

Conversion and Consummation

By Ron Christian, Writer/Compiler

-Experiencing Transformation Through Christ-
and
-Glorification In Christ-

As author/compiler of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Noriko Schakel , who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript of this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many readers.

With Gratitude,
Ron Christian

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Part I

Experiencing Transformation Through Christ

(Compilation of miscellaneous articles
– both short and longer –
written by several authors,
revealing the various dimensions of God's Great Plan of Salvation.)

**APPRECIATING GOD'S AMAZING "PROGRESSIVE
REVELATION"**

BY RON CHRISTIAN

TRUTH WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD GRADUALLY AND PROGRESSIVELY

The knowledge of the Truth of God is communicated through a variety of means – Orderly nature, Individual Conscience, Witness of the Church, and Printed Word of the Bible. Not all men are fortunate enough to have available to them all of these forms of Revelation.

“The Word of God is so wonderful that we tend to forget that there are other ways that God uses so that He is not left without witness. It is a tragedy never to have heard the gospel message, but it is a worse tragedy to have sinned against the light one has. Since no one is completely without light, no one can sin with innocence. And one who has great light may be less obedient than one with little light. Light is a matter of degrees in God’s world. And He will judge all men according to how they respond to the light that is available to them.” (Wilber Dayton, *Aldersgate Series, Romans*, pp. 37, 38)

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.

These truths help provide the answer to those who wonder what standard of judgment 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’ – or to the multitudes of folks who have never once heard a clear and simple presentation of the Gospel ‘plan of salvation’.

In an attempt to give ‘honest’ answers to the above-stated concerns regarding the ‘opportunities and destiny of the unevangelized’ (i.e., an answer that ‘satisfies’ a person’s ‘inherent sense of justice’, as well as an answer that is Biblically-supportable), I found that a discussion with ‘seekers’ about the concept of ‘progressive revelation’ was helpful. The light of God’s revelation (regarding His nature and His ‘plan of salvation’ for mankind) did not come quickly or easily, but rather slowly and gradually. John 1:9 declares: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”

Jesus, the Incarnate One, is the true or complete light of God, in contrast to other lesser and incomplete lights previously given to mankind before Jesus’ coming. These other lights were imperfect, incomplete, and transitory. Jesus is the true light because He is God’s perfect, complete, and eternal light. He is like the noonday sun in contrast to the reflected light of the midnight moon.

Reflected lights from God were shone upon the earth to mankind before the coming of

Jesus. These reflected lights revealed the reality of God partially and imperfectly. The reflected lights cast shadows upon the nature and the person of God, even though it is true that they did reflect something of the truth of God's nature.

What were some of these imperfect and partial 'lights'? The light of NATURE was one of those imperfect lights. Psalms 19:1 tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Much can be learned about the character of God through Nature, but God's revelation through Nature is incomplete and imperfect, compared to His revelation of Himself through His Son. We can see the POWER of God in the thunder and lightning and earthquakes and tornadoes. We can see the ORDER of God in the predictable seasons of each year, in the ebb and flow of the tides, in the unfailing courses of the stars. But, seeing God through Nature alone gives one a picture of God as a Being who is orderly and powerful, but one who may not be LOVING or PERSONAL.

The light of God was imperfectly and partially reflected among men in God's providential activities in HISTORICAL EVENTS. Indeed, the God of Israel is seen as the 'God Who Acts'. The greatest event in history, as far as the Israelites were concerned, was God's miraculous deliverance of the enslaved Israelites from Egyptian bondage, climaxed with God's miraculous parting of the Red Sea! But the light of God revealed to mankind through historical events is still partial and incomplete and imperfect – like a reflection of light from the moon rather than the bright shining of the sun. Why? Because historical events can sometimes be misinterpreted and understood differently from what God intended them to be interpreted. The Jews themselves, as a nation, fell into this trap! Seeing God miraculously deliver them from Egyptian bondage with the result of God drowning the pursuing Egyptian soldiers in the Red Sea, the Israelites naturally concluded that God hated the Egyptians (and indeed, hated all other nations apart from the Jewish people). National pride became Jewish exclusivism. The Jews felt that all other races of people were inferior and even despicable! They concluded, from observation of God's miraculous intervention in history, that God loved the Jews and hated everyone else, that God was obligated to protect Israel and to fight Israel's battles, regardless of Israel's 'corrupt' moral condition! The prophets were raised up to remind Israel, that, in spite of God's wonderful promises of deliverance which were given in the Mosaic Law, and in spite of God's wonderful providential guidance of Israel throughout history, God was not UNCONDITIONALLY committed to helping Israel regardless of Israel's disobedience to God's commandments (which were just as much a part of the Law as were the promises).

Thus, the light of God as revealed in Nature, as revealed in the Old Testament Mosaic Law, and as revealed in God's providential guidance through Historical Events, were all incomplete, partial, and imperfect revelations of God's nature.

The light of God, as revealed through the great writings of the HEBREW PROPHETS was also another great revelation of God, but the light of this revelation (as great as it was) was still only a partial, imperfect, and incomplete revelation. The greatest writings of the greatest prophets were only preparatory revelations of the greatest revelation of all – the revelation of God through His Son – Jesus Christ!

If it is true that the writings of the Old Testament prophets were only imperfect reflections of the perfect revelation of Jesus, how much more true is it to say that the writings and teachings of the leaders of other religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism, and even the monotheism of the Islam religion, are very incomplete and imperfect! We are not, by saying these things about other ‘world religions’, saying that there is no truth found in other religions, either before or after the coming of Jesus – the Incarnate Son of God. We are saying that, at best, the light of truth found in other world religions is very imperfect and incomplete, and often very distorted because of the mixture of some truths with so much falsehood that is found in any religious system apart from Christ and Christianity (as taught in the New Testament)!

Even the light of God, revealed through the life and preaching of John the Baptist, was not the perfect or complete light of God. John was rightly considered a great prophet, apparently the greatest of all the prophets (if we properly understand the significance of Jesus’ words regarding John the Baptist). Many followed John the Baptist, and some of his followers even entertained exaggerated ideas about John. As great as this man was – the cousin of the Son of God – the Gospel writer makes it clear that John the Baptist was not ‘that light’. “There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.” (John 1:6-8) It is like saying, “John is the moon. The moon wonderfully witnesses to the fact that there is a sun which is reflecting its light upon the darkened earth through the moon. The moon is a witness to the greater light of the sun. Without the sun, there would be no moon. The sun is infinitely bigger and greater than the moon. The moon has no inherent light of its own. It only exists to reflect the light of the sun upon the darkened world. The sun which brightly shines in the noonday sky no longer needs the moon. Jesus (the sun) must increase; I (the moon) must decrease!”

The light – this light of God - “was coming into the world.” (John 1:9) Gradually and progressively throughout history, the light of God’s self-revelation was coming into the world. This speaks of PROCESS and PROGRESS. “From the beginning the divine light has shone. Always it was coming into the world.” (William Temple, *Readings In St. John’s Gospel*, pg.9)

We have already noted that God revealed Himself gradually and incompletely and imperfectly through the order of nature, through the events of history, through the writings of Moses' Law, through the prophetic words of the great Hebrew prophets, and more brightly through the powerful preaching of John the Baptist, who was sent as a witness to testify concerning the perfect Light – Jesus Christ. “FROM THE FIRST GOD WAS (SO TO SPEAK) ON HIS WAY TO THE WORLD, ADVANCING TOWARDS THE INCARNATION BY PREPARATORY REVELATIONS. He came in type and prophecy and judgment.” (Westcott's commentary on the Gospel of John; pg. 7)

The writer of the Hebrews wrote, “*Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets telling them LITTLE BY LITTLE about his plans. But now in these days he has spoken to us through his Son to whom he has given everything.*” (Hebrews 1:1-2 *Living Bible*)

This true light of God which was gradually coming into the world “gives light to every man.” (John 1:9) “No man is wholly destitute of the illumination of ‘the Light’. In nature, and life, and conscience it makes itself felt in various degrees to all.” (Westcott; Ibid; pg.7)

“Always it was coming into the world; always it enlightened every man alive in his reason and conscience. Every check on animal lust felt by the primitive savage, every stimulation to a nobler life, is God self-revealed within his soul...SO IT MAY BE TRULY SAID THAT THE CONSCIENCE OF THE HEATHEN MAN IS THE VOICE OF CHRIST WITHIN HIM – though muffled by his ignorance. ALL THAT IS NOBLE IN THE NON-CHRISTIAN SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT, OR CONDUCT, OR WORSHIP IS THE WORK OF CHRIST UPON THEM AND WITHIN THEM. By the Word of God – that is to say, by Jesus Christ – Isaiah, and Plato, and Zoroaster, and Buddha, and Confucius conceived and uttered such truths as they declared. THERE IS ONLY ONE DIVINE LIGHT; AND EVERY MAN IN HIS MEASURE IS ENLIGHTENED BY IT.” (William Temple, *Readings In St. John's Gospel*, by; pg. 9)

There is only one light – God's light- but God's light was revealed gradually throughout history in various ways and in various degrees. Christ is the eternal Light of God – the Light which was revealed partially in the wonders of nature, in the writings of the prophets, in the aspirations of the heathen, in the great ethical insights of the non-Christian systems of thought, in the enlightened conscience of seeking minds, in the loving responses of misguided heathen.

