitude, perseverance!

"Hupomone is not the spirit which lies down and lets the floods go over it; it is the spirit which meets things breastforward and overcomes them." (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 74)

Hupomone (perseverance and patience) is not a passive endurance, but it is a creative use of bad experiences to serve the higher purpose of good. Hupomone refuses to allow circumstances to master the soul; instead it uses and masters the circumstances.

"Give me the courage to accept what I cannot change. Give me the power to change what must be changed. Give me the humility to accept my positive blessings without pride and to learn from my negative experiences without bitterness. In Jesus' name. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When life hands me a 'lemon', I will learn to turn it into 'lemonade'!

I Peter 1:3-9

PEARLS ARE THE PRODUCT OF PAIN!

We are looking at the steps to Christian growth, as outlined in Romans 5:3-5. We have seen that trials properly encountered results in patience developed. Paul further says that patience (fortitude, perseverance) produces character.

Third, Character Perfected. The Greek word that is translated 'Character' is the word that is "used of metal which has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used of coinage as we use the word 'sterling'. When affliction is met with fortitude, out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer God". (Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 74)

Think of the most beautiful and lovely and tender-hearted people you have known. Have they not usually been persons who have gone through difficult trials and tests and sorrows, and have emerged victoriously? Have they not been the persons who, as a result of life's trials, have become understanding, gentle, stable, caring?

Problems and suffering, successfully met, can perfect character. Great spiritual vision of God is oftentimes the product of great sorrow. Someone said, "The vision of God can be seen more clearly through a tear". Trouble and sorrow and suffering can cause one to depend more fully on God's power. God's strength is made perfect through human weakness. God's power is only available to the one who knows that he is weak and powerless.

In the world of nature, pearls are the product of pain. A pearl "is a symbol of stress; it is a healed wound; it is the enduring token of a tiny creature's struggle to preserve its life. . .If there had been no wound there could have been no pearl". (Sangster's Daily Readings, p. 94) Beautiful character may be the product of suffering!

"There is something unheeding and harsh in a man who has known nothing of pain. . .Suffering, in a disciple, can often be wrested to service. It is Christlike work to soothe and sympathize, and only those who have drunk the cup of sorrow are fully equipped to do it." (Ibid, p. 48) Suffering can develop the tender heart. (II Corinthians 1:3-5) Someone said that when certain sorrowing people needed a comforter, that they would go to a certain woman who was known for her gentle eyes. Those gentle eyes came from a gentle heart, made tender through much sorrow.

Fourth, Hope Produced. "Character produces hope." Trials successfully met produces stronger character, and inspires greater hope for further progress towards the realization of final maturity in Christ. Hope is an anchor of the soul while going through trials and problems.

"Father, during my 'fiery trials', let me hear you whisper your comforting words to me (as expressed by the hymn writer):

'When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.'

What a loving God!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will 'bottle up my tears' (Psalms 56:8), and use them to cleanse my soul!

LIMITLESS GROWTH IN LOVE

Fifth, Love Experienced. The goal of Christian growth is supreme love for God, sincere love for others, and subordinate love for oneself. Growth in the Christian life is measured by growth in love. Love is the essence of maturity. The believer's hope is not illusionary. Hope is founded upon the foundation of God's eternal love. "Hope does not prove an illusion, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us." (Romans 5:5, Barclay)

Maturity is both a present condition and a progressive process. He whose life is guided by love is, Scripturally-speaking, a mature person. However, while one may be fully loving at any one moment and therefore be considered mature, the increase in love's capacity in a believer's life is limitless. Therefore growth in maturity is limitless.

Love is dynamic and limitless in its capacity to grow because the love activity of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life is limitless, dynamic, and continuous. (The Greek 'perfect tense' of Romans 5:5 is well described by Kenneth Wuest in his translation.) "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts and still floods them through the agency of the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:5, Wuest)

One is only mature to the extent that he is mature in love, and love can only be measured in terms of one's capacity for fellowship. "Without this maturity based on fellowship, there is simply no maturity at all. For maturity is a capacity for fellowship. The immature person has retreated in on himself, has withdrawn his relationships, and has become self-preoccupied, and hence by that very fact immature. Your capacity for fellowship gauges your maturity. You are mature to the degree, and only to the degree, that you can fellowship with God, with others, and with yourself." (Christian Maturity, E. Stanley Jones, p. 66)

"So maturity is not a matter of age but of attitudes. And these changed attitudes can be sudden and lasting. But they may also be gradual . . .But in either case you become mature to the degree that you relate yourself to God, respond to His grace, and work it out in life. Receptivity to grace is the secret of maturity." (Ibid, p. xi)

"But it is a maturity that keeps us on the stretch for more receptivity. For we are always seeing more things in God to receive. The finite will infinitely approach the Infinite, but will never arrive. In that eternal growth will be our eternal happiness." (Ibid, p. 356)

"O God, help me to make a deeper surrender of my life, in order that I may experience a deeper appropriation of Thy love. The depth of Your love in my life will be manifested by the breadth of my love for Your children. Pour out Your love into my heart!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am forever satisfied with God's love, but forever dissatisfied with the smallness of my capacity for His love!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH'

1. After naming the name of Jesus repeatedly in the first four chapters of Romans, why does Paul again talk of 'our Lord Jesus Christ' in Romans 5:1?

2. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "One cannot experience the 'peace of God' until he has first experienced 'peace with God'".

3. Because a believer has 'peace with God', he has a right to enjoy the 'peace of God'. Isn't a 'worry-worn Christian' a contradiction in terms?

4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Becoming a Christian does not resolve all problems. In some cases it may cause problems. Jesus is not only the great Uniter of people, giving peace where there had been disharmony. But Jesus is also the great Divider!" (Note Matthew 10:35-36)

5. With what attitude can a believer approach human problems and perplexities? (Note Romans 5:3) Why can a believer experience Joy in spite of sufferings?

6. From your own life or from observing the lives of other believers, can you illustrate the truth of the following statements: "Christian growth does not involve an escape from life's problems, but rather a creative use of life's problems. The challenge of Christian growth means using all of life's experiences as the raw material from which to create Christlike character".

7. As revealed in Romans 5:3-5, list the five steps to Christian Growth.

8. If God is not the author of suffering, then why does God allow believers to suffer?

9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God is with us and in us during our suffering, and the power that vanquished death is the same power that conquers man's unconquerable problems". (If you agree with this statement, can you illustrate its truth from your own experience?)

10. Give a Biblical definition and description of 'Patience' as it is used especially in Romans 5:3.

11. What are non-Christian answers to the problem of suffering, and what is the only adequate and Christian answer to human suffering? What is the most unusual example in history of God turning a seeming tragedy into a glorious victory?

12. What important questions should a believer train himself to ask, when he is facing problems or trouble?

13. In what ways did God use Paul's prison experience in Rome for Paul's own good, for the good of others, and for God's glory? (Note Philippians 1:12-14) Can you think of times in your own life when God used what seemed to you as a 'prison experience' to bring glory to God and good to others or to yourself? (Meditate on the following statement: "When life hands me a 'lemon', I will learn to turn it into 'lemonade'".)

14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is Christlike work to sooth and sympathize, and only those who have drunk the cup of sorrow are fully equipped to do it".

15. What word picture is behind the Biblical concept of 'Character'?

16. What is the ultimate goal of Christian growth?

17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Growth in the Christian life is measured by growth in love. Love is the essence of maturity".

18. What is meant by the statement: "Spiritual maturity is both a present condition and a progressive process".

19. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "One is only mature to the extent that he is mature in love, and love can only be measured in terms of one's capacity for fellowship. The immature person has retreated in on himself, has withdrawn his relationships, and has become self-preoccupied, and hence by that very fact immature".

20. Meditate on the following statement: "I am forever satisfied with God's love (Romans 5:5), but forever dissatisfied with the smallness of my capacity for His love". What can you personally do to help increase your spiritual capacities to receive more of His love?



CHAPTER 9

"THE HIGH COST OF RECONCILIATION!"

II Corinthians 5:11-21, Romans 5:6-11

UNIVERSAL BUT NOT AUTOMATIC RECONCILIATION

What more can God do than what He has done to save mankind from the penalty of sin--eternal death? God sent His Son to earth to live a sacrificial life, to die a substitionary death, and to conquer death through the resurrection. God has spared His wrath and extended His mercy to every person--all because of what Christ has done! God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should be saved!

God has highly exalted Christ and given Him a name which is above every name! Christ is the King!

As a result of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and Kingly reign, God is prepared to save all mankind. God's plan for man's salvation has been accomplished in Christ! The sacrifice of a loving God has made possible the glory of a reconciled sinner!

Christ's death for helpless, despising sinners (Romans 5:6-8), results in Christ's reconciliation of sinful man with the sinless God. (Romans 5:9)

The New Testament uses the word 'Reconciliation' to describe the changed relations between God and man which are the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In our study of Romans, we have looked carefully at the 'Finished Work' of Christ on the Cross and in the Resurrection. Now we must look at the benefits which that 'Finished Work' has for mankind. Romans 5:9 says, "And since by his blood he did all this for us sinners, how much more will he do for us now that he has declared us not guilty? Now he will save us from all of God's wrath to come". (Living Bible)

Notice the past, present, and future aspects of reconciliation, as related in this verse.

First, look at reconciliation as a past, objective accomplishment. "He did" reconcile us. By the shedding of Christ's blood in the death of the cross, a universal atonement has been provided for the sins of all men. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins." (Hebrews 9:22) As a result of Christ's historic death, sin's penalty for all mankind has been paid. The righteousness of God has been vindicated and the justice of God has been satisfied. By the one decisive act of Christ's death, all men are delivered from a condition of estrangement and restored to fellowship with God--not automatically but potentially, dependent upon each individual's personal appropriation of the purchased gift of grace. Reconciliation is universal as far as God is concerned, but not automatic as far as man is concerned.

"O God, because of the 'Finished Work' of the Cross, you are at peace with all the world! All enmity is gone and all walls are destroyed! I come, not to a God of wrath, but to a God of peace! Wonderful!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The deep wounds of suffering revealed in the open hands of the Crucified Saviour are for the healing of my deep wounds of sin!

Colossians 1:21-23, John 19:30

MAN MAY KNOW THE WARMTH OF GOD'S LOVE!

We are looking at Reconciliation as a past objective accomplishment. Says Leon Mooris, "Reconciliation is not something in which we have the decisive part. It is worked out by Christ, and we enter into it by our repentance and faith. But it is his work first and foremost. This is the main thrust of New Testament teaching on reconciliation". (Christianity Today, January 17, 1969, p. 4)

In his book 'The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross', Leon Mooris says, "First of all there is an aspect of reconciliation which is outside man, an objective element. We are said to have received the reconciliation, which therefore, is in some sense independent of us. Obviously reconciliation must be personal to be effective, and we must enter into a state of being reconciled; but nevertheless, there is a sense in which a reconciliation can be said to be proffered to us. In other words the New Testament view is that reconciliation was wrought on the cross before there was anything in man's heart to correspond. There is an objective aspect to reconciliation, and this may well be held to imply that there is a sense in which God can be said to be reconciled to man". (p. 225-226) In a footnote in his book, Mooris quotes P.T. Forsyth as saying, "Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work. . .He preached something done once for all--a reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconciliation, not an invitation only". (p. 226)

That means that if Christ had not died on the cross, then reconciliation would have been totally impossible. God can treat man differently now that Christ has died! Wrote Paul, "But now, through the blood of Christ, you who were once outside the pale are with us inside the circle of God's love in Christ Jesus. For Christ is our living peace". (Ephesians 2:13,14a)

Says P.T. Forsyth, "God's feeling toward us never needed to be changed. But God's treatment of us, God's practical relation to us--that had to change". (Ibid, 247) Leon Mooris then comments, "His (God's) love is consistent and does not alter; but we cannot reason from that that the expression of that love is always the same. Love may be likened to a flame. Without changing its essential nature it may give warmth and light or it may sear and burn. All that sinful men can see of a holy God is that aspect that we call the wrath of God. But when the Son of God himself has dealt with that wrath, then men may know the warmth of His love". (Ibid, 248)

"It is not the wrath of Your justice, but the warmth of Your love, which I now feel! I am not seared, but soothed by the light of Your holiness! 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me'!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The cross allows God's love to be expressed in tender forgiveness, not in terrible justice!

Hebrews 9:11-14, 23-28

TIME DOES NOT ERASE SIN!

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon one time said, about the preaching of the Gospel, "If I only had about a dozen words to speak and knew I must die, I would say, 'This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners'".

Christ's death makes possible man's reconciliation. Reconciliation acknowledges that there is a barrier which has caused estrangement between God and man, and that that barrier must be removed. Christ alone can remove that barrier and forgive those sins which have caused enmity between God and man. Christ sacrified His blood once-and-for-all to forgive sinners.

But man attempts to deal with his sins in his own way. Man suppresses his guilt and is glad to let bygones by bygones. As C.S. Lewis says, "We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. I have heard others, and I have heard myself, recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were no concern of the present speaker's, and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of a sin. The guilt is washed out not by time, but by repentance and the blood of Christ". No matter how much man attempts to suppress his guilt and hide his sins, and no matter how much time has elasped since the transgression, still "God requireth that which is past". (Ecclesiastes 3:15) Says Lewis, "In our own affairs we never doubt that the past is important. When a student fails his exams, he cannot laugh it off and proceed to the next unit of his course as though nothing had happened. When a businessman finds his debts pressing, he cannot write them off and start afresh as though nothing had happened. In every area of life we recognize that our actions have consequences and that we are responsible. We cannot cut ourselves adrift from the past".

Man must face the fact of his estrangement and acknowledge that he can only be at one with God through faith and repentance. The object of man's faith is Christ who objectively accomplished man's reconciliation on the cross. Man must appropriate Christ's accomplished work of reconciliation, in order for man to be reconciled to God. The objective aspect of reconciliation is first and foremost; the subjective aspect of reconciliation is secondary and derivative. Man can only be reconciled to God because God has taken the initiative and made provision for man's reconciliation.

"O Christ, my sins are like an iceberg. My conscious mind--the tip of the iceberg--recalls only a small number of my total sins. Is there forgiveness for the large bulk of my remaining sins which are submerged in my subconscious mind? I dare to believe that you can forgive the sins I remember and the sins I don't remember!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will confess 'recalled sins' and 'repressed sins', in order to enjoy unlimited forgiveness!

Hebrews 4:1-11

RECONCILIATION IN THE PRESENT TENSE!

We are looking at reconciliation, as described in Romans 5:9, which says, "And since by his blood he did all this for us sinners, how much more will he do for us now that he has declared us not guilty? Now he will save us from all of God's wrath to come". (Living Bible)

We have been looking at the fact that reconciliation is a past, objective accomplishment, made possible through Christ's historic death.

Secondly, reconciliation is a present, guiltless relationship. Romans 5:9 says that "He does" much more for us now!

Through the objective work of Christ on the cross, all men are put into a saveable relationship with God. Man's reconciliation with God is impossible without the cross. However, with the cross each man must repsond to Christ's decisive accomplishment in order to make reconciliation real and personal and workable. Through Christ's death, God is once-and-for-all reconciled to lost humanity, but each individual member of that lost humanity must personally accept what has been universally accomplished by Christ. He who personally accepts what Christ has historically accomplished on the cross, is put into a right relationship with God. Personal faith appropriation of the finished work of the cross means personal enjoyment of the benefits of reconciliation.