There have been many heathen people throughout history who served the living God, even though they never heard of the name of Jesus! Christ, the Light of God, has been manifesting Himself in the hearts of all men, in all generations, under all circumstances.

Many have been obedient to the Light of God which has come to them, in various manners, and in differing degrees of 'brightness' and 'clarity'. Yes, many in history (even many so-called 'heathen') have been obedient to the Light, even though they had never heard of Jesus' earthly existence and never new anything about the 'splendor of God's Light as revealed in the Incarnation'. There have been many American Indians or black men in the dark jungles of Africa who have followed the Light of God (inwardly revealed to them), i.e., Jesus Christ, without knowing of the earthly existence of Jesus. In following their 'inner light', they were following Christ without even realizing it! Many have built shrines to the unknown God and have faithfully served that 'unknown God', never realizing that whom they were serving sincerely, though ignorantly, was none other than the Living Christ who manifested the Light of God concretely on earth during his 33 years of earthly existence in Palestine! "The Light which strives to reach every man is not some vague general light, but the present continuation of the Light which shone in Jesus as He called men by the Sea of Galilee." (*The People Called Quakers*; Elton Trueblood; pg.70) This Light reaches out toward every man, whether he is under the 'umbrella of Christian teaching', or under the domination of Communism, or entangled in the false teachings of a non-Christian religion.

- By Ron Christian -



HOW CAN THE ALTOGETHER "UNIQUE" PERSON OF JESUS BE DESCRIBED (IN THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT)?

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:1-3)

"For in Christ there is all of God in a human body"! (Colossians 2:9, Living Bible)

A. "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD"! (John 1:1)

Jesus existed before the created order of the Universe. Before time existed, Jesus was with God in eternity. Jesus is not confined to time, space, or matter, but was the agent of God's creation of these elements. The first essential truth about Jesus is that He existed from all eternity.

"Before the mountains were born you brought forth the earth and the world everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalms 90:2)

B. "THE WORD WAS WITH GOD"! (John 1:1)

John secondly tells us that Jesus, the Word, was always with God. Jesus always experienced the most intimate fellowship with God. No secrets existed between God and Jesus. No other is able to tell us as much about God as Jesus is. If we want to know

about God, we must listen to what Jesus has to say about God. Jesus is our primary source for knowledge about the eternal God of the Universe. Jesus' knowledge of God supersedes all of the accumulated philosophies of the ancient or modern world, and is greater than the greatest insights of the prophets. Jesus came from God, and knows God personally. In Him is the culmination of all revelation.

C. "THE WORD WAS GOD"! (John 1:1)

John thirdly says that the Word was God. John, however, did not mean that Jesus was identical with God. What did he mean? When the Greeks used a noun, they almost always used the definite article with the noun. Instead of saying 'God' they would usually say 'the God'. When John wrote "the Word was God", he does not have an article in front of the word 'God'. When there is no definite article with the noun, the noun becomes more like an adjective, describing the character or the quality of the person. Therefore, when John said, "The Word was God", he meant that Jesus possessed the same divine qualities and same character that God Himself possessed. Jesus is identical to God in nature, character, and qualities, but not identical to God in person.

Therefore, although Jesus is a separate person, He is equal to God the Father in essence and being and divine qualities. We actually see what God is like when we look at Jesus, for Jesus was also divine.

-By Ron Christian-



"THERE IS 'WONDER-WORKING POWER' IN THE BLOOD OF JESUS!"

This broken-hearted sinner asks, not for 'justice' (i.e., to be treated as he deserves to be treated – condemnation), but he asks for 'mercy' (i.e., to be treated in a way that he does not deserve to be treated)!

What the sinner most needs is what the God of mercy is most ready to give – Forgiveness! Reconciliation with the Father, all because of the atoning and the justifying blood of the Son of God! "The blood, the blood. O hallelujah, it cleanses me!"

If there is true repentance and if there is genuine faith in Christ, God is able and He is 'glad' to take a very sinful man and to transform him into a very good man – a Godly man, a man who will be impassioned to follow Jesus Christ the remainder of his days!

'Tears' are flowing – that is, 'tears of joy and exaltation' that the lost ones are now found, that the bound ones are now free, that the despairing ones are now the hopeful

ones, that the selfish ones are now the self-giving ones, that the grasping ones are now the giving ones, that the filthy-minded ones are now the pure-minded ones, that the broken ones are now the healed ones!

The greatest evidence that Christianity is authentic and that Christianity is a ‘powerful force’ in the world is this: A wicked man can become a righteous man, a bad man can become a good man. “I once was lost, but now I am found; I once was blind, but now I see.”

The total transformation of a wretched man into a thoughtful, generous, tender-hearted, kind, long-suffering, patient, self-controlled and loving man! There is no power anywhere that can turn a wicked man into a godly man, a selfish man into a caring man – except the power of Jesus Christ! “Christ receives sinful men, even me with all my sin!”

-By Ron Christian-



IS IT WORTH YOUR GIVING MUCH TIME IN YOUR EARNEST ‘QUEST’ TO DISCOVER THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD?

Why not give this quest for the awareness of the Divine an unhurried trial? Is there, in all this universe, anything more important to you than to know God? Can you expect to know him in cramped moments? Are you willing to meet his conditions when he says, “Ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart”?

Give time to it, plenty of time. Go into the silence for long periods but also into the company of those who claim to know him. Put yourself to school in the Bible. Be found regularly at worship. Hold in your mind the picture of God revealed by Jesus and just think and think on him.

Don’t lose heart if the hours go by and nothing seems to come. The hours are not being wasted. Persist! Faith will grow in you. The glad day will come when you also will say, “I know him whom I have believed.”

(William Sangster, *Can I know God?*, pp. 23-24)



TO ALL “REPENTANT SINNERS” THE STUPENDOUS (UNBELIEVABLE)

GIFT OF GOD IS “ETERNAL LIFE” (A NEW QUALITY OF LIFE)!

This God offers a free gift to the sinning man. That is to say, He offers a gift of His own will, a gift which is the result of His own operation, of His own passion. Moreover, He offers this gift as a free gift without any condition as to character in the person who is to receive it, without any pledge on the part of that person as to the future. God bestows His gift freely upon all such as will receive it. God does not ask that men bring a certificate of character with them. Neither does He ask us to make a pledge and a promise that we will always be good. He asks no such pledge; He asks no such promise. That is the grace of God. I speak in soberness of truth and under emotion when I say I would to God I knew just how to say “grace” as it ought to be said! Out of the very grace of His heart which in operation has involved His own unutterable pain and sorrow, God offers a free gift, and He offers it to a man without any promise whatsoever as to that man’s character and without any pledge as to the future.

What, then, is this gift? It is the gift of life, age-abiding life. Our word “eternal”, great and wonderful as it is, connotes in our thinking one element only, the element of quantity. The Greek word so translated has in it more than the element of quantity, though that is included; it rather suggests a quality which ensures the quantity. Literally, it is age-abiding life.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit, The Wages of Sin – The Gift of God*, Book 9, pg.346)



EXPERIENCING THE GRACE OF GOD!

It is true that ‘humans’ are ‘unique creatures’, because humans are ‘creatures’ that are made in the ‘Image of God’. We are ‘fallen creatures’, affected by sin in every part of our lives. Our ‘minds’ are beclouded, thus, we fail accurately to discern the ‘reality’ of our world!

Our ‘emotions’ are affected, thus, we tend to desire what we ought not, and we fail to desire what we ought to desire! Our ‘will’ is weakened, thus, we are unable to choose the ‘right’ and to refuse the ‘wrong’!