He who is reconciled with God through Christ is he whose sins are forgiven and whose guilt is resolved. He is no longer at enmity with God. The dividing walls of hostility have been broken down. He enjoys friendship and fellowship with God. His sins are hidden in the 'sea of God's forgetfulness'. Those sins are removed, 'as far as the east is from the west'. He enjoys peace and rest (Hebrews 4:1-11) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who is reconciled with God is he who is enjoying cleansing from sin's pollution. The blood that forgives sins is the blood which also cleanses from the pollution and stain of sin.

He who is reconciled with God is he who is increasingly enjoying victory over sin's power. The remaining harmful habits are being broken. Actions, attitudes, and relationships are progressively becoming Christianized. If any man is reconciled to God through Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, all things are becoming new. (II Corinthians 5:17) The power of sin is being broken in that man's life.

What does Christ do in His present reconciling ministry? He is saving us from the guilt of sin, the pollution of sin, and the power of sin.

"O Christ, I see that Your 'Finished Work' on the cross remains unfinished until I personally appropriate that 'Work' in my personal life! The past divine accomplishment must become the present human experience, through faith in Your shed blood! Help me to personalize the victory of the cross!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Christ died in vain for me unless I allow the Universal Atonement to become my personal atonement for my sins!

Romans 5:9-11, II Thessalonians 1:5-12

"MUCH MORE THEN"

Reconciliation is first a past, objective accomplishment. Secondly, reconciliation is a present, guiltless relationship. Thirdly, reconciliation is a future, peaceful protection. Note Romans 5:9-10, "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (NASB)

When Paul uses the phrase 'much more then' in verses 9 and 10, he is engaging in interesting logic. To use this type of logic is like saying, "If the vast ocean is salt water, then one cup of that ocean water will be salt water. If the sun's energy can provide power to heat a thousand houses, then it can heat my one house. If Christ died for all mankind, then he died for me. If one is made a friend of God now, he shall escape God's wrath hereafter. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:9)

Argues the Apostle, "If the blood of Jesus shed on the cross resulted in a once-and-for-all reconciliation of God with man, and if we are personally and continually appropriating the benefits of the cross, resulting in personal daily reconciliation, then we can be assured that our present peaceful relationship will not be forfeited when we face the day of future judgement".

He who is presently enjoying friendship with God, need not fear that that friendship will be lost in the future, when the Great Day of Judgement will reveal the Wrath of God against sin and sinning humanity. He whose heart is enjoying the cleansing blood of Jesus now, can be assured that that same cleansing blood will guarantee a future, peaceful protection, from God's just wrath which will be exercised against those who rejected the blood of Christ.

There is 'eternal security' for the one who pleads nothing but the blood of Jesus as the basis for his reconciliation and peace with God. We are 'eternally secure' in the Son, not outside of the Son! "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. . .a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace." (Hebrews 10:26-27,29 NIV)

"My sins have already been judged on the Cross! I face, not a fearful future, but a fantastic future! I am secure in time and in eternity! God's friendship now cannot be compared to the greater friendship hereafter. All because of Jesus!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I was saved, I am saved, and I will be saved--in the Son, not outside the Son!

Romans 5:10-11, John 14:27, 15:13-17, 16:33

SWEET PEACE--THE GIFT OF GOD'S LOVE!

There are those who casually talk about God. They talk sentimentally about God, even while they are practicing sin and lawlessness in their lives. 'But God and I are buddies; we get along quite well together. We have an understanding between us', said one shallow person to me. Or some refer to God as 'the man upstairs'.

Without the cross, man is an outright enemy of God! Even with the historic death of Christ, man is still an enemy of God until man appropriates the work of Christ on the cross. (John 3:36) But the person who accepts Christ's work on the cross is reconciled with the Father.

Reconciliation produces friendship with God. "When we were his enemies, we were brought back to God by the death of his Son." (Romans 5:10, Living Bible) You can be a friend of God. You were made for greatness in the Creation. You lost your greatness in the Fall. You can regain your greatness by accepting the reconciling work of Christ on the cross. The fellowship lost in the fall can be regained through the cross. The rebel can be made the reconciled. The enemy can be made the friend. "Now we rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God--all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done in dying for our sins--making us friends of God." (Romans 5:11, Living Bible)

Reconciliation produces fellowship with God. The friendship of God with man is at the deepest and most intimate level. "What blessings he must have for us now that we are his friends, and he is living within us!" (verse 11b, Living Bible) God shares our deepest joys and our deepest woes. God actually indwells in our lives. All of life is shared with Christ. The intellect becomes the center where the Holy Spirit forms the 'mind of Christ' within the believer. The emotions become the center where the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love and compassion of God within the believer. The will becomes the center where the Holy Spirit works to accomplish the plan of God for the believer's life.

Peace is the gift of God and the result of the atoning and reconciling work of Jesus. The great benediction at the end of the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of this relationship: "The God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus". (Hebrews 13:20) The Christian peace is like the peace of the bird who is resting secure on a nest overhanging a mighty waterfall. Amidst the roar and confusion, the bird is peaceful, just as the Christian is tranquil as he rests secure in the arms of Jesus, amidst the turmoil about him.

"In the Garden of Eden, Adam walked with God 'in the cool of the day'. I have walked with life's sorrows too long! I have long tasted the fruits of my own sins, and they are bitter! Let me know forgiveness, that my heart may rejoice! Let me walk and talk with You, as Friend with friend! Amen!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother; his name is Jesus, the sweetest name I know!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE HIGH COST OF RECONCILIATION'

1. In what ways did the death of Jesus objectively accomplish the reconciliation of God and mankind?

2. What is your interpretation of the following statement: "Reconciliation is universal as far as God is concerned, but not automatic as far as man is concerned".

3. What is meant by the 'Finished Work' of Christ on the cross? Why can it be said that, through Christ, God is first reconciled to mankind, ever before there was anything in man's heart to correspond?

4. As a result of Christ's death on the cross, did God's feeling towards mankind change or was it simply God's treatment of mankind that changed?

5. What are two different expressions of God's love toward mankind, and how does man's experience of God's love change as a result of the death of Christ on the cross?

6. Give your interpretation of the following: "The cross allows God's love to be expressed in tender forgiveness, not in terrible justice".

7. What is meant by C.S. Lewis' statement: "We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels bygones".

8. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "The objective aspect of reconciliation is first and foremost; the subjective aspect of reconciliation is secondary and derivative".

9. Why is it important in man appropriating the reconciliation made possible through Christ's death, to confess the 'recalled sins' of the conscious mind and the 'repressed sins' of the subconscious mind?

10. What are some of the wonderful results and benefits that a person enjoys when he becomes personally reconciled to God through Christ? (Note II Corinthians 5:17)

11. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Christ died in vain for me unless I allow the universal atonement to become my personal atonement for my sins".

12. Explain (through the use of analogies) the kind of logic that Paul used when he wrote: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:9)

13. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If the blood of Jesus shed on the cross resulted in a one-for-all reconciliation of God with man, and if we are personally and continually appropriating the benefits of the cross, resulting in personal daily reconciliation, then we can be assured that our present peaceful relationship will not be forfeited when we face the day of future judgement".

14. What conditions must a believer continue to meet, in order for him to have assurance that he can face the future day of judgement with confidence rather than with fear? What serious warning is sounded in Hebrews 10:26-27,29?

15. What is restored by God to a person when he experiences reconciliation, according to Romans 5:11?

16. In what ways does the Holy Spirit work in the believer's intellect, emotions, and will?

17. What are characteristics of the believer's peace, as the result of the atoning and reconciling work of Jesus?



CHAPTER 10

"CAN MAN REGAIN HIS LOST GREATNESS?"

Psalms 42:1-5

CAN MAN REGAIN HIS LOST GREATNESS?

We must now begin a serious study of Romans 5:12-14. This passage describes the process by which Man lost his greatness in the Fall. Is it possible for Man to regain his lost greatness?

Man is made for the stars! Man may wallow in the mud, but he can never forget the stars! Man was born for greatness! Man has lost his greatness, but he can never forget the destiny for which he was created! The God-shaped image upon man may be distorted, but it can never be totally destroyed! Man can never really forget that he was made for godlikeness!

Says Carl Jung, the great psychiatrist, "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness". But man cannot stand a vacuum. That vacuum is meant to be filled with God!

A caged eagle wishes to be freed to soar in the heights. Man is made for the spiritual heights and will never be satisfied to remain in the cage of his sins.

It is possible to attain everything that life can physically offer, and yet be deeply dissatisfied and disillusioned. "The quest for spiritual renewal and personal fulfillment is rooted in the depths of human nature, and the motivation to be what a man ought to be spiritually springs from interior depths. Man feels unhappy when he looks at his soul, dwarfed by a secular spirit and blighted by sin. He feels restless in his estrangement from God. He then reaches toward God. 'Thou hast made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it reposes in thee'." (Personal Renewal Through Christian Conversion, Mavis, p. 12)

Man lost his greatness in the Fall of Adam, resulting in the problem of inherited moral depravity and a propensity to overtly sin against God's laws. Man can regain his greatness by confessing his sins and by committing his life to Christ. Sin's power is great, but God's grace is greater!

Sin came into the world through Adam's disobedience. (Romans 5:12) Romans 5:12 describes what in theology is called 'Original Sin'. Notes Bishop Bastian, concerning original sin, "It is that evil tendency with which every individual is born, a tendency which disposes him to do wrong and thus to become not only by nature, but by personal choice a sinner". Why is it that when you tell a child not to do a certain thing, he tends immediately to do it anyway?

"'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God'. (Psalms 42:1-2) Satisfy my parched soul with the Water of Life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As the fish is at home in the sea and the bird is at home in the air, my soul is at home in God!

Mark 7:21-22

"I'M STANDING UP ON THE INSIDE!"

Romans 5:12 says, "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned". This verse, perhaps more clearly than any other verse, declares what is called in theology 'The Doctrine of Original Sin'.

Bishop Donald Bastian says that original sin "is explained by the universal law of natural generation that like begets like. Adam, by the personal exercise of his own free will fell into sin, thus becoming a sinner. The son born to him was like him not only in physical structure, but in his moral image as well. From Cain to the present all his descendants have inherited from him a nature depraved and prone to sin like his own". (Genesis 6:5,12, Jeremiah 17:9, Mark 7:21-22)

The fact of original sin and the universality of sin is recognized in most branches of theology. Even unbelievers "have to admit and to confess this, that there is something which is spoiling and ruining life. They have to admit further, that mankind at large seems to prefer to do that which is wrong rather than that which is right; that if you tell a child not to do a thing, he will want to do it immediately and will, as often as not, proceed to do it". (Lloyd-Jones, Romans 5, p. 190)

Perhaps you have heard of the mother who told Johnny to sit down in a chair, as a means of discipline and punishment. Some minutes later the mother wanted to check out Johnny's obedience, and from another room she called out, "Johnny are you sitting in that chair?" Johnny replied, "Yes, I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside!"

One does not have to train a child to be selfish--another indication of the fact of 'original sin'.

Romans 5:12 teaches us that "we all sinned, in some sense, when Adam sinned. We were not there in a real way, sinning when he sinned, as Augustine taught; but we sinned because our representative did and suffered loss even as an entire school might if its representative loses at a track meet. John Wesley says, 'As by one man--as being the representative of mankind, Sin entered into the world. . .Even so death passed upon all men. . .in that. . .all sinned in Adam'". (The Word and Doctrine, Kenneth Geiger, p. 76)

Does man sin because he is a sinner or is man a sinner because he sins? Man is born with a proneness to sin! Is there any hope?

"O God, there is a 'bent' toward sinning in my life. There is a spiritual gravitational pull downward. I feel the moral drag in my life! But, thank you O God, that I also feel the upward magnetic pull of your mighty love and grace. Break the power of 'cancelled sin' in my life and set me free!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I inherited from Adam a proneness to sin; I received from Christ a proneness to righteousness!

Psalms 51:1-9

ORIGINAL SIN OR ORIGINAL GUILT?

Notes Bishop Bastian, "Methodist theology clearly teaches a doctrine of original sin, but does not hold to a doctrine of original guilt. The human race is not held to be guilty of Adam's sin, even though it is by his sin involved in moral ruin". (Genesis 2:17, 3:17)

"It should be frankly acknowledged that the sin nature is not sin in the fully ethical sense, for the volitional and accountable elements are missing. 'The sin remaining in the regenerate believer. . .is not sin strictly speaking, which is any "transgression of the law" incurring guilt; but depravity--an inherited, inborn, sinward inclination--a depraved bias'." (The Word and the Doctrine, Kenneth Geiger, p. 112)

No person is personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity from Adam. However, while one is not personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity, one is responsible for not availing himself of cleansing from moral depravity, made available through Christ's atonement.

Further, one cannot put the blame for his personal sin onto the fact that he inherited moral depravity. One cannot say, when he is engaging in personal acts of transgression, "I couldn't help it, for my inherited moral depravity caused me to sin!" There are others who, when sinning say, "Something made me do it" or "The devil made me do it" or "After all, we're only human, you know". All such statements reflect personal irresponsibility and deny the exercise of human will, made possible by God's grace which places man in both a saveable and in an accountable state of grace. "Whereas the sin nature constitutes a strong impulse toward sin, it is not an irresistible cause-and-effect situation." (The Word and the Doctrine, p. 115)

Related to this whole question of original sin and inherited depravity, is the question of guilt and condemnation, especially as these apply to infants. Says famous commentator Martyn Lloyd-Jones on page 120 of his book 'Assurance, Romans 5', "What condemns us, and makes us subject to death, is the fact that we have all sinned in Adam, and that we are all held guilty of sin. . .Death is always the punishment for the guilt of sin, actual sin; and therefore its universality, even in children, can only be explained by the fact that we all sinned in Adam, and became sinners when Adam sinned". But isn't such an interpretation as this teaching 'original guilt'? Are children actually sinners, actually guilty? We must look at this question in our next devotional.

"O God, thou art a just and fair God. I see that I am not personally responsible for Adam's deliberate disobedience of your direct command, but because he was the representative of the human race, his sin has affected my moral condition. I am responsible to avail myself of your provision for cleansing from my inherited moral depravity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is no stain of moral depravity that is so deep, but what Jesus' cleansing blood goes deeper yet!

Psalms 51:1-19

ARE INFANTS DOOMED IF THEY DIE?

What is my response to Martyn Lloyd-Jones' contention that even children are involved in the guilt of Adam's original sin? (I quoted his statement in the last devotional.)

Is he saying that infants are actually sinners, that they have actually sinned and these are actually guilty, when there is no possibility of moral conscious choice on the part of the infant? What is actual sin? "Actual sin is accountable wrongness before God." (The Word and the Doctrine, p. 94) Actual sin is dependent upon the existence of at least four factors: personhood, freedom, knowledge, volition. To say that a newborn babe is guilty of actual sin is to deny these four factors. How can guilt and condemnation be incurred when there is not even the ability to choose wrong and to reject right, on the part of the small infant? Surely the doctrine of original guilt is to be questioned (and rejected) based upon an understanding of the justice of God. Are we to conclude that infants are guilty of sin in the same way as responsible adults are guilty of sin? Never!

It is true that infants are involved in the universal moral ruin of mankind (and infants even experience, at times, sin's penalty which is physical death), but this fact surely cannot be taken as evidence that infants are guilty of actual sin (based on a wrong exercise of conscious volitional capacity which infants are incapable of exercising).

Is not the physical death of a baby simply another reminder of the physically deteriorating affects of sin on Adam's body which he passed on biologically to all mankind? Physical death of an infant surely cannot be interpreted as evidence of that baby's actual sin and personal guilt.

"Wesleyanism has consistently rejected all forms of realism which affirm the personal participation of infants in Adam's sin. We have never attached personal guilt in the sense of culpability to original sin. . . While infants are not condemnable for anything they have done, they are justly condemnable for their corrupt state as members of a corrupt race. Their misfortune, however, is more than compensated by the atonement of Christ by which their liability to punishment in the sense of condemnation is cancelled. Although, therefore, infants share in Adam's guilt, in a specialized sense of the term, yet through prevenient grace 'not one child' (to quote Wesley) 'finally loses thereby, unless by his own choice'." (The Word and the Doctrine, p. 112-113)

"Thou Lamb of God, thank you for your cleansing blood which atones for both the pollution of inherited sin and for the guilt of volitional sin. There is a double cure for my double problem!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: 'There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains'!

Mark 10:13-16, I Sammuel 1:21-28

APPLICATION OF THE ATONEMENT IN CHILDHOOD

Says one about the atonement of Christ, "The atonement has come to all men and upon all men. Its coextensiveness with the effects of Adam's sin is seen in that all creatures such as infants and insane persons, incapable of refusing it, are saved without their consent, just as they were involved in the sin of Adam without their consent. The reason why others are not saved is because when the atonement comes to them and upon them, instead of consenting to be included in it, they reject it. If they are born under the curse, so likewise they are born under the atonement which is intended to remove that curse; they remain under its shelter till they are old enough to repudiate it; they shut out its influence as a man closes his window-blind to shut out the beams of the sun; they ward them off by direct opposition, as a man builds dykes around his field to keep out the streams which would otherwise flow in and fertilize the soil". (quoted in Elect In The Son, Robert Shank, p. 104-105)

Unless or until a small child actively resists the grace of God when he is capable of personal moral choice, that child continues to enjoy the saving benefits of Christ's atonement. Is this to say that some children do not need to experience personal repentance or exercise personal saving faith in Christ? Hardly, for what child, old enough to exercise general volitional powers, has not wrongly exercised his volition morally? Even a small child, say four or five years old, knows something about personal guilt because of wrong moral choice. But it is true to say that some persons exercised positive volition in choosing Christ at such a young age, that they cannot, as adults, remember when they were not Christians!

My wife has a cousin who is a daughter of missionary parents and who has been herself a long-time missionary in Africa. She never remembers when she was not a Christian.

There are children whose first exercise of meaningful volition was in their acceptance of Christ as Saviour, perhaps as early as the age of three!

The streams of God's mercy early flowed in and fertilized their soul! These young children who enjoyed the saving benefits of Christ's atonement when they were incapable of refusing it, gladly received the saving benefits of the atonement when they were first barely able to exercise personal saving faith in Jesus Christ! Said Jesus, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these". (Mark 10:14 NIV)

"Thank you, O God, for the revelation of Your positive saving purpose for the human race! Thank you for the unlimited atonement of Christ, potentially sufficient for all persons, generally operative for all infants, and individually efficient for those who exercise personal saving faith in Jesus Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will encourage the very young in my life to exercise their positive volition in choosing Christ!

Romans 5:12-14

EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE!

We can summarize the teachings, both explicit and implicit, of Romans 5:12. "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."

Sin came into the world through Adam's personal disobedience. Adam's original sin caused all mankind to inherit moral depravity. All are involved in mankind's moral ruin as a result of Adam's sin. However, while all are involved in the affects of original sin, none are originally guilty when born into the world. Original sin (or better stated, inherited depravity as a result of Adam's original sin) concerns itself with liability to penalty, not personal blameworthiness. None are personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity, but all are responsible for yielding to the pressure and influence of moral depravity. Outward sin can be resisted and inward sin can be purged. Every man inherits moral depravity, and most if not all, yield to that downward moral tendency which disposes one to do wrong. When one yields to that tendency, he becomes not only by nature, but by personal choice, a sinner.

Every man has given counsel to the presence of original sin (moral depravity) in his life, and has chosen willfully to disobey God, thus incurring personal guilt. E. Stanley Jones says that innate depravity "is the self surrendered to nothing except itself--the self become God". (Song of Ascents, p. 52)

All men are thus personally responsible for willfully committing personal transgressions, for willfully allowing self to assert itself as god of one's life. Sin is seen as 'self' ruling life, rather than God ruling life. Man is responsible for yielding to the tendency towards self-rule.

All men are responsible for yielding to the downward pull of sin. (1) Adam disobeyed a direct command ("And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die'." Genesis 2:16-17 NIV). (2) Those who lived between the time of Adam and Moses (before the Mosaic Law was given) disobeyed the dictates of Conscience and were responsible for sin (Romans 5:13-14). (3) Those who lived after Moses disobeyed the commandments of the Mosaic Law, incurring guilt and condemnation. (Romans 5:20) Everyone is responsible!

"O God, I accept my personal moral responsibility. I acknowledge that I have often yielded to the inward pressure towards self-rule. Help me now to yield to the upward presence of Christ's rule!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Self-rule (Dictatorship) leads to total chaos and moral ruin; God-rule (Theocracy) leads to total peace and moral prosperity!

II Chronicles 32:24-31

PUTTING "SELF" AT THE CENTER OF ONE'S UNIVERSE

Every person is morally responsible before God. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

Adam disobeyed a direct command. God created Adam with a free will, and with the ability to love. Love is the property of free will. "For the thing that makes us uniquely human is that, unlike the other creatures, we are able to say both 'Yes' and 'No' to God. The stars in the sky follow their prescribed orbits, the animals of the field obey their instincts, but man has this unique and frightening ability--he can refuse to be obedient to his Creator. For God does not want salves, but sons." (God's Unfolding Purpose, Suzanne de Dietrich, p. 36)

Love must be tested. God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Genesis 2:17)

Adam disobeyed a direct command and overstepped his God-imposed limitations. Adam took things into his own hands, and set himself up as a little god. Adam's sin was the sin of playing the part of God.

Adam's sin is the central sin of all humanity--the sin of making one's self into a god, placing self and selfish desire at the center of one's universe.

"The person who plays the part of God makes himself into the center of his universe, whether that universe be large or small; he seeks his own glory rather than the glory of God, he wants to 'run his own life' instead of recognizing it as a gift from the hands of God. In briefest terms, he wants to be his own master rather than God's servant; he wants to dominate rather than to serve." (Ibid, p. 38)

Notes Donald Joy, "Since our first parents' crime was treason--for the purpose of putting themselves up as their own masters--the infection shows up in us in much the same way. Its symptoms are violent independence, selfishness, self-assertiveness, pride--anything which puts oneself on the throne". (The Holy Spirit and You, p. 84-85)

Notes Donald Demaray, "What do we mean when we say the nature of sin is pride? We mean that man commits no wrong which is not traceable to pride; to put it another way, every sin man commits is the product of a desire to protect the ego or self. Murder, adultery, stealing, falsifying, and any and every sin that man has ever committed or ever will commit is the result of pride. It was so with Adam and Eve. It has been so with every man since that time". (Basic Beliefs, p. 51)

"O God, I have often been guilty of the central sin of mankind--making myself into a 'god'. But what an inadequate 'god' I am! I am not made to rule; I am made to serve! Help me to dethrone 'self' and enthrone the Saviour as the Lord of my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I give the ashes of my pride to Christ, and He gives to me 'beauty for ashes'! (Isaiah 61:3)

Acts 17:24-31, Psalms 19:1-4

LUSTS OF THE HEART BATTLE THE REASON OF THE MIND!

We have said that Adam disobeyed a direct command. Secondly, we can say that those who lived between the time of Adam and Moses (before the Mosaic Law was given) disobeyed the dictates of Conscience and were responsible for sin. Romans 5:13-14 says, "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is not law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come".

There was no written law to disobey before the time of Moses, and therefore sin as a transgression against law was impossible. However, even without law, there was the operation of moral depravity, issuing forth in rebellion against God's revelation through nature and through conscience. Mankind before the time of Moses was corrupt and subject to death.

The wickedness of mankind, during the time of Noah was great indeed. Says Genesis 6:5, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually".

God's revelation of Himself through Nature and through inner conscience was rejected. "But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, evil men who push away the truth from them. For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known of his existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse (when they stand before God at Judgement Day). Yes they knew about him all right, but they wouldn't admit it or worship him or even thank him for all his daily care." (Romans 1:18-21, Living Bible)

God justly condemned those who sinned against the light of truth, revealed through Nature and through Conscience. "All who have sinned without knowledge of the Law will die without reference to the Law; and all who have sinned knowing the Law shall be judged according to the Law." (Romans 2:12, Phillips)

It is still true that when there is a battle between the higher reason of the mind and the lower lusts of the heart, that oftentimes the lusts of the heart win the battle. "The heart of man is desperately wicked."

"The inner voice of conscience combines with the outer voice of nature to guide me to the face of God! I have too often silenced the voice of conscience and ignored the voice of nature. I am guilty of listening to the clamour of my sinful lower nature! Forgive me for closing my ears to the Voice of Conscience. I will henceforth listen to the 'still, small voice' and obey!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will respond to the enlightened reason of the mind and kill the dark passions of the heart!

THE LAW DRIVES MANKIND INTO THE ARMS OF GOD'S MERCY

Thirdly, those who lived after Moses disobeyed the commandments of the Mosaic Law, incurring guilt and condemnation. Romans 5:20 says, "The Ten Commandments were given so that all could see the extent of their failure to obey God's laws". (Living Bible)

From the time of Cain until Moses, God revealed Himself to man through the wonders of Nature and through the dictates of Conscience. The law of God was written on man's heart and mind. (Romans 2) However, man became expert in rationalizing sin, and man trained and conditioned his conscience to guide him as he wanted to be guided. "After awhile they began to think up silly ideas of what God was like and what he wanted them to do. The result was that their foolish minds became dark and confused. . .Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. . .So it was that when they gave God up and would not even acknowledge him, God gave them up to doing everything their evil minds could think of." (Romans 1:21-22,25,28, Living Bible)

In the midst of moral chaos and mental disillusionment, God introduced the Mosaic Law--including the Ten Commandments. Why did God give the Law? The Law was given to define sin. The law amplified sin and showed the exceeding seriousness of sin. The law reveals the real nature of man's weakness. The law even prods the old nature of the unregenerate man to cause him to sin all the more. "Law intruded into this process to multiply law breaking." (Romans 5:20, New English Bible) The Law caused man to rebel and to do the very things which the Law forbade him to do. The Law condemns man and shows man his helplessness. The presence of the Law gave man a chance to try to get to God by his own human good, thus finally driving man to despair and helplessness into the arms of God's mercy and grace. The Law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by Faith. "Law came in, to increase the trespass, but where sin increased grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus our Lord." (Romans 5:20-21 RSV)

As a result of mankind giving council to the presence of innate corruption in his life, mankind has rebelled against God. As a result of man's sinful nature and sinful choices, mankind faces the penalty of sin which is death.

"O God, deliver me from my tendency to justify my behavior and to rationalize my sin! Thank you for your holy Law which clearly defines and strongly magnifies my sins. Your holy Law drives me into your strong arms of mercy! I am helpless in myself, but hopeful in You!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Law is the great magnifying lens of sin; the Lord is the great purging flame of sin. I choose the Flame!

II Peter 3:1-18

BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF 'DEATH'

Romans 5:12 tells us that death reigns over mankind. "When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout the entire world, so everything began to grow old and die, for all sinned." (Living Bible)

All have been born in sin. All have willfully sinned. The penalty of sin is death. Therefore, all men face sin's penalty which is death.

'Death' according to the Bible, is threefold. There is physical death, spiritual death and eternal death.

The universal consequence of sin's entry into the world is physical death. When Adam fell, all of mankind fell--fell from health to weakness, fell from life to death. Saints and sinners alike must experience the corruption of physical death. Man is born to die. Sin brought death into the world. Never blame God for funerals!

Another consequence of sin's entry into the world is spiritual death. Many are alive physically, but dead spiritually. Says Ephesians 2:1-2: "You were spiritually dead through your sins and failures, all the time that you followed this world's ideas of living, and obeyed the evil ruler of the spiritual realm--who is indeed fully operative today in those who disobey God". (Phillips)

The final and terrible consequence of sin's entry into the world is eternal death. Eternal death is sin's final punishment, experienced by those who persistently and ultimately resist the offer of God's mercy and forgiveness. "And death and hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death--the Lake of Fire. And if anyone's name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire." (Revelation 20:14-15, Living Bible) It is not God's will that any perish. God's perfect will is that all be saved. But God's permissive will allows a man to spurn the mercy of God, and be eternally lost. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Hell was not prepared for man, but was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels (demons). God never intended for a human being to suffer in hell, but the man who serves Satan must suffer Satan's fate. The servant must dwell with his master. God wishes to save all men from that terrible place of destruction and torment. God never sends anyone to hell; a sinner sends himself there by willful refusal of the offer of mercy.

Have you responded to God's offer of mercy and forgiveness? Are you willing to surrender control of your life to Christ?

"O God, it is not your will that I perish. You prepared hell for the devil and his demons, not for me! I am made by you and for you. I am made for heaven! But only the holy ones will go to heaven! Make my life holy! I am a candidate for your grace--the grace that transforms sinners into saints!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whosoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' I DO! I DO!

A TOTAL LOSS AND A TOTAL GAIN!

Romans 5 teaches us that mankind universally lost greatness through sin's great power. (Romans 5:12-14) But Romans 5 also teaches that every person has the potential of regaining greatness through Grace's greater power. (Romans 5:15-21) For the next few days we must make a serious study of Romans 5:15-21.

A young person is heard to say: "If Adam had not sinned, we would not have all of these problems in the world". When Adam sinned, all mankind sinned. You and I were in Adam when he sinned. When he sinned, death came as a consequence to Adam. Because we were in Adam, we too (as an entire human race) received death as a consequence!

Perhaps you find yourself saying, "That's no fair! I cannot help it that Adam sinned! I should not be held responsible for Adam's sin!" But let me respond by asking a couple of questions: "Is it fair that you should get the beneficial results from Christ's righteousness? Is it fair that you should be treated so mercifully and kindly simply because God looks favorably upon Christ's righteousness?" You are not personally to blame because of Adam's transgression, even though you have to bear, along with Adam, sin's consequences, since you were in Adam from the beginning. That appears grossly unfair! However, is it just and fair that you should so abundantly enjoy the benefits of Christ's righteousness, which is life and peace, simply because you are in Christ, although your personal commission of sins should result in death for you? Although you involuntarily inherited original sin because you, by physical birth, are a descendant of Adam, you may voluntarily receive life and peace and justification through spiritual birth, by faith in Christ's righteousness. Being 'in' Adam means receiving Adam's lot--condemnation and death! Being 'in' Christ means receiving Christ's lot--righteousness and peace and eternal life and glory!

You personally had no choice in being a descendant of Adam and in automatically (at physical birth) becoming a member of a fallen race which is universally infected with sin and subject to death.

You lost your greatness due to Adam's original transgression and due to your own indulgence in personal sins, but you may regain your greatness due to Christ's atonement and due to your personal repentance and faith in Christ's atonement. You lost all 'in' Adam; you may regain all 'in' Christ!

"O God, what I lost by being a member of Adam's race, I thank you that I can more than gain by becoming a participant in Christ's atonement. Thank you for Christ's bood which cleanses from all sin--even inbred sin!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not allow my inherited state of sin to keep me from receiving my spiritual heritage in Christ!

I Corinthians 15:20-22, 45-49

THE FIRST 'ADAM' AND THE SECOND 'ADAM'

You had no choice as to your physical descent from the first 'Adam', but you do have a choice as to your spiritual connection to the second 'Adam'. Some things were decided and determined for you before you were born, but in some things you make decisions--decisions so important that an eternal destiny is determined by your decisions!