Even though these persons (unbelievers) feel the devastating effects of sin in their lives, they are, nevertheless, the objects of God’s love, and they are the recipients of God’s grace.

Humans are the recipients of God's 'general revelation'. To the sincere unbeliever, (i.e., to the one who is in a 'spiritual quest') God imparts a certain degree of His grace! God's grace (His enabling power) is sufficient for the sinner to 'think some objective thoughts', to 'feel some genuine compassion', and to 'make some unselfish decisions'!

This type of grace towards sinners (the grace that touches the mind, and the emotions, and the will of a sinner) – this grace has a special 'name'!

It is called 'prevenient grace – the 'preliminary grace' of God that seeks to prepare a sinner for the powerful 'saving grace' of God!

God initiates His call of love to the sinner, to prepare the mind and the heart (emotions) and the will of the sinner, so that the sinner will have the 'ability' to respond to God's offer of salvation!

The kindness of God 'touches' the mind and the heart and the will of the sinner, and God seeks to persuade the sinner to make a major change in his life. God (Holy Spirit) offers the gift of 'repentance' and the gift of 'saving faith', and the Spirit (without 'forcing His will') urges the sinner to accept these all-important 'gifts' for the guarantee of salvation! When those 'gifts' are accepted and activated, the recipient (sinner) experiences new life in Christ!

The one who is 'born again' (through repentance and faith) is the one who enjoys new life in Christ! The 'old things' have passed away, and behold, all things have become 'new in Christ'! The mind of the sinner is renewed, the emotions of the sinner are healed, and the will of the sinner is empowered (through personal 'surrender' to follow Christ's will)!

How does this 'divine transformation' change the way a person faces life, and the way a person faces circumstances with its various trials and tragedies? In significant ways that come to a 'surrendered person' – both gradually and spontaneously!

-By Ron Christian-



“DOES GOD CARE FOR ME PERSONALLY?”

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was always concerned with individuals. It is true that He was moved with compassion on the multitudes, but His compassion went beyond the multitudes to the lonely individuals. He saw each person as unique and worthy.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Surrounded by a crowd, Jesus healed the woman who had been sick for twelve years with an incurable disease.

As the crowds thronged Him, Jesus saw Zacchaeus, and he became the object of Jesus' special attention and love within the privacy of Zacchaeus' home.

The healing of the blind man near Jericho vividly shows Christ's personal compassion!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Loving Heavenly Father, my mind cannot comprehend, but my heart thrills, with the reality that You love each person in the world as if they were the only one person in the world to love! Such personal love! Apparently (if I properly understand Scripture) there is nothing that delights You more than to love humans, and to have humans love You in return! You love me (and everyone else) with an everlasting love! O God, it is Your unconditional love for me (and for everyone else) that is the motivation for my love for You! Of course, Your love is infinite, while my love is finite (and at best fallible). But, You 'love me into loving You' – You shed abroad Your love into my heart, giving me true dignity and worth and confidence, and consequent humility and gratitude! I am so grateful that I am not 'lost in the crowd', but that I am an object of Your special love! You are so powerful that You can rule the vast Universe, and yet so personal that You can care for me personally! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Always remember that God loves you, and knows you, and He has a special place for you in His eternal kingdom! You must never have an 'inferiority complex' or a 'superiority complex' – for you are neither a 'worm' nor a 'wonder'! You are a special creation, redeemed by Christ, called to love all around you, and empowered to use your special gift to serve needy ones!

-By Ron Christian-



WE WANT SALVATION FROM OUR SINS AND WE YEARN FOR ETERNAL LIFE.

We want salvation from our sins and we yearn for eternal life. We think that we can earn these things. Then we find out, as Paul did, that we cannot pile up enough good marks and merits to earn anything from God. No, salvation "is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and....not as a result of works.

-By Catherine Marshall-

IS 'SIN' REALLY THAT HORRIBLE?

Even though we (modern-day) persons (sinners) were not actually present when Jesus was crucified, the sins that put Jesus on the Cross then, are the same sins that dwell in our own hearts. So, in that sense, your sins and my sins helped 'crucify' Jesus Christ! We, along with the ancient Jews and the Romans who actually crucified Jesus, are 'guilty' of killing the most pure and innocent person in the universe!

My 'jealousy' and my 'bitterness', along with the 'jealousy' and the 'bitterness' of the ancient ones, helped 'crucify' the Lord of Life, the King of kings, the innocent rabbi from Galilee! When we look (honestly) at the Cross, we should 'see' the sheer 'terror' and the great horror of Sin. It was Sin that crucified Jesus Christ – your sin and my sin, and the sin for every human who has ever lived!

-By Ron Christian-

O THE DEEP, DEEP LOVE OF JESUS

"How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." Ephesians 3:17-18)



S. Trevor Francis (1834-1925)

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!

Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from shore to shore!
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!
How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them all His own;
How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!
O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heaven of heavens to me;
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!

(Words: S. Trevor Francis, 1875)



IT IS GOD'S DESIRE THAT ALL PERSONS REPENT AND GO TO HEAVEN!

Why should I briefly 'outline' these 'statements of truth' (basic doctrines of Christian conviction)? Simply to 'declare' that God has made His intention abundantly 'clear' and God has openly offered His 'gifts' to everyone. No one has any 'excuse' to be 'in the dark' regarding the 'will' of God for the human race.

All persons (sinners) can be saved! None need perish! Where sin abounds, grace super-abounds! Whosoever will may be saved! What more can Jesus (who gave His total 'self' to save mankind), I say, what more can Jesus do, other than what He has already done?

If a person (sinner) is lost eternally (in hell), it will not be the fault of the triune God! If someone decides to exercise his 'will' (choice) negatively, in rejection of the 'greatest offer in the universe', he will go to 'hell' where he will have all of eternity to reflect on his 'horrible decision' (to reject the 'Lover of his soul')!

Greater tragedy there cannot be, than the tragedy of saying 'No' to the Savior of the World! It is a 'terrifying description' – a 'description' that should 'capture' the attention of every human being! I am sure that Jesus spoke these words, with deep sorrow in His heart, and maybe even with 'quivering lips'.

Jesus said that in 'hell', the lost ones are 'weeping and wailing, and gnashing their

teeth’! The ‘weeping’ in hell is so horrible that it cannot even be ‘compared’ with the weeping that is experienced anywhere here on earth! The ‘weeping of regrets! The ‘weeping’ of suffering! The ‘weeping’ because of ‘lost opportunities’. The ‘weeping’ because of the realization that there is no chance to be near to the One for whom you are made. The ‘weeping’ because of ‘lostness’ or of ‘loneliness’. The ‘weeping’ because of a barren life, lived on earth.

The weeping because of ‘sheer horror’, or the ‘ugliness’ of the atmosphere of ‘hell’. The weeping because of one’s separation from his loved ones and his friends. The weeping because of the ‘fellow sufferers’ around one, none of whom are capable of offering ‘comfort’ to you.

-By Ron Christian-



WITH THE CROSS, GOD WIPED OUT THE OLD CREATION

With the cross, God wiped out the old creation that was flawed in Eden. The Gospel’s momentous news is not only that Jesus died on that cross, but that you and I and our flawed natures also died with Him.

“Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 2:38

-By Catherine Marshall-



What “Condition” Does God “Demand” To Be Met, In Order For A Sinner To Find New Spiritual Life?

It begins with God. The soul comes to Him, yields to Him, puts itself in relationship with Him, blunderingly, tremblingly, it may be; not necessarily understanding the doctrines of faith, for no man was ever saved by understanding the doctrines of the faith; not necessarily at the moment accepting all evangelical theology, for that is too vast for immediate understanding, but by yielding to God as He has manifested Himself in Christ. There we begin. When we do so, we receive a free gift in which there are qualities of cleansing, of peace, and of pardon; and as we answer its call and its demands and its guidance through the running days and the multiplying years we are brought by it

into the realization of the eternal purpose of God. That is one course open to every soul who knows the gospel.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit, The Wages of Sin – The Gift of God*, Book 9, pp.247-248)



DO ALL HUMAN ACTS AND ATTITUDES OF “SIN” ORIGINATE IN THE “HUMAN HEART” (THE INTENT, DESIRE, WILL)?