It is true that you personally had no choice in being a descendant of Adam, but it is also true that you had no choice in being an object of God's special love and mercy! You had no choice in being a member of a human race for whom a universal atonement has been provided by Christ!

In some important things you do have a choice! You chose to succumb to personal transgression, admittedly made more appealing because of the pull of original sin within your heart. But just as you chose to sin, you may choose to yield to the pull of God's grace working within your heart and mind to bring you to a place of true repentance. You can choose to stay 'in' Adam or you can choose to get 'in' Christ. You can choose to remain in death or you can choose to receive new life in Christ!

It must be acknowledged, of course, that there is a difference between what you lost in Adam and what you regain in Christ. In Adam, the results of his sinful actions are automatic. Those who are born to Adam, automatically inherit the taint of his sin (original sin). The results of Adam's transgression to his descendants, are acutal and universal, and come through biological heredity.

In Christ, the results of His righteous actions are not automatic. Human beings do not, without the exercise of their will, receive the righteousness of Christ as their own righteousness, whereas, human beings, without the exercise of their will and choice, automatically receive the taints of Adam's sin. In Christ, the benefits of His righteous actions to the human race are potentially universal. However, these benefits must be received individually, not by involuntary biological birth, but by voluntary spiritual rebirth. We did not personally choose to be 'in' Adam. We must personally choose to be 'in' Christ. It is by nature that we are related to the first 'Adam'. It is by grace that we are related to the second 'Adam', the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mankind is universally and automatically lost through sin's great power. However, the sins of all mankind are universally atoned for through Christ, making possible the individual salvation of every person. Sin's power is great, but grace's power is greater!

"Help me, eternal God, to make right choices in life, that I may enjoy a right destiny in eternity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am not free to choose my inherited sinful heredity from Adam, but I am free to choose my spiritual inheritance from Christ! I will exercise my positive volition!

Isaiah 55:6-9

GOD REDEEMED THE 'TERRIBLE' INTO THE 'TREMENDOUS'!

The Fall of Adam (and the consequences of that Fall upon all of humanity--sin, pain, etc.) provides the 'raw material' from which man and God, working together, produce holiness and happiness.

Let us examine this statement together during the next couple of days. Before doing so, however, let it be stated that we must never turn sin and rebellion into a virtue. Adam fell from God's originally-created state of grace. God did not will that Fall, but in spite of that Fall (and even through that Fall) God has brought about great good to humanity. God did not will sin, but God has used sin (as represented in the Fall) to provide good for humanity. God is the great redeemer, even producing good out of evil.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. The Fall was terrible since it represents human rebellion in opposition to divine love. However, the cross is far greater than the Fall is terrible, since the cross of Christ represents divine restoration of the chiefest of sinners. Man's lost greatness through sin's power is great, but man's restored greatness through grace's power is greater!

The evil resulting from the Fall is not worthy to be compared with the good resulting from the free gift of God's Grace in Christ Jesus. "God saw that to permit the fall of the first man was for best for mankind in general; that abundantly more good than evil would accrue to the posterity of Adam by his fall; that if 'sin abounded' thereby, over all the earth, yet grace 'would much more abound', yea, and that to every individual of the human race, unless it was his own choice." (Wesley's Sermon, God's Love To Fallen Man, p. 43)

What good has accrued to the posterity of Adam, as a result of the Fall? Without the Fall there would have been no cross, and without the cross there would have been no opportunity for God to visibly demonstrate His eternal love in its greatest intensity! The Fall caused all men to be constituted as sinners (for "in Adam all die"). It is because all men are in need of salvation that a Saviour was provided. Fallen humanity is capable of experiencing God's love in a way that not even the unfallen angels can experience God's love. The race of beings which have fallen to the lowest depths are capable of experiencing God's love at the highest heights! God redeemed the Terrible--the Fall--into the Tremendous--experience of Calvary love! Without the Terrible there could be no Tremendous!

"O God, your wisdom is past finding out! What was for humans the greatest tragedy--the Fall into sin--has become for the Divine the occasion for the greatest revelation--Reedeming Love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The rending of sin in the Fall has become the rendering of salvation in the Cross! Glory!

I Peter 1:10-12

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE DARK 'FALL' OF MANKIND!

In the last devotion we asked the question, "What good has accrued to the posterity of Adam, as a result of the Fall?" We said that it was the Fall that called forth the necessity of the Cross of Christ, and in the cross the eternal heart of Divine Love is revealed to humanity! So God redeemed the Terrible into the Tremendous! Without the Fall there could be no cross. Without sin 'abounding', grace could not 'much more abound'.

We can also answer the above-stated question by saying that the whole experience of justification by faith and redemption in the blood of Christ could have had no existence, apart from the Fall of man. Only because Adam and the sons of Adam fell from grace, does Adam's race have the need and the capacity to experience forgiving love in the Son of God. The highest heights of God's love (redeeming love; not merely creation love) can only be experienced by a race of beings who have fallen into the lowest depths of sin. The unfallen angels personally know nothing of God's redeeming love. It is only fallen man who can experience redeeming love!

Notes John Wesley, "The fall of Adam produced the death of Christ. . . If God had prevented the fall of man 'the Word' had never been 'made flesh'; nor had we ever 'seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father'. Those mysteries never had been displayed, 'which the very angels desire to look into'. . .Unless 'by one man judgement had come upon all men to condemnation', neither angels nor men could ever have known 'the unsearchable riches of Christ'. . .According to the counsel of his own will, the plan he had laid before the foundation of the world, he created the parent of all mankind in his own image; and he permitted all men to be made sinners, by the disobedience of this one man, that by the obedience of one, all who receive the free gift, may be infinitely holier and happier to all eternity!". (Wesley's Sermon, God's Love To Fallen Man, p. 48-49)

The immensity of man's sin is great, but the immensity of God's love is greater. When sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

You can be sure that if one stays connected with the Old Adam (with all that he represents by way of disobedience), he will experience both physical and eternal death. You can be 'much more' sure that if one gets connected and stays connected with the Last Adam--Christ--he will experience both abundant life here and eternal life hereafter!

"Only the pained can appreciate pleasure; only the hurting can appreciate healing; only the sinning can experience a Saviour; only the fallen can know redemption. Even though You, O God, did not will the Fall of Mankind, you graciously provided for the Recovery of Mankind! What a wise God!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As in the case of the historic Fall, so in the history of my personal life; in the darkest night of my personal tragedy there is the brighter light of God's provision!

Ephesians 3:7-13

THE 'MUCH MORE' OF THE LAST ADAM--JESUS CHRIST!

If death is certain through Adam, how 'much more' certain is life through Christ? "If God's justice and his righteousness led to punishment, 'much more' will His love and grace and mercy lead to salvation." (Assurance, Exposition of Romans 5, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 231)

"If we can say (as we can) that God's essential and eternal justice led to man's punishment and death, oh how infinitely more certain and sure can we be--and especially having seen it all displayed in a living manner in Christ--that His love is really going to do for us that which He has said He would do, namely, give us life." (Ibid, p. 231)

There were great losses because of Adam's Fall. There are greater blessings because of Christ's salvation!

What we all lost in Adam was great! What we all gain in Christ is much greater!

The condemnation which we earned as a result of our fall from grace, is not as great as the fellowship we freely receive as a result of our salvation in Christ. Condemnation is something we have earned and deserved (because of our racial and personal involvement in sin). "Salvation is something which has been given to us and which we receive absolutely freely as the gift of God." (Ibid, p. 233)

The process of death, as a result of Adam's sin, abounds, but the process of life, as a result of Christ's righteousness, much more abounds. The process of life and fruitfulness is greater than the process of death and disintegration!

If sin is a cruel tyrant whose reign is death, how much more is Christ a loving King whose reign is life and love! "Adam's one sin brought the penalty of death to many, while Christ freely takes away all sins and gives glorious life instead. The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to be king over all, but all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and acquittal are kings of life because of this one man, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:16-17, Living Bible) "Adam was made lord of creation, but he lost that position. We shall not only have that back, we shall have infinitely more. We shall share a throne with the Son who shares the throne of thrones with His Father. That is the prospect awaiting us!" (Lloyd-Jones, Ibid, p. 226)

What we lost in the first Adam, we more than gain in the second 'Adam' --Jesus Christ! Are you living in the first or second Adam?

"O Christ, what I have lost because of my racial connection with Adam and because of my personal involvement in sin, I have now regained because of Your universal atonement for sin and because of my personal appropriation of your forgiveness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's grace is lavish! I regain in Christ far more than I ever lost in Adam!

Hebrews 9:11-28

CHRIST'S BLOOD GOES DEEPER THAN THE STAIN OF SIN!

If we lost a righteousness in Adam's fall, we gain a much greater righteousness in Christ's salvation! The righteousness which was the property of creation, lost in the Fall, is not as great as the righteousness which is the gift of re-creation, gained in conversion. The righteousness which Adam enjoyed as a property of his unique creation, is not to be compared with the righteousness which the sinner receives as a gift of his glorious conversion! The righteousenss of Adam may have been great, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater! Where sin abounded, in that it stole from Adam his original righteousness, grace does much more abound in that it imparts to Adam's fallen race the very righteousness of Christ (giving man right standing with God!).

How is that righteousness imparted to sinners? Apart from anything that a sinner can do. All a sinner can do is to accept by faith the free gift of Christ's righteousness. This righteousness is of grace--it all depends on God's love and Christ's obedience! "As we were constituted sinners because of Adam's one sin, and apart from any action on our part, so we are constituted righteous persons entirely apart from anything that we do. It is entirely and only because of Christ's obedience." (Assurance, Exposition of Romans 5, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 276)

"The burden of the New Testament is not sin-fixation, but a Christ-fixation. Its emphasis is not the incurable persistence of sin, but the illimitable triumph of Calvary! Not sin reigns, but grace reigns! The final words are not 'sin' and 'defeat', but 'grace' and 'victory'."

"Dark the sin that soiled man's nature,
Long the distance that he fell,
Far removed from hope and heaven,
Near to deep despair and hell.
But there was a fountain opened,
And the blood of God's own Son
Purifies the soul, and reaches
Deeper than the stain had gone."
(Insights Into Holiness, Kenneth Geiger, p. 72)

"The principle taught, then (in Romans 5), is that what grace has done is not merely to counteract exactly what sin has done. . .In fact there is not comparison; it is superfluity, an abounding, an engulfing, it is an overflowing on the side of grace." (Ibid, Lloyd-Jones, p. 299)

"O God, I openly confess that all my own righteousness is like 'filthy rags' in your sight (Isaiah 64:6), for my righteousness is tainted by human pride. The taint of pride is deep. Wash me throughly with your blood and clothe me beautifully with the garments of Christ's righteousness! I believe! I believe!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "The cleansing stream, I see, I see! I plunge, and oh! it cleanseth me, it cleanseth me!"

16. What has been provided for every human being, as a result of the death of Christ on the cross?

17. What is meant by the expressions: 'The first Adam and the second Adam'?

18. What good has accrued to the posterity of Adam as a result of the fall?

19. What realities can we be sure of because of our natural relationship to Adam; what realities can we be even more certain about because of our supernatural relationship to Christ?

20. Describe the righteousness which the believer enjoys, both in terms of its source and in terms of the method by which it is received.

21. What is the main thrust of the teaching of the New Testament in regards to sin and to grace?



CHAPTER 11

"IF I SIN – SO WHAT?"

Romans 6:1-2,11

"IF I SIN--SO WHAT?"

"If I sin, so what! I am a Christian! I am saved by grace and grace alone. The degree of my sinning in no way affects my relationship with Christ. If I was once saved, I am always saved, regardless of my sinning. Grace covers all my sins. Did not Paul write, 'Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds'?"

Do you agree with this reasoning? Such reasoning is the reasoning of a person who wishes to sin and at the same time be guaranteed safety from sin's consequences.

During the last several days we looked carefully at Romans 5. In Romans 5 Paul pictures the greatness of God's grace--grace that is greater than sin. Sin's power is great, but grace's power is greater. Where sin abounds, grace super-abounds!

Paul anticipated those who would seek to exploit his great teachings concerning grace. Following upon the tracks of his marvellous teachings concerning grace, would be those who would make sin into a virtue. Such people would say: "Because of God's grace, why not sin? Sin is a virtue. It allows God's grace to operate!"

Paul tells us in Romans 6 that the reign of grace and the reign of sin are totally incompatible. To be saved by grace is to be saved from sinning! It is utterly absurd to reason as follows: "In the light of God's grace power to forgive, it is therefore safe--and even virtuous--to sin, for sin actually gives God a chance to exercise His great grace in forgiveness!"

Paul refutes such reasoning: "Anyone who lightly regards sin, also lightly regards God's Grace, lightly regards the meaning of union with Christ, and lightly regards the call to holy and righteous living!" In other words, willful, habitual sinning is a perversion of God's grace! It is a tragedy to presume upon the mercy of God and to pervert the grace God!

Paul is warning us against a trivial attitude toward sinning. Never take God's grace and mercy for granted! Realize the seriousness of sin, confess it quickly, and turn from it decisively. To engage in willful, habitual sinning is a total perversion of God's grace. To practice sinning is to deny the operation of God's grace in one's life. Paul would agree with John who states that he who is presently practicing sinning is he who is not in a present state of knowing Christ. (I John 3:8)

"God, deliver me from presumptious sin--the sin of presuming on the mercy of God. Save me from a calloused heart--a heart that is hardened to a suffering Saviour on a cruel cross, put there by sinful men like me. Rescue me from the trap of rationalization--the trap of justifying my ugly sins!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A broken and a contrite heart, God will not despise! When I sin, break my heart, "Thou Three-Personed God!".

I John 3:4-10

IS SIN A VIRTUE?

Paul encountered opponents who believed that works of righteousness were unimportant. They believed that because man was saved by grace, that therefore, one's actions were unimportant.

"The argument springs from the great saying at the end of the last chapter (Romans 5): 'Where sin abounded, grace superabounded'. It runs something like this.

The Objector: You have just said that God's grace is great enough to find forgiveness for every sin.

Paul: That is so.

The Objector: You are, in fact, saying that God's grace is the most wonderful thing in all the world?

Paul: That is so.

The Objector: Well, if that is so, let us go on sinning. The more we sin, the more grace will abound. Sin does not matter, for God will forgive anyway. In fact, we can go further than that and say that sin is an excellent thing, because it gives the grace of God a chance to operate. The conclusion of your argument is that sin produces grace; therefore, sin is bound to be a good thing if it produces the greatest thing in the world." (Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Romans, p. 82-83)

To use this type of reasoning is about like saying (to use a very simple illustration) that it is a good thing for basements of houses to be filled with rain water, for this gives a chance for the pumps to show their power in pumping water out of basements!

Or it is like saying, "It is a good thing to have an accident, for the accident gives the insurance company a chance to prove itself!"

Or it is like saying, "It is a good thing to have a serious illness, for the illness gives the doctor a chance to prove his medical skills!"

Or it is like saying, "It is a good thing to break a parent's heart, for it gives the parent opportunity to exercise his love and grace in forgiveness!"

One can only conclude one of two things about the person who continues to sin, even though such a person makes a profession of faith. Either that person has never been seized by God's grace and been genuinely converted to Christ or that person has allowed his relationship with God to die, by re-introducing a life-style of sinning into his life. Either the person was never saved or if he was saved, he has lost his vital relationship with God. In either case, such a one needs a new vision of the costliness of God's mercy!

"O God, thou art a Great Liberator! I am free from sin, not free to sin! Help me to feel the exceeding sinfulness of sin, in order that I might experience the wonderful salvation of the Saviour!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Spiritual color-blindness results in seeing 'Blacks' as 'Whites'. I determine always to see sin in all its terrible blackness!

Ephesians 4:17-24

LIVING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

One man who obnoxiously practiced sin was asked if he had no fear of God. Replied the man, "Oh, there is no need for fear, for God is in the business of forgiving!" What presumption on God's mercy! What perversion of God's grace! The one who keeps on sinning is the one who is submitting to the reign of death, not to the reign of grace. Such a person who practices sin has neither known Christ nor seen Him, according to I John 3:6! Or if he did once know Christ, he has succumbed to the reign of death after having once tasted of the goodness of God! The person who practices sin, has either never known Christ initially or if he once knew Christ, he has allowed sin to establish its reign once again in his life.

It is unthinkable for a man who is in true union with Christ to entertain a thought of liberty in sinning, under the pretense of God's grace! He who wishes to have liberty to sin and at the same time be guaranteed safety in Christ, is he who wants "to trade on the mercy of God to make it an excuse for sinning". (Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Romans, p. 85)

Paul asks, "If we died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:2) Decisively, in a moment of time, at the point of conversion, 'we died to sin', that is, we died to the reign of sin and Satan. We were transferred or translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. No longer are we tyrannized by Satan, and held captive by his power. We are not under his dominion, but we are now under the dominion of Christ who is the Lord of righteousness, peace, love and holiness. We are no longer 'in' Adam, but we are now 'in' Christ. The rights, privileges, and powers of Christ now belong to us. We have been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Our citizenship is not of the earth--fleshly--but our citizenship is in heaven--spiritual. We are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the household of faith. (Ephesians 2:19) We are no longer in the rule, reign, and territory of sin. Sin shall no longer have dominion over us. We have been transferred from Satan's camp to Christ's camp!

Romans 6:1 can be paraphrased as follows: "Therefore, in light of the knowledge of our new position in Christ, being what we are, dead to Adam and dead to sin and its reign and rule, how can we live any longer in sin? As members of the Kingdom of righteousness, it is unthinkable to practice sinning!"

"Grant me the filial awe I pray, the tender conscience give; Quick as the apple of the eye, O God, my conscience make! Awake my soul when sin is nigh, and keep it still awake." (Hymnwriter of I Want A Principle Within)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The tender conscience deals toughly with sin!

Ephesians 4:25-32

'CHRISTIANIZING' THE CHRISTIAN!

Romans 6:11 reads, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord".

'Reckon'--that is, realize your new position and status in the kingdom of God, as children of the Light. Allow your thought patterns to conform to your new position. Christianize your thoughts. Also allow your emotion and feelings to be reshaped according to the sentiments of the kingdom of God. Realize your full and unconditional acceptance by God. Sense God's unconditional love for you and let your heart rejoice with joy unspeakable. Allow your emotions to be fully Christianized. As a member of the Kingdom, now under the control of the King of kings, allow your will to be fully surrendered to righteousness and holiness. Set your will against the temptations of sin and Satan. Give no opportunity to the devil. Reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin and sinful practices. Establish holy habits. Set your will to do God's will. Allow your will to be surrendered only to God. Make a full surrender of your will to God. Let your will become fully Christianized.

"You are citizens of the Kingdom", says Paul. "Now act as citizens of the Kingdom through a daily surrender of your mind, your emotions, and your will to God!"

Because we died to the reign of sin when we were transferred to the reign of grace, we are to put away all sin from our lives. Positively speaking, because we are members of the Kingdom of righteousness, we are to live as children of the Kingdom of God. Righteousness, peace, love, holiness--these describe the new life-style of the children of the Kingdom. We must no longer live as children of the darkness, but we must live as children of the light.

As members of the Kingdom of truth, one's attitudes and thoughts and actions must all be constantly changing for the better. Every thought must be captured and brought under the authority of Christ. This means learning to know the 'mind of Christ', thinking Christ's thoughts after Him. Every emotion must be brought under the control of Christ. This means feeling Christ's compassion with Him, sharing in Christ's sufferings for His world. Every decision of the will must be made under the direction of Christ's Lordship. We must be co-laborers with Christ in realizing Kingdom purposes in a world which needs to be redeemed. As members of the Kingdom of God, our emotions, thoughts, and decisions must evidence Kingdom citizenship. As a Christian, have your thoughts, emotions, and decisions been Christianized?

"O God, you have called me out of the 'world of sin', now take the 'sin of the world' out of my heart! You have separated me from outward sins, now separate me from inward sin! You have called me a saint, now make me saintly! I believe in the possibilities of Your grace!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who has made me a citizen of the Kingdom, shall make me a soldier of the Cross!

Philippians 2:12-13, 3:12-17

"CHRISTIANS IN THE MAKING, NOT YET MADE"

Following the decisive step of putting off the old nature and putting on the new nature (Ephesians 4:22-24), there must be a daily and progressive renewing of the believer's attitudes and thoughts. To the extent that the heart is reguarly renewed, to that same extent will one's behavior increasingly become Christianized.

As a believer in Christ, say to yourself: I am not merely dead to the reign of sin, I am alive under the reign of grace; and grace is a tremendous power. All the dynamic of the reign of grace is upon me, and is working in me, and will bring me to perfection. The whole object of grace is to destroy sin and all its works within me. I am under the dominion of grace and grace is out to destroy any remnant of sin left in me. How can I possibly continue to sin when I am under the dominion of grace? As a member of the Kingdom of truth and grace, it is my responsibility to bring my will, my emotions, and my mind under the lordship of Christ. I must seek increasingly to conform my mind, emotions, and will to the standards of the Kingdom. I am a Christian in my position before God. I must now cooperate with God in order to Christianize my total life--to bring it into conformity to holy standards.

It is possible to become a Christian in a moment of time, and yet it takes a lifetime of patient practice to become fully Christianized in thoughts, actions, and relationships.

It is our part to work at being Christians, being careful to do those things which are compatible with our professions of Christianity. It is God's part to work within us, helping us to know the right and to do the right. Even the great apostle Paul confessed: "I don't mean to say I am perfect. I haven't learned all I should even yet, but I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be". (Philippians 3:12, Living Bible)

"We are only Christians in the making; we are not yet fully made", was a popular phrase of E. Stanley Jones.

Someone said that believers are simply "Christians under construction". Too often persons become citizens of the new kingdom of truth, but after becoming citizens, still act and react as citizens of the kingdom of darkness! Their actions, thoughts, and decisions have not been fully Christianized. Although they are 'free' in Christ, they act as if they are still in 'bondage' to Adam!

"O God, I see now that Truth <u>subjectively</u> experienced is Jesus Christ who will enter my heart immediately upon true confession and belief. Truth <u>objectively</u> understood is the Word of God (Bible) which can only enter my heart gradually through a lifetime of prayerful and disciplined inquiry. I <u>am</u> a Christian, and I am <u>becoming</u> 'Christianized'! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Person of Truth--the Holy Christ--will lead me progressively to the Propositions of Truth--the Holy Scriptures! There is no thrill like the 'thrill of becoming'!

John 1:11-12, I John 3:1-3

REALIZE YOUR FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE!

When one hears the voice of Christ and learns of the person of Christ, listening and learning lead one to a decisive experience in Christ. The old life is exchanged for the new life. The selfish life is exchanged for Christ's indwelling life. There is a decisive act of the will. The old self if surrendered to Christ. Christ gives one a new life. The old garment of sin is removed decisively (Greek aorist tense, Ephesians 4:22,24), and the new garment of Christ-like living is put on.

After one becomes a Christian, he needs to learn to think and to feel and to act like a Christian. That means that he must realize that he is no longer under the reign of sin, but now under the reign of grace and truth and righteousness and holiness. He needs to learn to enjoy the power of the Kingdom of God--power to live above yielding to temptation and sin. We died to sin when we became members of the new kingdom of grace, so how can we live any longer in sin? As members of the kingdom, realizing who we are, we can never be found saying, "If I Sin--So What!"

We said in the last devotional that, although many Christians are 'free' in Christ, they act as if they are still in 'bondage' to Adam! Martyn Lloyd-Jones illustrates this well: "Take the case of those poor slaves in the United States about a hundred years ago. There they were in a condition of slavery. Then the American Civil War came, and as the result of that war slavery was abolished in the United States. But what had actually happened? All slaves, young and old, were given their freedom, but many of the older ones who had endured long years of servitude found it very difficult to understand their new status. They heard the announcement that slavery was abolished and that they were free; but hundreds, not to say thousands, of times in their lives and experiences many of them did not realize it, and when they saw their old master coming near them they began to quake and to tremble, and to wonder whether they were going to be sold. They were free, they were no longer slaves; the law had been changed, and their status and their position was entirely different, but it took them a very long time to realize it. You can still be a slave experimentally, even when you are no longer a slave legally. You can be a slave in your feelings when actually in respect of your position you have been emancipated completely. So it is with the Christian". (The New Man, Exposition of Romans, Lloyd-Jones, p. 23)

"O God, forgive me for acting and thinking like a slave, when in reality I am a son--a son of God! Help me to accept and enjoy my 'rights' as a son!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What I am positionally--a child of God--I will learn to enjoy experimentally!

Ephesians 1:1-14, Colossians 1:27-29

"CHRIST IN YOU--THE HOPE OF GLORY!"

We have made a serious study of Romans 6:1-2. Now for several devotionals we must look closely at Romans 6:3-11. The theme of this great passage of Scripture is 'Union With Christ'.

Christianity is not difficult, it is impossible, if we seek to live it on our own steam! Christianity is Christ in us, living His life through us.

The very 'core' of Christianity is 'union with Christ'. 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' is the theme of Christianity.

Man needs not an ideal example, but an inward empowering. Christianity is not a creed, but a life; not demands but resources; not a religion but a dynamic relationship. Mere religion is a dead weight to the soul, but relationship with Christ is a "living power to carry the soul". (A Man In Christ, James Stewart, p. 169)

"'Christ in me' means Christ bearing me along from within, Christ the motive-power that carries me on, Christ giving my whole life a wonderful poise and lift, and turning every burden into wings. All this is in it when the apostle speaks of 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'. . .It means feeling within you, as long as life here lasts, the carrying power of Love Almighty; and underneath you, when you come to die, the touch of everlasting arms." (Ibid, p. 169-170)

Paul used the phrase 'In Christ' many times in his writings. "Take the long, typically Pauline sentence at the opening of the epistle to the Ephesians; within that single sentence 'in Christ' (or some derivative) occurs a dozen times. It is indeed the most characteristic phrase in the apostle's terminology." (Ibid, p. 155)

What does the phrase 'in Christ' declare? "We are declaring that Jesus is no mere fact in history, no towering personality of the past, but a living, present Spirit, whose nature is the very nature of God." (Ibid, p. 154)

Jesus is much more than an example to follow or to imitate. He is a person with whom to commune through His indwelling, empowering Presence. If Jesus is Example only, then man who is weak is the inevitable subject of bitter despair. There must be an indwelling and empowering by the Divine Presence if Jesus' way of life is to become man's way of life!

Union with Christ speaks of two things: (1) Transference of Position (from being 'in' Adam to being 'in' Christ); (2) Change of Condition (from being 'in' sin to 'becoming' a saint in heart and in life).

"Just as the roots are 'in' the soil, and as the birds are 'in' the air, and as the fish are 'in' the sea, so let my soul be 'in' Christ. For it is in Christ that I find my natural habitat. As my lungs are made for the physical atmosphere, so my spirit is made for the spiritual atmosphere!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today, 'in Christ' I can live a 'supernaturally natural' life!

I Corinthians 1:26-31

'BAPTIZED' INTO CHRIST!

When we speak of being 'in' Christ, we are reminded that once we were 'in' Adam. We are transferred from Adam to Christ.

As we were once united to Adam, so now we are united to Christ. It is the Spirit who unites (baptizes) us in Christ.

'Baptism' refers to baptism of the Holy Spirit when He incorporates the believer, plants the believer, engrafts the believer into the Lord Jesus Christ.

As long as we remain united with Him, abiding in Him (John 15), our final salvation is guaranteed, for everything that happened to Him happens to us. All the blessings which Christ receives, we receive because we are 'in' the Beloved!

Perhaps the most glorious aspect of Salvation is that the believer is 'in Christ' and Christ is in him.

The teaching of Romans 6 is not the place to go to formulate your doctrine of water baptism. It is 'union with Christ' that is the main doctrine of this section of Scripture.

'To drink' of the Spirit (verse 3) is to enjoy the union and incorporation of the Spirit. Our oneness with Christ is the focus of attention.

"In salvation we are not merely forgiven and not only justified. The doctrine of salvation includes the basic truth that we were in Adam, but now in Christ, that we are taken out of the one position and put into another." (The New Man, Exposition of Romans 6, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 38)

"The glorious thing about salvation is that I am taken out of Adam, that I have finished with him, and am dead to sin. I am in Christ, and all the blessings that come to me come because of my union with Christ." (Ibid, p. 38)

"We are saved by this tremendous action of God through the Spirit, who takes us out of Adam, incorporates us, implants us, baptizes us into Christ." (Ibid, p. 39)

We are baptized into the whole of Christ with all the benefits and blessings which belong to Christ. I Corinthians 1:30 says that Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. This means that Jesus is everything that we need! When we are in union with Jesus, we are in a position to receive everything that is available in Jesus. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known." (I John 3:2 NIV) The possibilities of 'union with Christ' are limitless!

"O Christ, I see now that my 'legal' position is immediately changed at conversion, but my actual condition changes gradually through growth. You call me a 'saint' at the moment of faith; you make me a 'saint' over a lifetime of living faithfully. Thank you for your powerful, yet patient, work in me!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will practice receptivity, for I enjoy only those gifts and graces of Jesus that I am presently able and willing to receive.

Romans 6:3-11

UNION WITH CHRIST!

Romans 6 teaches us that the believer experiences a transfer of position--from Adam to Christ. It also teaches that the believer experiences a change of condition--from sin to sainthood. It is 'union with Christ' that makes possible this change of position and change of condition.

We are trying to understand what 'union with Christ' means. Perhaps it is something that can only be experienced rather than analyzed. Nevertheless, we must try to understand Paul's teachings in Romans 6 (and other places) regarding 'union with Christ'.

First, 'union with Christ' in His death, burial, and resurrection 'means to be identified with Christ's attitude to sin'. (A Man In Christ, James Stewart, p. 196)

Second, 'union with Christ' in His death, burial, and resurrection means involvement in Christ's mission of compassion and Christ's obedience to the Word.

Third, 'union with Christ' means participation in Christ's amazing power.

Fourth, 'union with Christ' does NOT mean the end of the Christian's personal effort, cooperation and striving.

Fifth, 'union with Christ' will ultimately consummate in total redemption (including the body) in heaven.

We must now begin to look at each one of these five statements regarding 'union with Christ'.

Union with Christ 'means to be identified with Christ's attitude to sin'. (Ibid, p. 196) Not only is the sinner's position changed, but his condition will also be changed. God's grace which imputes Christ's righteousness to the sinner is the same grace which imparts Christ's righteousness to the sinner. Not only does one receive a right standing with God, but one receives a new nature from God. As one is positionally changed from a sinner to a saint, one is also imparted the holy nature of God which is the basis for developing actual saintliness. One cannot long be reckoned righteous unless there are actual fruits of righteousness in his life. The grace that saves one from sin is the grace that delivers one from sinning. Union with Christ means receiving the very nature of Christ. The least that can be said as a result of receiving the nature of Christ, is that the converted one is delivered from a practice of sinning. "Be ye holy, for I am holy", says God.

"O God, I cannot be both united to sin and united to the Saviour at the same time! I will either hate the one and love the other or the other way around! I am called to holiness. Now make me holy in my nature. Destroy all sin in my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What God has called me in name, He will make me in reality--a holy man!