Anger is murder in malice and motive. Lust is adultery though it never passes beyond the look of desire. The seat of sin is in the will. Man is judged not by what he does, but by what he wills to do. Intention determines quality. The same words may be a term of affection or a stinging insult. The motive makes all the difference. A blow may be an act of friendly playfulness or a challenge to deadly combat; the heart at the back of the hand settles which it is. There is many a thief who never steals. Lawlessness may stop short of transgression but it is the lawlessness that is sin. Man is not a sinner because he is a transgressor; he is a transgressor because he is a sinner. The sin of lawlessness precedes the act of transgression. Disobedience in act is the effect of which lawlessness is the cause. It is not a question of any one commandment but the disposition of the heart to the Giver of them all.

This definition of sin explains a fact and a passage. The fact is the variation in transgression, and the passage is James 2:10. Sin is the revolt of man against the authority of God; that is the essential fact. Different men carry their revolt into practice by breaking different commandments. The same man rarely if ever, breaks them all. Indeed men are generally very proud of the commandments they keep, and have no sympathy with men who are vicious on lines where they themselves are virtuous. The drunkard will often boast of his chastity, the immoral man is thankful he is not a thief, and the profane swearer flatters himself that he never lies. As a matter of fact none have any room for boasting. That the drunkard is not an adulterer, the immoral man a thief, and the swearer a liar, is simply an accident of temperament and circumstance. When we go astray we turn “*every one to his own way.*” (Isa. 53:6) Given the conditions of desire and opportunity, the man who breaks one commandment would break any one in the Decalogue. The particular point at which we trespass is a matter of small importance; that we should defy God’s boundary at all is the offence. The sliding scale of society is not recognized in the judgments of Heaven. It is the sin at the back of the sins that does the mischief; the sin in desire, intention, and will. Sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is sin, whether it assumes a virtuous or a vicious form. Man is judged not by his acts but by his heart.

(Samuel Chadwick, *Humanity and God*, pp. 28-30)



**IT IS GOD'S ABSOLUTE 'WILL' THAT EVERYONE MAKE HEAVEN HIS
ETERNAL HOME!**

God has a prepared place in heaven for every single human being. God is not willing that anyone should perish but that everyone should repent and be saved! Short of coercion, the Holy Spirit is doing everything in His power to motivate everyone to come to Christ for salvation.

God loves all, Jesus died for all, all are provided with the opportunity to repent and to trust Christ for salvation (because of the 'prevenient grace' that the Spirit offers to everyone). Further, all have the capacity to turn to the 'higher power' (known to most people as the Lord Jesus Christ).

How wide is God's mercy? I believe God's mercy is very 'wide' – wide enough to encompass even the so-called 'heathen' persons in our world! God, in the end of time, will judge all persons fairly (that is, each person will be judged by God, according to the kind of spiritual light and according to the degree of spiritual light that each person has received). God will not condemn a person because of his 'ignorance' (his lack of knowledge regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ).

When a 'heathen' (a person with little spiritual knowledge) stands before God, Jesus will judge him with great understanding and mercy! If a particular heathen has 'walked in all the diminished light' that he had the opportunity to experience (the light of nature and the light of conscience and the light of pagan religions, etc.), then, God in love will gladly receive that heathen into His heavenly kingdom! In heaven, he will learn about Jesus!

In heaven, that heathen will understand (for the first time) the true significance of the name of Jesus, and he will rejoice that it was Jesus alone (Jesus' blood) that gave him entrance into heaven. That 'converted heathen' will spend all eternity learning about the majesty of Jesus (His life and works), and that newly revealed knowledge will cause him to bow his knee in worship of Jesus and to raise his hands in joyful praise for the One whom he unfortunately did not have the privilege of knowing on planet earth!

Calvinism does not embrace the 'universal love' of God. The doctrine of 'predestination' is a direct and blatant denial of God's universal love. Calvinism pictures God as One who hates most of the human race, who denies that the human being has the capacity

(power) to choose his own eternal destiny, who (horror of horrors) actually takes delight when a large portion of the human race goes to hell! God, according to Calvinism, is glorified when the reprobates (those not selected) are punished in hell! Let it be repeated: the kind of ‘God’ who glories in the destruction of a human being (in eternal hell) is the kind of ‘God’ who could be the ‘brother’ of Satan himself! Just as Satan glories (rejoices) when a man goes to ‘hell’, so the God of Calvinism also glories when a man (reprobate) goes to hell! I can only say (as many others would likewise say) that the ‘God’ of Calvinism should be repudiated (rejected and abandoned) by every ‘sane-minded’ person!

-By Ron Christian-



IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE ‘SAVED’ WITHOUT THE DEATH OF CHRIST?

Every person is a sinner, Jesus died for all sinners, every sinner is savable (capable of being saved), Jesus’ blood was shed for the atonement of every sinner (for the forgiveness of every person), the Holy Spirit is able to witness to every repentant person that he/she is a child of God (and that these repentant ones are on their way to heaven). The Holy Spirit is able to constantly apply the ‘blood of Jesus’ to the heart of every believer (to maintain a believer’s ‘walk with Christ’)!

Was Christ’s earthly life and death essential to make possible God’s election of man in Christ? Could not God simply have decreed man’s salvation without Jesus dying on the Cross? No! Even though God wanted to save mankind, God could not have saved sinful humanity without the Holiness of God being honored and without the penalty of sin being paid (the penalty of sin being death).

Christ’s sacrifice (that is, His shed blood) is the answer to God’s holiness being honored, and the justice of God being vindicated! The atoning blood of Jesus was absolutely essential for the salvation of man. In the Bible are found these simple (frank) words: “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sins!”

God loved mankind, God elected all of mankind to be His ‘own’ – before the foundation of the world – but God could only save mankind through the death of Jesus on the Cross. Of course, if Adam and Eve (and the human race that they represented) had not fallen into sin (in the Garden), there would have been no need for the 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity to come to earth, to give His life as a ransom for a fallen race of people! Because of the terrible ‘fall’, of necessity God had to send His Son to earth to provide a ‘ransom’ (atonement and a bloody sacrifice) – a means of rescue from hell – for the sinful human race (God-loved persons)!

What God purposed and what He intended in eternity – namely, the choice (or election) of the human race for salvation and sonship – Christ made possible in time through His death on the cross. Without Christ's death on the cross, providing atonement for sin, the intention of God would never have been realized.

There is no way that any man could have been chosen by God for sonship without the historic work of Christ on the Cross. There is no election (or choice) of man to salvation outside of Christ and His work on the Cross! God's choice of humans for salvation and sonship could only become a reality because of what Christ did on the cross. We are chosen in (or through) the Beloved Christ!

The angels must have been aghast (totally surprised) when Jesus said He would be willing to leave the comfort (glory) of heaven, to travel to a wretched location in the universe called planet earth (a small and insignificant and sin-filled and ignorant and idolatrous world)!

-By Ron Christian-



DID CHRIST'S DEATH MAKE ADEQUATE PROVISION FOR MANKIND'S SALVATION?

I propose to you that God chose the human race corporately to be saved, and that mankind's salvation was made possible through what Christ voluntarily did at the Cross, thus bringing all men into a savable relationship.

In Christ (because of His 'finished work'), God chooses to save all persons, but only those persons who actually (willingly) accept God's choice (to save all) in reality become the 'chosen' ('elect') ones of God!

Objectively, God (because of Christ's 'work') is reconciled to every human being (sinner), but what God has done objectively for the human race, must be personally and subjectively accepted. The Bible exhorts each person (sinner), "Be ye reconciled unto God!" That is to say each person must meet the 'conditions' (repentance and faith) in order that he (a sinner) might find peace with a loving and grace-filled and inviting God!

Potential 'blessings' are made possible to every person – all through the 'finished work' of Christ (death and resurrection). "Come unto me, all ye that labor are heavy laden, and I (Christ) will give you rest!" Those who meet the condition ('come unto Christ') enjoy the benefit ('rest unto your soul')! With every promise to be claimed, there is a condition to be met! God says (in His Word), "If you do this, then I will do that!"

To enter into new life (salvation), there are God-given ‘conditions’ that must be met, if God’s promises are to be fulfilled in our life! Salvation (initially) involves the meeting of certain ‘conditions’ (the exercise of repentance and the exercise of trust/commitment in Christ’s provision for salvation). God cannot repent or believe for the sinner (although the gift of repentance and faith are offered to the sinner, because the sinner independently cannot repent of sins and trust in Christ).

There is no ‘unconditional security’, no irrevocable, no automatic, no certain relationship with God, irrespective of a person’s lifestyle, following his conversion experience. ‘Eternal Life’ is not some sort of ‘deposit’ that God gives a person. Rather, it is the ‘Life of God within a person’, based upon a dynamic relationship of mutual love.