I John 1:7, 2:1-2, 3:4-6

'THE SINNING CHRISTIAN'--A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS!

One who is united in Christ cannot practice sin. (I John 3:6) 'The sinning Christian' is a contradiction in terms. Neither Paul nor John (I John 2:1-2) deny the possibility, and many times the reality of an occasional isolated sinful action in the life of a person who is in union with Christ, but both Paul (Romans 6:1-2) and John (I John 3:4-6) declare that "No one who lives in Christ keeps on sinning". (I John 3:6)

The one who is united to Christ is the one whose spiritual condition is increasingly improving. As Christ hates sin, so the believer in Christ increasingly learns to hate sin. How shall one continue in sin if he has died to the reign of sin in his life? He no longer practices rebellion and willful transgressions against God's known laws and God's revealed will. Whatever Christ hates, the believer learns to hate. He who has the mind of Christ within him, is he who understands increasingly the hellishness of sin. It is sin that smashed the most beautiful life of the universe on a cross!

He who continues to identify with Christ's death, burial and resurrection is he who increasingly becomes sensitized to sin's presence in his life. Christ's death and resurrection signaled finality to the destruction of sin's reign. Therefore, to identify with Christ's death means to reckon oneself to be dead to sin's reign in his own life.

What is the essence of sin? The essence of sin is pride and unbelief. The manifestation of pride is seen in man's attempt to usurp God's authority and disregard God's laws. Making oneself god instead of submitting oneself as servant to the True God is the very essence of sin. Doing that which is right in one's own eyes instead of doing that which is right in the eyes of God, is evidence of human rebellion and sin. Man is called to surrender and submission. Instead, man assets himself in rebellion and self-will.

To enjoy the holiness of God means that one learns to abhore and to forsake sin in his life. Sin and holiness are totally incompatible!

A believer in union with Christ has the divine perspective of grace. Grace accepts the sinner and delivers the sinner from a practice of sinning. Grace transfers one from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of light, from the reign of sin to the reign of righteousness. He who is in union with Christ realizes the cost of God's grace!

"O God, when I fall in sin, let me always 'fall toward the Cross'. Help me honestly to confess, and gladly grasp your saving Hand of restoration. Put me quickly back on the path that leads to heaven--the 'path of holiness'! In Jesus' saving name! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If (or when) I sin, I have One who speaks to the Father in my defense--Jesus the Righteous One! His speaking is my healing! (I John 2:1-2)

John 15:1-11

INEXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCES!

Union with Christ means involvement in Christ's mission of compassion and Christ's obedience to the Word. Christ was moved with compassion for the lost, and so will those who are union with Christ. Christ learned obedience by the things which he suffered. The believer in Christ will also walk obediently. 'I delight to do thy will', is the soul-cry of the true believer.

Union with Christ means participation in Christ's power. Notes James Stewart, "To be 'in Christ' means that Christ is the redeemed man's new environment. The human body, by the acts of eating and drinking and breathing, is continually drawing for its strength upon the resources of its physical environment. So the Christian spirit, by prayer and worship and surrender, makes contact and keeps contact with its spiritual enviornment, which is Christ; thus the soul draws for its strength upon the supplies of power which in Christ are quite inexhaustible. 'I can do all things', it says 'through Christ which strengthens me'. Faced with the strain and stress of the moral struggle, surrounded by stubborn hereditary foes, torn sometimes on the rack of almost unbearable temptation, it lifts its head and cries, 'Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ'." (A Man In Christ, p. 198)

Union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection does NOT mean the end of the Christian's personal moral effort, cooperation, and striving. Those who are 'in Christ' presently have standing and position in Christ. We have been transferred from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of light. From that moment on it is our responsibility to walk by faith. We have become united in the Vine; as branches we are now to stay attached to the Vine and grow as healthy branches. We have been saved from sin; we are now to serve righteousness. The light has come to us; we are now to arise and shine in the world. We have been separated unto Christ; we are now to separate ourselves from worldliness in our daily life-style. Because union with Christ on the earthly plain is not experienced without opposition from Satan, this union must be maintained by faith, prayer, watchfulness and obedience. It is a dynamic union; not a static state. It is a voluntary union, not a coercive union.

Union with Christ will ultimately consummate in total Redemption--including the body--in heaven. Heaven will be a place where we become more and more like God, and yet we will never become gods. Eternal growth in Christlikeness--that is what makes heaven so glorious!

"Just as the branch receives its sap from the vine, so let me receive my strength from thee, O God! Thou art the Vine. All life resides in thee alone. I am the branch. All life is received from thee. I do not grow by tense trying, but by simple trusting! O the bliss of abiding in You!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Just as the branch surrenders itself to the vine for continual life, so I will surrender my little life to God to receive His inexhaustible Life!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON "IF I SIN--SO WHAT?"

1. How would you respond to a person who said the following to you: "If I sin, so what! I am a Christian! I am saved by grace and grace alone. The degree of my sinning in no way affects my relationship with Christ. If I was once saved, I am always saved, regardless of my sinning. Grace covers all my sins. Did not Paul write, 'Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds'."?

2. What attitude should a believer have regarding sin--its commission and its practice? (Note Romans 6:1, I John 2:1-2, 3:4-9)

3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Anyone who lightly regards sin, also lightly regards God's Grace, lightly regards the meaning of union with Christ, and lightly regards the call to holy and righteous living!"

4. Is it possible for a one-time believer to fall back into a pattern of sinning, resulting in him losing, not only his fellowship with God, but eventually his relationship with God? What Scriptural basis can you cite to document your viewpoint on this controversial issue? (Note I John 3:8)

5. One can only conclude one of two things about the person who continues to sin, even though such a person makes a profession of faith. What are those two things?

6. How would you refute the argument of the person who says that, because man was saved by grace, his actions are unimportant?

7. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "He who wishes to have liberty to sin and at the same time be guaranteed safety in Christ, is he who wants 'to trade on the mercy of God to make it an excuse for sinning'."

8. When one, through spiritual conversion, is transferred or translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, what lifestyle can he expect to live as a 'child of light'? (Note Romans 6:2, I John 2:3-6)

9. What does it mean for a believer in Christ to become Christianized in his mind, emotions and will? What is the difference between a spiritual Christian and a carnal Christian? Do you identify with the following prayer: "O God, you have called me out of the 'world of sin', now take the 'sin of the world' out of my heart!"

10. Meditate on the following statement: "To the extent that the heart is regularly renewed, to that same extent will one's behavior increasingly become Christianized". What can you do, as a believer, to daily renew your heart?

11. Explain the difference between the Truth <u>subjectively</u> experienced, and the Truth <u>objectively</u> understood.

12. How do you interpret the following 'Affirmation': "What I am positionally--a child of God--I will learn to enjoy experimentally!"

13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Christianity is not difficult, it is impossible--if we seek to live it on our own steam!"

14. Share as many Scriptures as you can to document the truth of the following statement: "Christianity is not a creed, but a life; not demands but resources, not a religion but a dynamic relationship". (Note John 10:10, 14:6, I John 1:7, Ephesians 1:18-20, 3:16-19)

15. 'Union with Christ' speaks of two primary realities. What are those two realities?

16. When you are in union with Jesus, you are in a position to receive everything that is available in Jesus. According to I Corinthians 1:30 what are some things you receive from Jesus Christ?

17. Describe in at least five different ways what 'Union with Christ' means.

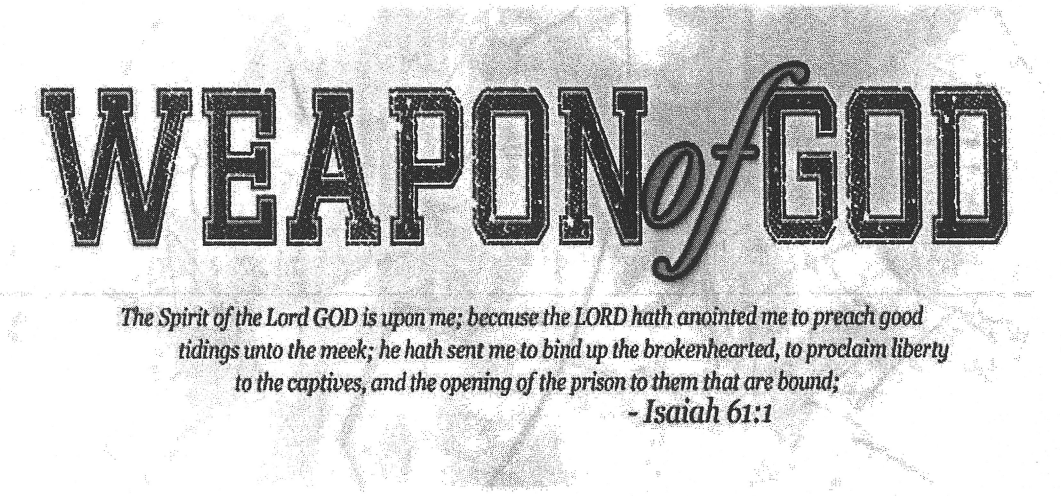
18. Describe what the following statement means to you: "God's grace which imputes Christ's righteousness to the sinner is the same grace which imparts Christ's righteousness to the sinner".

19. Quote Scriptural support to document the Truth of the following statement: "The sinning Christian is a contradiction in terms".

20. What is the essence of sin?

21. Through what means can the sincere believer find victory over his moral struggles and his unbearable temptations?

22. When the believer is enjoying 'union with Christ', does this mean that he no longer needs to exercise personal moral effort and striving to live the Christian life? What is God's part and what is the believer's part, in living the Christian life? Is the Christian life the result of the believer 'trying harder' or 'trusting more' or both?



CHAPTER 12

"ARE YOU A WEAPON FOR GOD?"

Romans 6:12-14

THE HELPLESSNESS OF GOD!

In this world there is an eternal battle being waged between sin and God. Both sin and God have their weapons for the battle. What are the weapons? Human beings! Every person is either a weapon in the hands of God or a weapon in the hands of sin!

Have you ever thought that both sin and God are helpless without human weapons?

"Both God and sin are looking for weapons to use. God cannot work without men. If God wants a word spoken, He has to get a man to speak it. If God wants a deed done, He has to get a man to do it. If God wants a person cheered, encouraged, strengthened, helped, He has to get a man to do the lifting up. God, as it has been said, is everywhere looking for hands to use. And it is the same with sin. Every man has to be given the push into sin. The invitation to sin has to be offered to every man. Sin is looking for men who will by their words or example, seduce and invite others into sinning." (Daily Study Bible, Romans, Barclay, p. 87-88)

Every man can make a choice as to whether he will be a weapon for sin or a weapon for God. Every man has the power to exercise great influence for good or great influence for evil. Every man must choose to yield himself to either God or to sin. Both God and Satan are helpless unless they get men through whom they may work!

"We hear a great many sermons about might and majesty and power of God; we would be well sometimes to think of the helplessness of God, that without us and without what we can do God is quite and totally helpless. He has got to get a man! We are the Body of Christ, literally hands to do his work, feet to run his errands, a voice to speak for him. This is the Church's task; to be the body, the hands, the feet, through whom Christ acts." (The Life of Jesus For Everyman, William Barclay, p. 94-95)

Every man must yield to his members to sin as weapons for wickedness or he must yield his members to God as weapons for righteousness. There is no neutral ground. He that is not for Christ is automatically against Christ.

What are some of the members or parts or activities of human personality that both Satan and God are seeking to use as weapons for their respective causes? Among the members of human personality are the Mind, the Mouth, the Movements of human actions, and the Motivations of human influence. Both sin and God are seeking to use as weapons the minds of men, the mouths (words) of men, the movements (actions) of men, and the motivations (influence) of men. Surrender to God! Be God's weapon for righteousness!

"O God, I see that every person is mastered by someone or by something. I choose to be mastered by You. I place myself in your hands to be used as a weapon for righteousness and holiness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is so mighty that He has chosen to be 'helpless' without me! How humbling and yet how ennobling to me!

II Corinthians 10:3-5

THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND!

Perhaps the greatest battlefield today is the battlefield of the Mind. Because ideas and thoughts profoundly affect human behavior, both Satan and God are seeking to capture the thoughts of men for sinful or holy purposes respectively. God wants to use men as His weapons to Christianize human thoughts. Satan wishes to use men as His weapons to corrupt human thoughts.

Wrote Paul to fellow believers, regarding the battle for the mind: "The truth is that, although of course, we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. The very weapons we use are not those of human warfare, but powerful in God's warfare for the destruction of the enemy's strongholds. Our battle is to bring down every deceptive fantasy and every imposing defense that men erect against the true knowledge of God. We even fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ". (II Corinthians 10:3-5, Phillips)

There have been many human thoughts and ideas which have have not acknowledged the authority of Christ. The thoughts of Frederich Nietzsche have been used as weapons for wicked purposes. It was Nietzsche who thought that love was the 'slave morality'. He totally misunderstood the Christian ethic of love, and instead turned love into a spineless characteristic of weak people. Nietzsche influenced Hitler's philosophy which in turn resulted in a ghastly world war that took millions of lives! The thoughts and philosophy of man became the weapon for great evil, causing untold suffering!

Contrast the ideas of Nietzsche with the ideas which John Wesley taught. The theme of Wesley's life and writings was love. His Biblically based ideas of Christian love saved England from a bloodbath, the kind of bloodbath which France experienced in the French Revolution. Wesley's ideas brought untold human blessings to mankind!

Think of the ideas of John Bunyan which he penned while he was a prisoner because of religious persecution. His book, 'Pilgrim's Progress', written while he was imprisoned, is considered the best known book in all Christian literature apart from the Bible. Millions have been immeasurably blessed by the words and ideas of John Bunyan during the last three centuries!

Every human category of thought must be brought into subjection to Christ's way of thinking. Every person is called to yield his mind to God as a weapon for righteousness.

"O Christ, as King, you are increasingly bringing my thoughts into captivity to your kingdom purposes. Quicken, renew, and cleanse my mind by your transforming power. Teach me to think your thoughts 'after you'."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The 'Christianizing of thoughts' is a high and holy calling. The struggles against evil are won on the battlefield of my mind!

Matthew 12:36-37, James 3:6-12

WE CREATE OUR WORLD BY OUR WORDS!

Have you yielded your mouth--your words and speech--as a mighty weapon for righteousness? "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." (Psalms 51:15)

You will be judged by your words! Jesus said: "I tell you, on the day of judgement men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned". (Matthew 12:36-37) "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." (Proverbs 13:3)

We create our world by our words! Negative words create a negative environment. Positive words create a positive environment. Words can elevate or words can destroy! Words can build up or words can destroy friends during adversity! Words can sooth or words can sear! As a man speaketh, so is he!

Words are powerful weapons for either good or for bad! Bad words have devastating consequences; good words have powerful results! "With it (tongue) we bless the Lord and Father, and with it (tongue) we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God." (James 3:9) The mouth can be a powerful weapon for righteousness or a powerful weapon for wickedness! Wrote James, "If a man can control his tongue he can control every other part of his personality!" (James 3:2, Phillips) One can be tongue-controlled only if he is first God-controlled! God alone is powerful enough to tame the unruly tongue of men! "The tongue is as dangerous as any fire, with vast potentials for evil. It can poison the whole body; it can make the whole of life a blazing hell." (James 3:6, Phillips)

Think of the powerful effect of words! "The human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of!" (James 3:5, Phillips) During World War II, words of Churchill and Roosevelt moved millions in the Free World to sacrifice greatly to save democracy for the future. How powerful were their words for good!

Words should be accurate reflections of one's personality, expressions of one's being. "To the Hebrew, his 'word' was an almost physical projection of his person. His word was personal. He was frugal with words lest by carelessness his words betray him." (A Theology of Love, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, p. 42)

One's words are either weapons for God or weapons for sin. The gossiping tongue is a powerful weapon of Satan. The charitable tongue is a powerful weapon of God. Don't destroy reputations. Instead, use your words to heal broken characters!

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." (Psalms 19:14)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1) I will create a peaceful world through peaceful words!

Proverbs 15:1-4,22-23

FORCEFUL WORDS BACKED BY FORCEFUL LIVES!

We are seeking to apply the truths of Romans 6:12-14. The 'Jerusalem Bible' interestingly translates this portion of Scripture as follows: "That is why you must not let sin reign in your mortal bodies or command your obedience to bodily passions, why you must not let any part of your body turn into an unholy weapon fighting on the side of sin; you should, instead, offer yourselves to God, and consider yourselves dead men brought back to life; you should make every part of your body into a weapon fighting on the side of God; and then sin will no longer dominate your life, since you are living by grace and not by law".

Every part of man is to be offered to God as a weapon for right purposes. We have noted thus far the weapon of the Mind and the weapon of the Mouth.

Deceptive words are Satan's weapons to deceive human minds! Wrote Paul to Titus, "For there are many. . .who will not recognize authority, who talk nonsense and yet in so doing have managed to deceive men's minds. They must be silenced, for they upset the faith of whole households, teaching what they have no business to teach for the sake of what they can get". (Titus 1:10-11, Phillips)

Job 6:25 says, "How forceful are right words!" Right words are forceful as weapons in the hands of God, because right words are backed by right lives. Words which are forceful are words that are backed by an authentic Christian life and experience. Words become hollow and empty when they are spoken by shallow lives. Out of the abundance (or the shallowness) of the heart the mouth speaketh! (Matthew 12:34)

"J. Wesley Ingles reminds us that the great Christian words are no more than a mockery to our cynical age because they have often been spoken by lips while betrayed by hands and feet. They must become incarnated again in the living, daily experience of Christians profoundly involved in life by lips and hands that move in harmony. He said, 'Every abstract word is hollow until we pour life into it. Honor, glory, sacrifice, loyalty, love, joy, peace, courage and endurance, faith and faithfulness, democracy and brotherhood, justice and mercy--what are these? Words. Abstract words. Hollow words--until we fill them with deeds, with life, and hence with meaning. The great words of the Christian faith--grace, forgiveness, redemption, faith, hope and love--all are hollow words until we pour out our Christian experience into them'. Yes, the great words are hollow; and yet, filled full of life, they could shake the world again. . ." (A Theology of Love, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, p. 43)

"Let the words I speak truly reflect the life I live--a guileless life, a life free from deception. Let the 'Christian words' I speak be filled with meaning, because they are backed by a God-filled life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will say what I mean, and mean what I say, lest I fall into temptation and sin! (James 5:12)

Titus 2:1-15

ARE YOU A WEAPON FOR GOD?

According to Romans 6:12-14, God is looking for weapons to use for his holy causes. God wants you to yield your Mind to Him as an instrument of righteousness. God wants to use your mind as a weapon on the battlefield of ideas, with the goal of "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ". (II Corinthians 10:5)

Your Mouth with its words must also be yielded to God to be used as a mighty weapon for righteousness. Let loving words be a projection of your loving self.

Your involvement in redemptive Movements (actions, works, good deeds) is to be used by God as a mighty weapon to tear down the strongholds of Satan in human society. You are to invade society with loving actions and redemptive works. Let your life be full of good deeds. Involve yourself constantly in 'love projects'. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven". (Matthew 5:16)

The movements of men either glorify God or they advance the cause of evil! We must spend several devotionals looking at this weapon.

Think for a few moments of the millions of unborn babies who have never had a chance to live, simply because a consenting doctor and a consenting mother have decided to abort the baby rather than allow it to be born a healthy child! The Supreme Court which represents thousands with their liberal views regarding abortion, has been used as a destructive weapon of sin to kill millions of unborn babies! The liberalization of laws regarding human life is surely one of the cruelest weapons of Satan today!

Recently I received a letter from a local 'Right to Life' chapter in which the following appeared: "Even as I write this, the U.S. Senate is still trying to reach a compromise on whether or not to allow Federal funds to pay for abortions. We are in a sorry state when millions of Americans must finance something they morally oppose. But, united we can win. This is an issue on which all Christians can work together for the glory of God and to accomplish His will".

In contrast to those who have yielded themselves as instruments of sin unto wickedness, there are many who have yielded themselves as instruments for holy causes. There are many who are redeemed and purified and who are "zealous for good deeds". (Titus 2:14) There are many who are steadfast in their labors for God--mighty weapons in God's hands. (I Corinthians 15:58)

"O God, 'I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do'." (Edward Hale)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: 'All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for Christians to do nothing!' I will involve myself in some redemptive movement!

Matthew 25:31-46

"CHRISTIANITY IS A SOCIAL RELIGION"

Those social movements in which you are involved will either be weapons for God or weapons for sin. Said Paul, "Do not yield your members to sin as weapons of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness". (Romans 6:13)

Do not involve yourself as an instrument for the cause of Satan's dark kingdom, but rather yield yourself as a weapon to advance the cause of Christ's righteous movement.

Said Wesley: "Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, in all the places you can, in all the ways you can." Wesley believed that faith was practical, expressing itself in social involvements. Said Wesley: "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness." "Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection." "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and. . .to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it."

Appearing in our local newspaper (The Coloradoan Newspaper, December 17, 1974) were these words, concerning the social dimensions of Christianity: "In the Scriptural perspective, religion is not just inward piety and a special, enclosed cirlce of virtue and belief, but is explicitely directed toward renewing society, to correcting ills, righting wrongs, and relieving poverty".

It was the great Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote, "To allow the hungry man to remain hungry is blasphemy against God and one's neighbor, for what is nearest to God is precisely the need of one's neighbors".

Compassionate involvement in redemptive movements--this describes the social witness of the earnest believer! Notes William Sangster: "The power of even one man or woman with God is immensely potent".

We are told that when Abraham Lincoln saw the slave market at New Orleans for the first time, he said, "Let's get out of this, boys. If I ever get any chance to hit this thing, I'll hit it hard". Lincoln was a mighty weapon in the hands of God to destroy one of society's greatest evils--slavery. His Emancipation Proclamation freed thousands from the bondage of slavery.

You can help change your world! God wants to use you as His weapon! The society of which you are a part is not a Christian society, but even society can be at least partly 'Christianized' through your efforts! What a high and holy calling!

"Forgive me for retreating from society's problems. I am part of society, therefore, society's problems are my problems. Help me to be part of the solution. Deliver me from the trap of corporate irresponsibility which says: 'Everyone's responsibility is no one's responsibility'! Make me, O God, responsible to society because I am responsible to you! Through Jesus' redeeming Name."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Good actions on the part of enough good people can change the course of history!

Galatians 6:1-10, Matthew 13:33

LEAVENING INFLUENCE OF A COMMITTED MINORITY

The society of which we are a part is not a Christian society, but God can use every believer as a mighty weapon for righteousness, holiness, and social justice.

"With men and women experiencing. . .'full salvation' Christ is seeking to invade the world. It is His World!--the place of His incarnation, the scene of His Cross, and holding still His borrowed and discarded tomb. His followers are not to sneak through the world teaching it as little as they can; but claiming it, asserting His Kingship over it, challenging evil wherever they meet it, and admitting no segment of life as alien to His rule. Art, science, politics, commerce--all are His." (Daily Readings, William Sangster, p. 246)

Notes Perry Cotham, "We should call America a pagan nation, inhabited by a minority of committed Christians. . .Ours is a pluralistic society, and committed, evengelical disciples of Christ are truly in the minority. Lest we despair, recall from both Biblical and secular history that the character of a nation is not necessarily determined by the majority of its people--a deeply committed minority is quite sufficient. . .If God spared an entire nation because of the dedication of one woman named Esther, if He spared multitudes because of the prayers of one man named Moses, if God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous Sodomites, then will not the Almighty spare this great nation because of the leavening influence of some truly converted people?" (Politics, Americanism and Christianity, p. 234)

Never forget: "The good influence of godly citizens causes a city to prosper, but the moral decay of the wicked drives it downhill". (Proverbs 11:11, Living Bible)

Earnest Christians always have had a deep concern for the social needs around them. Those who are most alive to God are those who are most alive to 'people-problems'. Love for God is best demonstrated by love for one's fellowmen. In her study of early Methodists, Dr. Mary Alice Tenney observes: "Perfect Love operates in two directions; vertically toward God, horizontally toward man. Early Methodists really loved men. . .they went into dirty garrets and nursed sick old women. Even noblemen did that sort of thing, denying themselves luxuries in order to do it. It got right down among the needy, the evil, even the criminals, and showed them what real friendship and compassion are. . .If Love could be allowed to work in the world today among the Great Hungry here and overseas, as it was released by the Methodist Revival, the ground work for world change would be laid". (Living In Two Worlds, p. 112-113)

"O Father, help me to be a weapon for good in your hands. A weapon is meant to be used. Use me to destroy the evil things around me, without destroying the evil people around me who need to be cleansed from evil!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will stop just saying I love people; I will really love them, and show it by my actions! (I John 3:18, Living Bible)

James 2:14-26, 1:27

"BOTH-AND" OR "EITHER-OR" PERSONS?

Christians are called to bear the sufferings of the world redemptively. Christ suffered redemptively for mankind. Christians are to follow the example of Christ. "Though living in this kind of a world is costing us pain, it is costing God more." (Christ and Human Suffering, E.S. Jones, p. 194) Remember, the Gospel has a cross at the very heart of it. The cross on Mount Calvary is the outward revelation of the cross which has always been on the heart of God! Jesus shares the suffering of every man. "He is cold in the chilled bodies of the poor, he is lonely in the outcast, is hurt in the guilt of the sinner, is part and parcel of every life." (Ibid, p. 161)

Every Christian is to enter into the suffering of the world--to lose himself helping to redeem the sufferings of others. "If one part (of the body) suffers, all parts suffer with it." (I Corinthians 11:26) Every Christian is a part of the body of Christ.

As important as prayer is, prayer must never become a substitute for compassionate action. "A wealthy farmer prayed in his family circle that his unfortunate neighbor might not starve. When they arose from their knees, his little girl said to him, 'Daddy, you needn't have bothered God with that, for you can quite easily keep them from starving'." (Christ and Human Suffering, E.S. Jones, p. 191)

Christians are to be weapons in God's hands to affect social change. As such, Christians are called to deal with the 'root' of social problems, not simply with the 'symptoms' of social problems. "Any tackling of the problem of suffering that does not go to the sources of that suffering as they are found in evil systems is lacking in spiritual intelligence. Judged by that simple test much of our Christian work could scarcely pass the intelligence test. We try to bail out suffering from individual lives and leave in full operation systems which are the direct and positive cause of that individual suffering." (Ibid, p. 182)

"Shall we rescue individual slaves or shall we strike at the slave system? Shall we pick up individual drunkards and leave the liquor traffic to manufacture drunkards? Shall we rescue the wounded in war or shall we strike at the war system? Shall we pick up the wounded by Jericho's road or send someone out to get the thieves? The obvious answer to all these questions is that we should do both." (Ibid, p. 182)

Sensitive Christians are not "Either-Or" persons, but they are "Both-And" persons.

"God, help me, like you, to be wholistic. Help me to be a 'both-and' Christian. It is both Doctrine and Ethics. It is both Creed and Life. It is both Inner Experience and Outer Conduct. It is both individual salvation and social action. It is both Devotion and Service."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not choose between an 'individual gospel' and a 'social gospel'. The whole gospel includes both!

Matthew 5:13-16, John 17:9-19

HEAVENLY VISIONS WITH EARTHLY CONCERNS!

We have said that sensitive Christians are not 'either-or' persons, but 'both-and' persons. "There is no real choice between an individual gospel and a social gospel. If it is to be a whole gospel, it must include both. We tend to alternate between a social or an individual emphasis, and do not hold them in a living blend. The individual must experience a personal transformation, but society must also undergo that same transformation before the Kingdom of God is an actuality. It is not true, as claimed by many, that all we have to do is to regenerate the individual and the regenerated individual will necessarily apply the gospel to the social order. The fact is that this does not usually work, unless the content of the social application is put into the teaching concerning individual regeneration." (Christ and Human Suffering, E.S. Jones, p. 183)

Which emphasis comes first, the personal or the social? "If religion does not begin with the individual, it never begins, but if it ends with the individual--it ends!" "Service without devotion is rootless; devotion without service is fruitless." (New Man For Our Time, Elton Trueblood, p. 29,25)

The Christian is a man with a heavenly vision, but filled with earthly concerns! In fact, the man who is most living for heaven ought to be most living for his fellow man. "That is why the moral earnestness of revival converts had much to do with the abolition of slavery, the temperance movement, a growing concern for child welfare, medical aid for the sick, education for all, women's suffrage, the reclamation of the socially lost such as the prostitute and the criminal, and the giving of the gospel to those where its truth had never gone." (One Divine Moment, Robert Coleman, Editor, p. 107)

He whose head is in heaven ought to have his hands and feet most actively at work on earth! A Christian is a man who is living in two worlds. He who is most alive to spiritual visions ought to be most responsive to human needs, for the man with the heavenly vision is seeing Reality from a broader perspective. Being alive to the spiritual realm ought to automatically include all of the material realm. Said one to John Wesley during his search for spiritual reality: "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion". (Blueprint For A Christian World, Mary Alice Tenney, p. 83)

"O God, I feel your call upon my life, the call to open the eyes of the blind and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among those who are cleansed by faith. (Acts 26:18) Help me to fulfill my calling!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will seek to be a person who translates a clear heavenly vision into a practical Christian ministry!

II Peter 1:3-11

WHAT DOES 'SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD' MEAN?

A Christian should be a person with both a heavenly vision and a practical earthly concern, a person who is concerned in personal salvation and social redemption. Today, however, there appear to be too many who are very concerned about heavenly matters, but quite unconcerned with earthly problems. Why is this so? For several reasons, some of which we wish to look at during the next two or three devotionals.

For one thing, Evangelical Christianity has overly reacted to Liberal Christianity which has preached a 'social gospel' which includes a minimum concern about the hearafter. In reacting against the social utopias which the Liberals have sought to build upon earth through human reformation and political legislation, Evangelicals have sought to re-emphasize personal regeneration, with a consequent de-emphasis upon the need for involvement in social problems.

Also, Evangelicals have so emphasized 'separation from worldliness' and the importance of escaping "the corruption that is in the world through lusts" (II Peter 1:4), that well-meaning Christians have separated themselves not only from worldly practices, but also from worldly people who have worldly problems. Are not Christians supposed to separate themselves from everything that might pollute their pure and spotless lives? Does not the Scripture say, "Come out from among them and be ye separate and I (God) will receive you?" But in dealing with this problem of misplaced separation, let us remind ourselves that while Jesus was a man of heavenly vision, he never separated Himself from the needs of people. He was a friend of publicans, harlots, and sinners of all kinds. The Christian must ever be a man with a clear heavenly vision who translates that vision into a life of practical action.

There are well-meaning Christians who have been taught that one of the 'signs of the times' is widespread lawlessness, social disorder, and intensified evil. Some Christians feel that social disintegration is an inevitability, and that therefore Christians can do nothing to stop this process. If society 'in the last times' is inevitably going to 'go to the dogs', why exert so much effort in trying to redeem society? These fatalistic Christians reason: "The world is predicted to get worse and worse before Jesus returns, so don't fight this inevitability. Save your energy for better things--like the cultivation of your own soul. Wait until Jesus comes back again. Then the world will enjoy universal peace, and the evil human systems will be cleansed of their evil". Are these fatalists right in their thinking?