If a person (because of the enticement of sin) draws away from that ‘love relationship’ with God (and if he begins to ‘love’ the worldly attractions instead), then either quickly or gradually the love relationship with God will be severed.

-By Ron Christian-



IS GOD’S LOVE ‘EXCLUSIVE’ OR ‘UNIVERSAL’?

Why would not every person on earth run into the arms of love – unconditional love – of Jesus? Personal and personable love! Love that fills the heart and the mind and the spirit and the body! Love that removes all sin and love that replaces the sin with the dignity of being a child of God! Jesus’ love that prepares a special place for every human being in heaven! A love that enables and that strengthens the humble person as he travels to that heavenly mansion above!

Christianity (New Testament) asserts that God loves all persons, asserts that God (before the foundation of the world) chose to save all persons (through the instrumentality of Jesus’ death and resurrection), asserts that the Spirit awakens all sinners to their need for salvation and convicts all of their sins, asserts that the Spirit witnesses with the repentant person that he is, indeed, a child of God and that heaven awaits for his eventual arrival, asserts that the Spirit develops the nine-fold fruits of Christlikeness gradually within the heart of every believer.

All of these positive affirmations (declarations of truth) should make us all ‘stand on tiptoe with joy’! We ought to experience the highest form of all laughter, the holy laughter of thanksgiving and joy!



‘SYMBOLISM’ IN THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS (MATTHEW 1)

1. First Stage - The first section of the genealogy which is from Abraham to David is the section of Israel's greatness. It represents the first stage in man's history – the stage of man's greatness. As Barclay says, "Man was born for greatness". Man was created in God's own image, and as such was made only for greatness and fellowship. Man had sweet and blessed communion with his Creator and was meant to enjoy His presence forever. Innocence, uprightness, strength, and obedience characterized man's beginning. God communed with man in the coolness of the day. As the crown of God's creation, God gave man superior intelligence and permitted man to subdue the earth. Man's body was strong, his mind was superb, and his spirit was unblemished.

2. Second Stage – The second stage of man's history – the Fall. "Man was born for greatness" but "Man lost his greatness". Man fell from the height of splendor to the depth of despair, from the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion, from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation, from the freedom of innocence to the bondage of guilt, from the strength of health to the weakness of disease, from the glory of life to the corruptness of death, from the richness of an heir to the poorness of an outcast, from the fullness of knowledge to the shamefulness of ignorance. Man is an estranged creature, haunted by loneliness and paralyzed by fear. Man is alienated from God, from his fellowman, and from himself. Man was made for greatness but is wallowing in despair. Man was made for communion, but is plagued by feelings of separation and rejection. Man was made to only enjoy peace, but hears constantly the clamor of disharmony. Man was made for love, but is too often a creature of hate. Man was made to be integrated, but is a bundle of frayed nerves. Man was made for God, but is a rebel in rebellion against God's perfect will. When man rebelled against God's commandments, man died. Man's sensitivity to fellowship became annulled by sin. Man's innocence became blemished by guilt, and his capacity for nobility became shriveled by self-centeredness. Man's nature is corrupted by sin. Every area of man's activity feels the pollution of sin. Man's will is rendered so weak that he is unable to subdue the passions of his flesh. Man's knowledge is so inadequate that he is unable to discover and pursue the pathway which leads to righteousness. Man's nature is warped, twisted, and corrupted.

3. Third Stage – The third section of this genealogy - "Man can regain his greatness". (Barclay's *Matthew*, page 4) Christ is merciful and full of grace, and therefore seeks to

make the undeserving child of hell a child of heaven. Christ came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 10:10). He came to rescue the perishing, to restore the downtrodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul. He came not to condemn, but instead to save (John 1:17). He came to “save his people from their sins”. (Matthew 1:21) The Just One died for unjust, fallen humanity, that He might make man righteous. Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered life, to make a strong character out of a shallow life, to make a confident and radiant life out of a guilt-ridden life. Through Christ man can know greatness again.

-By Ron Christian-



WHY DOES GOD PERMIT HUMAN BEINGS TO CHOOSE ‘EVIL’?

God has allowed a choice between good and evil, and God allows terrible events to happen in our world (like abortion and like the German concentration camps). The sovereign God (though very powerful), nevertheless, allows the exercise of genuine human ‘free will’. The fact that man can choose wrongly, demonstrates the fact that God has a ‘permissive will’ as well as a ‘perfect will’.

God wants all persons to accept Christ and to live a holy life (perfect will), but God permits (allows) persons stubbornly to ‘do their own thing’ (to live a selfish life). Because people choose wrongly when ‘moral alternatives’ are presented to them – this well-known and obvious fact strongly argues for the contention that God has, indeed, a ‘permissive will’ as well as a ‘perfect will’.

All kinds of mental and theological problems develop when one rejects the reality of a ‘permissive will’ in the character of Almighty God! God, indeed, is sovereign, but God (whose power will ultimately and totally be manifest at the ‘end of this age’), this God does not, in the ‘name of His power’, destroy the operation of human ‘free will’, during this ‘present age’ when human testing is necessary to determine the ‘state’ of each person’s final judgment (in eternity).

Through God’s testing (which requires the genuine operation of ‘free will’), each person (depending on the outcome of the ‘testing’) either prepares himself for a wonderful future, or prepares himself for a tragic future! But all of this (man’s testing that prepares him for a glorious future or for a destructive future), is based on the fact that God has a ‘permissive will’ – that is, God allows man the ability to genuinely choose between ‘moral alternatives’!

The God of the New Testament is like a father who loves his prodigal son, and who waits for the return of his son from sin, and, who, after the son's return, welcomes the son back 'home' with open arms!

Or, the true 'God' is like the 'good shepherd' who travels far and wide into the rugged wilderness, to rescue his lost sheep from sure disaster. He leaves the ninety-nine other sheep, and he expresses his undying and personalized love for the one unworthy, straying sheep. How personable is God's love for every lost soul! The 'good shepherd' is 'Good', not cruel (like the God of Calvinism)!

-By Ron Christian-



DOES GOD HAVE ONE 'WILL' OR TWO 'WILLS'

God has a 'perfect will' for mankind (the way of righteousness and holy living), but God also has a 'permissive will' – based on the reality of God's creation of humans with a 'free will'. In other words, God allows man to choose evil rather than to choose good, to choose to kill babies rather than to let them live, to choose to eliminate Jews in a 'gas oven' rather than to honor this race of people!

God permits a person to choose to climb a dangerous mountain and to have an accident, rather than to use 'common sense' and to decide to stay home on a wintry day! God permits a person to choose to refrain from drinking alcohol while driving rather than to become drunk while behind 'the wheel' and hit an innocent bystander along the road! God permits a person to choose to live near the ocean where hurricanes frequently hit, and consequently to have his house washed away by the tidal waves! God permits a person to choose to refuse the wise advice of parents, and instead to choose to marry a 'loser' and end up with a tragic divorce.

Every human being is created with the ability to choose between moral alternatives – to choose the 'right' and to refuse the 'wrong', to choose the 'way of wisdom' and to reject the 'way of folly'! Human beings are not 'robots', controlled by a sovereign 'God' who uses them as 'mere tools' to carry out some kind of mysterious divine purpose!

Rather, human beings are created in the 'image of God', with an inner desire to serve their Creator, but, nevertheless, (because of the 'inward bent to sin') humans also experience an inner desire to become autonomous (self-directed) rather than to become God-directed. Every person experiences an 'inner conflict', an inner 'pull' towards the God who created him, and also, at the same time, an inner 'pull' (because of his 'fallen

nature') to 'move away from God' and to live an independent life!

How a person resolves this 'terrible inner struggle' (listening to the voice of God or listening to the voice of one's self) will determine the 'outcome' of a person's life! There is the voice of the Spirit (convicting and drawing a person to Christ), and there is also the voice of selfishness that draws a person away from God and that seeks (deceptively) to lull and to entice a person to 'taste the carnal fruit of the world' (satisfaction of fleshly appetites)!

-By Ron Christian-



'FIRST ADAM' IS TOTAL LOSS, BUT 'SECOND ADAM' IS TOTAL GAIN!