"Guard me, O God, from two dangers--the danger of naive optimism and the danger of cynical fatalism. On one hand, help me realistically to see that total redemption of society can only take place when the 'Prince of Peace' returns to earth. On the other hand, help me hopefully and persistently to work for the partial redemption of social structures, as your transforming power is released through me."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The stubborn structures of corporate evil will yield to the tougher touch of divine power!

Matthew 4:23-25

"EVERYBODY'S JOB IS NOBODY'S JOB"

In the last devotional we looked at the fatalistic attitudes which some Christians have regarding the possibility of social transformation. This fatalistic attitude toward the world is destructive of redemptive action in society. Christians are called to "occupy till Jesus comes", and this means to minister to the world's many hurts. This means aggressive and loving involvement in human institutions and worldly systems.

Another hindrance in dealing with social sickness is collective irresponsibility. You have heard of the old adage, "Everybody's job is nobody's job". We can also add: "Everybody's guilt is nobody's guilt". Many social ills are not healed because no one personally feels responsible for the problem or for the solution to the problem. Who feels personally responsible to feed the starving Africans or to house the wandering refugees or to clothe the shivering orphans? Who feels personally responsible for the deprived, discriminated, discouraged?

"If a group of people can be made to share the responsibility for what would be a sin if an individual did it, the load of guilt rapidly lifts from the shoulders of all concerned. Others may accuse, but the guilt shared by many evaporates for the individual. Time passes. Memories fade. Perhaps there is a record, somewhere; but who reads it?" (Whatever Became of Sin, Karl Menninger, p. 95)

Some are hindered in any meaningful involvement in social concerns for they feel insignificant as an individual. "I am only one person, what can I do?" comes from the lips of many. It is time to realize that good actions on the part of enough good people can change the course of history! Recognize that Christians may exercise a powerful influence on society even though they may be a small minority. Notes Billy Graham, "Joan of Arc was only one woman, but she saved France. The whole city of Florence was transformed under the preaching of one Roman Catholic priest by the name of Savonarola. Martin Luther was one man, but he nailed some theses on the church door at Wittenburg and altared the course of European history. One (modern-day) man, Aleksander Solzhenitzen, with nothing but a pen in hand, stood up against the entire Soviet empire. They didn't know what to do with him. He didn't stand with a gun, he stood with moral courage. The whole world admired him." (Decision Magazine, January 1976)

Jesus went about healing all manner of sicknesses, and so must Christians today! This healing ministry includes society with its many ills. You are only one person. Don't underestimate your influence as one person. Unite with other redemptive persons and become an instrument of healing in society.

"Help me to accept both my personal strengths and my personal weaknesses. Help me not to be depressed by feelings of self-contempt on one hand, nor to be inflated with feelings of self-conceit on the other hand. Help me to lose myself in order to find myself in service to others."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not allow the complacency of corporate irresponsibility to rob me of the concern for personal accountability!

II Timothy 1:1-5, Luke 17:1-2

ONE LINK IN THE LONG CHAIN OF LIFE!

"Are you a weapon for God?" That is the question around which we have clustered all our thoughts in our daily devotionals for the last several days. "Put yourselves in God's hands as weapons of good for His own purposes." (Romans 6:13, Phillips) God is looking for weapons for His holy causes. God wants you to yield your Mind with all its thoughts, your Mouth with all its words, and your Movements with all their resulting actions, deeds, and projects.

Also, God wants you to surrender your Motivations to Him. Every person motivates or influences others for either good or bad. Every person consciously or unconsciously persuades others to think a certain way or to take a certain course of action. Influence is a mighty weapon for either God or for Satan.

Sin perpetuates itself through the power of influence, and that influence is felt from generation to generation. Even after you are dead, your influence lives on! The intangible force of influence is great! Your life will influence future generations!

The story is told a young man who was living recklessly and irresponsibly. He seemed to have no regard for anyone but himself. This wild young man began to study biology. While he was looking at small one-celled organisms through a microscope, he noticed how quickly the cells divided, forming another generation. He was struck with a startling insight--each generation was simply one link in the long chain of life. Applying this simple observation to himself, the young reckless man vowed that he would no longer live irresponsibly, for he knew that his actions and attitudes would influence future generations, for either good or ill. If he was only one link in the chain of life, he would be a strong link!

What kind of great grandchildren do you wish to have? The life you live will help determine the outcome of your great grandchildren! You are shaping future generations!

Exodus 20:5 reveals the power of influence: "I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation". Now God never brings punishment arbitrarily upon anyone, so why does God bring punishment on the descendants of those who hate him? Because the descendants have been influenced and taught to hate God! We teach our children by precept and example to either love righteousness or to love sin! We mold our children to become either objects of judgement or objects of mercy. God-lovers or God-haters!

"O God, help me to be a strong link in the long chain of life. Help me to live responsibly, knowing that with every decision I make, I am either helping or hindering future generations. Help me to pay the high price for the richest of all gifts--the gift of a godly example lovingly offered to future generations!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I determine to live in such a way that my great grandchildren may have reason to rise up and honor me!

Psalms 19:14, 55:21, Matthew 12:34-37

POWERFUL INFLUENCE OF WORDS!

People are greatly influenced by the quality of one's companions. I Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be fooled. 'Bad companions ruin good character.'" The company one keeps molds the quality of one's life, and the words one listens to affects the quality of one's thinking. Many children and youth are very impressionable. What they see and what they hear greatly influence them! There are too many young people keeping company by the hour with the wrong Hollywood Stars on Television! Need we stress that bad influence through TV corrupts good manners?

The influence of words is immense. This can be illustrated in numerous instances. "It is more than one man's opinion that George Whitefield was the greatest evangelist ever to come out of Britian, and certainly no one would deny him a high place in the history of preaching. His genius was his uncanny ability to persuade people. Once, Benjamin Franklin heard him speak. When Whitefield appealed for money, Franklin resolved that he would give him none. As the appeal continued, he decided he would give him his pennies. But Whitefield's oratory was so pursuasive that next Franklin thought he should give him silver coins. By the time the collection plate was passed, however, Franklin was so moved that he contributed all he had in his pockets, even the gold coins. . .

"A portion of Ebenezer Porter's inscribed memorial to Whitefield includes these words, 'Bold, fervent, pungent, and popular in his eloquence, no other uninspired man ever preached to so large assemblies or enforced the simple truths of the gospel by motives so persuasive and awful, and with an influence so powerful on the hearts of his hearers'." (Pulpit Giants, Donald Demaray, p. 161,164)

The power to persuade through words, both in speech and in writing, is a mighty weapon for both God and Satan. Who can tell how far-reaching will be the influence of even one man's words!

"Who among his neighbors at Down--in rural Kent, only sixteen miles from London Bridge--knew that Charles Darwin would shake the world? Even to his own gardener he seemed half-mad at times, watching worms for forty years and ready, it was said, to give credence to any foolish idea that was put to him. . . So worldly! So foolish! And yet his work was so world-transforming too! Who of those who saw the bearded figure of Karl Marx day after day in the library of the British Museum could have guessed that he would stamp his thought upon an age. . .?" (Daily Readings, William Sangster, p. 63)

"O God, divinely empower my words in order that they may be your weapon to destroy worldly arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God. Use my words to take every thought captive to obey Christ." (II Corinthians 10:4-5)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will jealously guard my eye-gate and my ear-gate, lest an enemy intrude and destroy the fortress of my inner life!

I Corinthians 10:31-11:1

WHAT YOU ARE 'SPEAKS' SO LOUDLY!

The influence of character is also immense! Pope John Paul I served as Pope for only a month before he died. He was a man who will be remembered, not for his great accomplishments, but for his great character; not for what he did, but for what he was! His life and character influenced a large portion of the world--inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church!

Someone said, "What you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you say". Pious words not backed by a godly life are empty!

In the church of my childhood there was a handful of godly older folks who deeply influenced me. I watched their lives carefully. Their loving words were backed by loving lies! Among those godly people in that small, white-framed church was my godly grandmother. She influenced me to become a Christian. During a period of deep spiritual struggle one time, I was walking alone outside. Tears were streaming from my face. I fell on my knees, and I declared to God that if I ever got 'religion' that I wanted the kind that my grandmother enjoyed! I was attracted to Christ because of her godly character! Most people come to Christ because of a powerful godly influence.

In one of his books, William Barclay recounts a parable by Laura Richards. It goes like this: "A man sat by the door of his house smoking his pipe, and his neighbor sat beside him and tempted him. 'You are poor', said the neighbor, 'and you are out of work and here is a way of bettering yourself. It will be an easy job and it will bring in money, and it is no more dishonest than things that are done every day by respectable people. You will be a fool to throw away such a chance as this. Come with me and we will settle the matter at once.' And the man listened. Just then his young wife came to the door of the cottage and she had her baby in her arms. 'He is fretful and I must hang out the clothes to dry.' The man took the baby and held him on his knees. And as he held him, the child looked up, and the eyes of the the child spoke: 'I am flesh or your flesh', said the child's eyes. 'I am soul of your soul. Where you lead I shall follow. Lead the way, father. My feet come after yours.' Then said the man to his neighbor: 'Go, and come here no more'."

"It would be better for that man to have a millstone hung around his neck and be thrown into the sea, than that he should trip up one of these little ones." (Luke 17:2, Phillips)

"O God, little eyes are constantly watching me. Little feet are closely following me. Little ears are carefully listening to me. I am the best Christian someone knows! Help me never to 'trip up one of these little ones'!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To be godly enough to say--'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ'. (I Corinthians 11:1)

II Corinthians 7:1-4

A 'POINTER' AT THE CROSSROADS OF LIFE!

Notes William Barclay, "There is only one thing which is worse than sinning oneself, and that is teaching another to sin. It is one of the grim truths of life that someone must always present another person with his first temptation, must give him the first push into sin, and it is a terrible thing to introduce a younger or a weaker brother to the wrong thing. Someone tells of an old man who in his death-bed seemed worried and distressed by something. When asked what was the matter he said that, when he was a boy, he and some companions had been playing at a cross-roads in the middle of a common. There was a signpost there and it was loose in its socket. They turned it round so that its arms were facing in the wrong directions. And the old man said, 'I cannot stop wondering how many people were sent on the wrong road by the thing we did that day'. There can be no regret like the regret of having sent another on the wrong way. It was Paul's proud claim that his guidance and his influence had always been towards the best". (Daily Study Bible, Corinthians, William Barclay, p. 244-245)

He stood at the crossroads all alone,
With the sunrise in his face;
He had no fear for the path unkown,
He was set for a manly race.
But the road stretched east, and the road stretched west;
There was no one to tell him which way was the best;
So my chum turned wrong and went down, down, down,
Till he lost the race and the victor's crown,
And fell at last in an ugly snare,
Because no one stood at the crossroads there.

Another chum on another day,
At the selfsame crossroads stood;
He paused a moment to choose the way
That would lead to the greater good.
And the road stretched east, and the road stretched west;
But I was there to show him the best;
So my chum turned right and went on and on,
Till he won the race and the victor's crown;
He came at last to the mansions fair,
Because I stood at the crossroads there.

Since then I have raised a daily prayer,
That I be kept faithfully standing there,
To warn the runners as they come,
And save my own or another's chum.

(Author unknown)

"O God, use me as your 'Pointer' at the crossroads of life! Many there are who may take the low road that leads to destruction unless I am at the crossroads to point them to the high road that leads to life! Give me the joy of pointing many to you!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will be a signpost for righteousness for the many whom I meet today!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'ARE YOU A WEAPON FOR GOD'?

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following vivid statement: "Every person is either a weapon in the hands of God or a weapon in the hands of sin!" (Note I John 3:7-9, 5:11-12) (Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Both God and Satan are helpless unless they get men through whom they may work!")

2. Describe in terms of functions which the church fulfills, illustrations of the truth of the following statement: "We are the Body of Christ, literally hands to do his work, feet to run upon his errands, a voice to speak for him. This is the church's task: to be the body, the hands, the feet, through whom Christ acts."

3. What are some of the members or parts or activities of human personality that both Satan and God are seeking to use as weapons for their respective causes?

4. According to II Corinthians 10:3-5, what is one of the greatest battles today that Christians are involved in? Give illustrations from your own life that demonstrates the reality of this great battle.

5. What evidence is there from the Bible that we will be judged by our words?

6. Tell what is meant by the statement: "We create our world by our words!"

7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "One can be tongue-controlled only if he is first God-controlled." (Note James 3:5-10)

8. What did J. Wesley Ingles mean when he wrote, "Every abstract word is hollow until we pour life into it."

9. What significance does the performance of <u>good works</u> have, in the believer's attempt to be a good 'weapon' in <u>the hands</u> of God? (Note Matthew 5:16, Titus 2:7-8,14)

10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for Christians to do nothing."

11. To what extent should evangelistically-oriented and evangelically--oriented Christians be involved in the social, moral, and political issues of our modern-day? If individuals are converted to Christ, will the social and moral problems in society automatically be healed or is it necessary for Bible-believing Christians to take initiative to work through the political processes to correct some of society's problems? Is not the Gospel of Christ concerned in both individual salvation and social reform, and should not the earnest believer be invovled in realizing both of these goals?

12. What is your response to the following statement from Edward Hale: "I am only one person, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." As a Bible-believing Christian, what do you feel that you can do to help fulfill God's redemptive purpose in His world?

13. Tell why you agree or disagree with John Wesley's following statements: "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. Christianity is essentially a social religion, and. . to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it." (What Scriptural basis can you cite to support your answer?)

14. How do you react to the following statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "To allow the hungry man to remain hungry is blasphemy against God and one's neighbor, for what is nearest to God is precisely the need of one's neighbors."

15. What is the motivation (Scripturally speaking and practically speaking) for believers to be involved in art, science, politics and commerce?

16. Is America basically a 'pagan' nation or a 'Christian' nation? What evidence can you cite to support your conclusion? In light of your answer, how should evangelical Christians respond?

17. What evidence from history can you cite to show that God spared a nation from divine judgement and destruction because of the intercessory prayers and leavening influence of a committed minority of Christians?

18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Love for God is best demonstrated by love for one's fellowmen." (What Scriptural basis can you cite to support your answer?)

19. Tell why you agree or disagree with E. Stanley Jones' statement: "Though living in this kind of a world is costing us pain, it is costing God more."

20. What is the relationship between prayer and compassionate action, as these two activities relate to the believer's response to human needs?

21. Give examples to illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Christians are called to deal with the 'root' of social problems, not simply the 'symptoms' of social problems."

22. Within the teachings of Christianity, which emphasis comes first, the personal or the social?

23. What does it mean for a Christian to be 'living in two worlds'?

24. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "He who is most alive to spiritual visions ought to be most responsive to human needs, for the man with the heavenly vision is seeing Reality from a broader perspective."

25. Today there appear to be too many sincere Christians who are very concerned about heavenly matters, but who are quite uninvolved with earthly problems. Give several reasons why this may be so.

26. What is meant by the statement: "Everyone's guilt is nobody's guilt!"

27. How powerful is your godly influence as a weapon in the hands of God? Do you agree with the following statement: "The life you live will help determine the outcome of your great grandchildren! You are shaping future generations!" (Note Exodus 20:5)

28. Can you illustrate from your own life and experiences the truth of the statement: "The influence of words is immense."

29. Can you share from your own experience the impact and influence that a godly person or persons had on your own life?

30. Is there someone (perhaps a child or a youth) whom you sense is standing at the crossroads of life, that you can influence to take the 'high road' with Christ rather than the 'low road' of sin?