There is no one more compassionate and there is no one who is more concerned to alleviate pain and to eliminate (sin-caused) disease, than the loving Savior! Jesus spent much of His earthly ministry healing the sick ones and comforting the suffering ones. When one traces the origin of suffering, it certainly does not go back to God. Sin, caused by human disobedience against God's explicit law (in the Garden of Eden), is the cause of all suffering.

Sin and suffering entered the world, not because God wanted this to happen or intended for this to happen. When our 'federal head' (the one who represented the human race) wrongly exercised his 'free will', the consequence for that willful disobedience was severe. Suffering (of all kinds) entered our world, and suffering has been in the world ever since that dreadful day when our 'federal head' (Adam) thought God did not mean what He commanded!

On the very day that our 'federal head' (Adam) partook of the 'forbidden fruit', the soul of mankind died, and the body was no longer strong and heaven-like in appearance and in capabilities! The body became weak and it became subject to disease and to tremendous suffering, of all kinds.

The salvation of our souls (the health of our souls) can become a reality, while we live on this earth, but (as the remaining consequence of the historic fall) we humans will have the challenges of physical (and mental) illness to deal with, all the remaining days of our earthly existence!

The benefits of God's grace always guarantees spiritual healing, and that type of healing (of the spirit) can happen often and soon (depending upon the preparation of the soul for

the entry of the Lord into the human heart). But, while it is proper to do all that we humans can do to alleviate pain and to eliminate diseases, we all know that each of us humans will someday physically die. Dust we are and unto dust we shall return.

The hope of Christianity is that God loves all persons, Christ died for all persons, every person is capable of being forgiven of sins and of enjoying 'rich fellowship' with God and with others, the Comforter will help us as we deal with multiple problems and suffering on this planet, and, wonderfully, God has a place prepared in heaven for every one of us. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all persons should repent, and make heaven someday his eternal home!

-By Ron Christian-



HOW CAN I BE CONFIDENT THAT I AM INCLUDED IN CHRIST?

There are those who appear to be very confident, very self-reliant, and self assured ('towering like a cedar of Lebanon'). Psalms 7:35, Living Bible

These persons seem to manifest no doubts, no fears, and often they are brash, bold, and brazen. They seem to have the 'world by the tail'. They enjoy intimidating others with their confident words and actions. It seems that such people make all the right decisions. They boast that they are self-made persons.

However, such confidence is an illusion! Such confidence is the product of spiritual ignorance – a lack of understanding of God's master plan for history!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

How can you have confidence that you are included in Christ? You can have confidence that you are a Christian and on your way to heaven, if you have responded in faith to the Good News of salvation. It is not enough to hear the Good News. You must also believe the Good News. That is, you must put your faith totally in God whose plan for human salvation has been revealed through Christ. Believing is trusting God, taking God at His word, transferring your trust from yourself to God alone, for God alone has a plan for human salvation.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, I see that my confidence does not originate in the fulfillment of my own self-

centered will, but in the fulfillment of your eternal will – the salvation of mankind through Christ. If one is not saved through Christ, he has no basis for confidence and every reason for doubt and fear. I put my trust alone in the Saving Christ!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

I encourage you to place your faith in God’s provision for your salvation, through Jesus Christ your Savior – the only basis for confidence and assurance in your life, as you live daily and as you face eternity in your future. Remember, what God intended in eternity, and what Christ provided in time (on the Cross), you must personally appropriate by faith (trust) – to enjoy Salvation from all your sins and reconciliation with your blessed Savior! Look to Him alone, and you will live – and experience true and lasting confidence.

-By Ron Christian-



HAVE YOU YET EXPERIENCED “LIFE” – ‘REAL LIFE’, ‘ABUNDANT LIFE’, ‘SUPERNATURAL LIFE’, ‘ETERNAL LIFE’?

JESUS’ COMPASSION

John proclaimed, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of man.” (1:4) Throughout John’s entire Gospel, he refers to Jesus as the source of all life. Jesus claimed that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life (14:6). Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (10:10) Jesus came to give zest and enthusiasm to life. Christ came to forgive man, to release him from condemnation. He came to destroy the alienation that man so deeply feels, by providing friendship and fellowship with man.

Jesus came to eliminate man’s fear and give him confidence and rest: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus came to release man from the captivity of his selfish passions, and to give man new aspirations and a powerful Presence whereby these aspirations can be reached. In short, Jesus came to save man from a life of chaos and to impart physical, mental, and spiritual health. Jesus came to add a new and wonderful dimension to life, with Jesus Himself at the center of all values and relationships.

MAN’S COMMITMENT

Jesus has abundant life to offer to all men. What must a man do to receive this new life? What does it mean to have this new life?

John gives us the answers to these questions. “To all those who did receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God.” (John 1:12)

Man receives this new life by believing in the name of Jesus. What does it mean to believe?

1. To believe in Jesus means to be completely convinced in our mind that Jesus is who He said He was. Jesus said he was divine, and that He had been with God for all eternity before the world was created. After one has investigated the account of Jesus' life and teachings, one must be completely convinced that Jesus was indeed divine, that He was the Son of God. Either Jesus was what He claimed to be (divine), or He was a liar or a lunatic. There are no other alternatives. No one can deny that He was divine, and simply call him a teacher, for a great teacher would not deliberately lie or deceive the person by calling himself something that he is not. Either Jesus was divine or He was a deceiver. However, it is highly unlikely that a fraud, deceiver, or liar would talk about great moral principles and urge people to be good, loving, and kind, if the fraud himself knows that his life will not measure up to the very standards that he himself established. It is unlikely that a liar would openly condemn lying. There is every bit of evidence that Jesus was what he claimed to be – the divine Son of God.
2. To believe in Jesus means to commit one's life to Jesus and to transfer one's complete loyalty to Him. (Examples: person saved by lifeguard; baby rests complete weight on mother's breast.) It means having confidence in Jesus and taking Him at His Word. It means having faith in Jesus as the only source of life, whereby our chaotic life may be restored to soundness, wholeness, and health. Such commitment requires an active obedience to the will of God. It means giving up all of one's right to self, and becoming subject to the complete Lordship of Christ.

In John 1:12, 'received' and 'gave' are in the Greek aorist tense, signifying that spiritual adoption is decisive and complete on God's part. However, while spiritual adoption is immediate and complete, the full realization of sonship is gradual and progressive and such sonship is dependent upon continuous exercise of belief in Christ.

What kind of life does Jesus offer man? It is eternal life, and eternal life is not merely duration of existence, but rather a new quality of life, a quality of life that experiences something of the very life of God Himself! (Example: When I offered a 27-year old

alcoholic eternal life, he replied to me, “If eternal life means living forever like the ‘hell’ of my past 27 years, then I don’t want eternal life.” I quickly explained that eternal life is not mere duration of time, but rather a new quality of life).

-By Ron Christian-



IS GOD’S OFFER OF FORGIVENESS FOR ALL OR FOR ONLY A FEW PERSONS?

According to the Bible, God is a God of love. He loves all persons. In spite of man’s ‘fall’ into sin, God wants every person to be ‘saved’ – to enjoy an abundant life on earth and an eternal life hereafter. Because of mankind’s ‘historic fall’, every person is a sinner, but God, through the coming and sacrifice of Christ, has provided a means of salvation for every person.

Every person can enjoy the forgiveness of sin, and experience reconciliation with the Father of love. The Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus into the world, is here to uplift Christ, and to draw all persons to the Living Christ. The Spirit is the Comforter, and as such, the Comforter is in the world to ‘comfort’ everyone who sorrows and everyone who grieves because of great loss in his/her life!

God has a place prepared in heaven for every single person, and the Spirit is seeking (with the cooperation of every person) to prepare every person for his custom-made home in heaven! These statements, in brief summary, reflect the ‘teachings’ of the Bible, regarding the meaning of life, and the essence of God’s love for every lost soul (including every suffering person).

-By Ron Christian-



THE TRAGEDY OF ONE MAN’S SIN (DISOBEDIENCE), IS CONQUERED BY THE TRIUMPH OF THE DIVINE SON’S REDEMPTIVE DEATH!

This, then, is what has happened. Sin made its entry into the world through one man, and through sin, death. The entail of sin and death passed on to the whole human race, and no one could break it for no one was himself free from sin.

Sin, you see, was in the world long before the Law, though I suppose, technically speaking, it was not “sin” where there was no law to define it. Nevertheless death, the consequence of sin, held sway over mankind from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sin was quite unlike Adam’s.

Adam, the first man, corresponds in some degree to the man who was to come. But the gift of God through Christ is a very different matter from the “account rendered” through the sin of Adam. For while as a result of one man’s sin death by natural consequence became the common lot of men, it was by the generosity of God, the free giving of the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, that the love of God overflowed for the benefit of all men.

Nor is the effect of God’s gift the same as the effect of that one man’s sin. For in the one case one man’s sin brought its inevitable judgment, and the result was condemnation. But, in the other, countless men’s sins are met with the free gift of grace, and the result is justification before God.

For if one man’s offense meant that men should be slaves to death all their lives, it is a far greater thing that through another man, Jesus Christ, men by their acceptance of his more than sufficient grace and righteousness should live all their lives like kings!

We see, then, that as one act of sin exposed the whole race of men to God’s judgment and condemnation, so one act of perfect righteousness presents all men freely acquitted in the sight of God. One man’s disobedience placed all men under the threat of condemnation, but one man’s obedience has the power to present all men righteous before God.

(Romans 5:12-19, Phillip’s Translation)



**ON THE CROSS, CHRIST PURCHASED ‘FORGIVENESS’ FOR ALL
(OBJECTIVELY AND CORPORATELY), AND EACH PERSON MUST ACCEPT
THE ‘GIFT’!**

The ambassadors of the Gospel of grace are sent to proclaim the forgiveness of sin. In the forgiveness of the race every offender is pardoned. Not maybe, but is! Without exception and without condition we are sent to tell every sinner that Jesus Christ has made atonement for the world’s sin, and through Him is preached the forgiveness of sin. That is the Gospel, and it is for sinners. How difficult it is to persuade men that the Good News is not reserved for worthy and respectable people! It is for prodigals, outcasts,

wanderers; for every one that answers the description and title of sinner. The Lord came, not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The Church is sent to the same sort of people, and its one and only message is that God for Christ's sake has forgiven them, and sends us to bring them back to Him. Every barrier is removed, every obligation met, every sin cancelled, every sinner forgiven; the Gospel is a message of a full, free, and universal pardon, on no other conditions than such as are involved in its acceptance through Christ.

Sin brought guilt, grace brings justification; sin separated man from God, grace brings him nigh by the blood of Christ; sin darkened the understanding and defiled the heart, grace brings light and knowledge and purifies the heart; sin disturbed the true order of man's nature and defaced the Divine image within him, grace creates him anew after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness; sin cursed the world, grace restores its peace and beauty; sin brought death, grace brings the gift of life. Wherever sin abounded, grace hath abounded more exceedingly.

There are still the two Adams, and the responsibility of choice still lies with man. We may reject grace and continue in sin, or we may renounce sin and live in grace. Every man elects to be identified with Adam or Christ, to choose sin or grace. No man need continue in sin, for grace has abounded unto complete salvation.

(Samuel Chadwick, *Humanity and God*, pp. 34-36, 37)



**“CONSTITUTIONAL HAPPINESS” WITHIN YOU!
BECAUSE OF YOUR “DIVINELY-WROUGHT PERSONAL
TRANSFORMATION!”**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN

WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THE UNFOLDING MYSTERY OF GOD?

The Mystery, now revealed through the life and the saving mission of Christ, is: God

loves all, and God is willing (through repentance and faith) to forgive all sin, and to save all to the 'uttermost' - to take every person to his/her God-prepared place in Heaven! Aren't these 'facts' enough to make you shout and shout - even to make you bend your head back, and to make you open your mouth widely, and to make your tongue resound with a loud and hearty 'laugh'? Join the blessed 'laughing Son of God', and let the joy of your own salvation become a little greater every day!

Let your 'holy laughter' pierce the atmosphere every time you think about the victory which Christ has decisively won for you! To know that, through your trust in Christ's 'finished work', you are 'saved' from hell and that you are 'saved' for heaven - such a glorious reality ought to make you shout a 'holy shout', and make you 'laugh' with a 'holy laughter' (a laughter something like the 'laughter of Christ').

'Constitutionally happy' - that is God's goal for you - yes, for you! How wonderful it would be if you and if I would leave this earthly life with a 'constitutional happiness' in our heart! To die happy, and then to enter the place of perpetual happiness - that surely should cause us to 'shout and sing and dance and laugh'! A 'holy laughter' is the 'highest form of laughter'!



EXPERIENCING THE 'MIRACLE OF GOD'S TRANSFORMATION!

The beautiful Jesus, who is 'constitutionally happy', because of His successful saving mission for mankind, is the same Jesus who wishes to share His 'happiness' with every lost person. When one (sinner) comes into a right relationship with God, that converted person (who is transformed by grace) increasingly experiences joy and happiness and a sense of well-being (peace).

This newly-converted person receives from the Savior a new inner 'fountain' - a 'fountain of joy'. He feels 'good' about God (who saved him). He feels 'good' about himself (whose inner soul is at peace). He feels 'good' about other persons (whom he now sees as individuals to serve, rather than as individuals to battle).

When a person feels good about God, about himself, and about others, he feels like he is properly aligned with the 'Universe'. He now feels that he is fulfilling the purpose for which he was created! Thus, as he continues to think rightly about God and about himself and about other persons, the joy of the Lord will increasingly be felt in his life!

Someday the joy of the Lord will so greatly increase (as he continues to 'walk with the Lord'), that he will declare that he experiences the joy that is unspeakable and full of

glory! He will find himself resounding with a 'holy laughter'! He can't help but release his inner 'fountain of joy', and one stream of that 'fountain' (among the many streams) is 'laughter'! A 'holy laughter' which is the 'highest form of laughter'!

-By Ron Christian-



FROM WHAT 'SOURCE' ARE YOU SEEKING ANSWERS TO THE ULTIMATE QUESTIONS OF LIFE (ARE YOU AN 'ETERNAL BEING')?

Think of our problems. Who are we? Why are we? What is this human life? What is the *meaning* of it? Where is it leading? That is the dilemma of the humanist. He doesn't really know what to make of this strange human creature.

Nor are we better off if we turn with the same question to a modern philosopher like Bertrand Russell. He has no other answer than this: "You are an eddying speck of dust; a harassed, driven leaf." If you seek from him and his kind the meaning of life, they say "The meaning of life? There is none really. No doubt we could make our brief existence a little better if we tried." Or if you ask for light on what follows when this life is past, they say, with Sir Arthur Keith, "Nothing follows. Life goes out like a guttering candle."

They walk in darkness, and they do not see a great light. So I turn to Jesus and the apostles, my hot, impetuous questions falling from my lips. I will ask them who I am, and what is the meaning of life, and what comes after this, and there is an answer for every question. "You want to know who you are?" says Jesus. "You are dear to God, and dear enough for me to shed my blood." "I can tell you", says Paul. "You were bought with a price." And John breaks in: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

"What is the meaning of life, Lord?" I ask. "What am I in the world for?" Plainly He answers: "To seek, first, God's kingdom and His righteousness." "And Lord, when the fever of this life is over?" . . . He smiles and says: "In my Father's house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you."

There it is. Plain dealing with plain questions. Light in darkness. The fruit of His coming. Is it any wonder that we say from our hearts: "Come, Thou long-expected Jesus..."

(William Sangster, *Westminster Sermons*, vol. ii, pp 4-6)

JESUS' DISPLAYED EARTHLY PERSON IDENTICAL TO GOD'S ETERNAL CHARACTER!

Because Jesus was the epitome of love (without alloy), this means that the eternal God is the epitome (essence) of divine love. All of God's actions are the actions of holy love. Therefore, to characterize God as a wrathful and vindictive and arbitrary God who predestinates some souls to hell (based on His 'hidden purposes') is to picture a God who is totally contrary to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

What Jesus did on earth (love everyone and seek the salvation of everyone- like a 'seeking shepherd' and a 'caring father' for the prodigal son) is the visible revelation of the heart of the eternal Heavenly Father! The universal love of the Son of God (living a sacrificial life and dying an atoning death in the place of all sinners) - these loving acts are the outward and visible acts of the eternal and invisible God!

God has always been a God of love, and that love was visibly demonstrated on Jesus' Cross! In contrast to the 'God' of Calvinism (who supposedly devised a 'plan' before the world's foundation to save some humans and to condemn other humans, according to His mysterious and hidden purposes), I say, in contrast to the Calvinist 'God', the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ also had a plan to cherish the entire human race as His sons and daughters, a very loving plan with no discrimination of any human beings!

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is 'perfect love'! Unlike the 'God' of Calvinism (who hates at least a portion of the human race, whom He has condemned even before the rejected ones come into the world), the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ loves every person and has chosen every person to be a child of God, through the loving sacrifice of Jesus! "For God so loved the world that God gave His only Son" as a sacrifice for a lost world!

Unlike the Calvinistic 'God', the true God (as pictured in the New Testament) loves every person (sinner) without discrimination, without favoritism, without wavering, without diminishing! Repeatedly, in one chapter of the Bible alone (1 John 4), the love of God is announced! "God Is Love" is the central message of Christianity! The 'God' of Christianity (portrayed in the New Testament), is eternal in His love.

Jesus revealed the character of the eternal God, for Jesus was 'God in human form'! The character of Jesus is identical to the character of God Himself. No contradiction in character (intent and deed) between the Son and the Heavenly Father! The love that Jesus demonstrated in His life and in His death is the identical love which was in the heart of God, for all eternity!

-By Ron Christian-



DOES GOD HAVE A 'HAND' OF COMFORTING LOVE, OR OF HARSH CONDEMNATION?

There is something strongly attractive about Jesus Christ! With His arms outstretched, He speaks in kindness: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest!"

God gives to every person the 'gift' of repentance and the 'gift' of saving faith, thus, every person is 'savable' (that is, each person is capable of being saved). God is not willing that any person should perish (go to hell), but that every person should exercise his God-given 'gift' of repentance and faith, and thus to be converted (and to enjoy an abundant life here on earth and an eternal life in heaven eventually). These are the 'foundational facts' regarding the nature of God and the nature of God's saving provision through Jesus Christ.

God's love is universal. His gifts of repentance and faith are universal. God's call to salvation is universal. God's offer of new life in Christ is universal. God's power to transform (change) the nature of lost sinners is universal. God's offered gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every person is universal.

God's promise of eternal life in heaven is universal! No wonder the Christian is 'constitutionally' happy. The knowledge that Jesus, through his death on the cross and because of his glorious resurrection, has won the victory over sin and over death and over hell and over the devil - knowledge of these 'realities' brings joy to one's heart and a holy laughter to one's lips.

When one carefully reads the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Christ, one can discern that Christ was not only a 'man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief', but that Christ was also a man who often expressed joy and hearty laughter. After all, Jesus enjoyed the laughter at wedding parties so much that His critics (unjustly) called him a 'wine bibber'!

-By Ron Christian-

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD!

Someone asked a group of students one time. “Is Christianity an offer or a demand?” Only after considerable thought could the group agree that Christianity is primarily an offer.

So it is with too many today. So many see Christianity as a demand - obligations to do or not to do, ethical creeds to live by, standards to uphold, a philosophy to understand or a way of life for which to strive. Christianity has demands. Christianity has ethics. Christianity has standards. Christianity has philosophical ideas. But Christianity is not morality, ethics, or philosophy. Christianity is not even primarily a religion. Christianity is a relationship - a vital, dynamic love relationship with a Person! The very Person of Christ!

This means that Christianity is an offer - an offer of life and love and power and beauty! Strength for the powerless, purity for the defiled, companionship for the lonely, respect for the despised, comfort for the sorrowing, hope for the despairing, strength for the weak, forgiveness for the guilty! Said Jesus, “I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10) “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4) “He that believeth in him hath everlasting life.” (John 4:14) “He that heareth my word is passed from death unto life.” (John 5:24) “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12) “I am the resurrection and the life.” (John 11:25) “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)

Life - with all its pulsating, exciting, dynamic, personal qualities - is the theme of John’s Gospel. Jesus is the Life. He offers life – real life, eternal life – to all people! That is the most exciting revelation this side of Heaven! Christianity is primarily an offer, not primarily a demand! Christianity is a Gift to be received by willing hearts!

The essential offer of the Gospel of Christ is newness of life. Not ‘betterness’! A new quality, not a greater quantity! God’s own strength, not merely man’s improved strength!

Christianity is able to make a valid claim to make bad men good, and to make weak Christians strong.

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS IS THE FOOD FOR YOUR SOUL!

Jesus said, “I am the living bread, which came down from Heaven! If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51)

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is the essential, without which life could not go on. Real life is based on a relationship with God, and that relationship is only made possible through Christ. “The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ and through Him know God. The restless soul is at rest, the hungry heart is satisfied.” (Barclay’s *John*, pg. 217)

Just as food is assimilated into the body to become a part of the very life of the body, so Christ must be taken into the very inner soul of man to form new life in man. Partaking of the flesh and blood represents symbolically the appropriation of the benefits of the death of Jesus. (The ‘Lord’s Supper’)

What benefits are derived through the death of Jesus?

1. Atonement: Jesus’ blood cleanses the sinner from all unrighteousness.
2. Reconciliation: Jesus destroys the enmity between God and man, and makes possible a new unity and friendship.
3. Peace: No longer does man have fear of a revengeful God, for God’s wrath has been appeased and God’s justice honored, while, at the same time, man’s acceptance by God is made possible.
4. Hope: Jesus’ death on the cross demonstrated God’s love and mercy for man and makes possible the fulfillment of God’s promise of eternal life for mankind. The future for man is as bright as the promises of God.
5. Satisfaction: Hungers for significance, belonging, and security are satisfied. Christ the Bread gives man significance and self-respect, and a sense of worthiness. Christ the Bread gives man a sense of belonging and acceptance and fellowship. Christ, the Bread, gives man a sense of security, peace, and dependability.

So we see some of the great benefits of the death of Jesus - Atonement, Reconciliation, Peace, Hope, Satisfaction of man’s basic needs. When we assimilate Christ into the very soul of our being, we feed on the Bread of Life.

-By Ron Christian-



HAS GOD CHOSEN ME TO GO TO HEAVEN?

Some of your basic questions should be answered! Are you a creature of freedom or a creature of fate? Are you free to determine your own eternal destiny or was your eternal destiny fixed by some divine decree before the foundation of the world?

Did God choose only to save certain human beings or did God choose to save the entire human race?

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

But even though all persons are in a savable relationship, all persons are not automatically in a saved relationship. Christ's atonement makes possible the salvation of all, but only personal faith in Christ makes actual salvation operative. Although Christ died in order to reconcile all, not all are personally reconciled to Christ. God's eternal purpose – universal salvation of humanity – only becomes God's realized purpose as persons personally receive Christ's salvation!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, I am beginning to see that the entire human race is the object of your special love and that you long for all to be saved from sin. Your ‘free gift’ of eternal salvation is now being offered to everyone. You favor the entire human race and you never arbitrarily select to save only some. Thank you for the revelation of your saving purposes for mankind.”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember that God so loved the entire world, that He gave His Son to die (providing a ‘universal atonement’ for the sins of the entire human race)! God is a JUST God, and therefore He is not arbitrary in His specific choice of only some persons to be saved.

God's objective intention is to save all humanity, for He is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all persons truly repent! God's choice of you for Salvation is real and it is Personal, but it is ‘not based’ on Personal favoritism but on Deep love for you!

-By Ron Christian-



**SINNING MAY “APPEAR” TO BE “PLEASANT” (PROFITABLE), BUT THE
“WAGES OF SIN” PAY IMMEDIATELY AND ULTIMATELY!**

Where this sin is committed wages follow as the necessary results of the things we decided to do; the harvest that must come from our own sowing; that which is righteously due to us by reason of our choice; that which must come to us as the result of the false effort we are putting into life.

The wages are described by the one word, death. The only wages that sin ever pays are the wages of death. They are paid immediately and continuously. Do not confuse, I pray you, appearances with facts. Someone may say, "Sin pays more than that. Sin pays some men wonderfully!" Sin does pay some men wonderfully to all appearances, but the gains of sin are the destruction of the sinner, always, and that not ultimately merely, but immediately.

The wages of sin is death spiritually; this first. Eyes that cannot see God, ears that cannot hear His voice, the heart that is insensate to His nearness, the life that is untouched by the movements of His grace; this is to be dead in trespasses and sins, and this eventually will mean death, bodily and mentally as well as spiritually; and at last it will mean eternal death, age-abiding separation from God, the second death. The second death is the ending of the possibility of dying, and that is the ultimate in sin.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *The Wages of Sin - The Gift of God, The Westminster Pulpit*, Book 9, pg. 349)



IF ANY PERSON BE 'IN CHRIST JESUS', HE IS A 'NEW CREATION' (THE OLD LIFE HAS PASSED, AND ALL THINGS ARE BECOME NEW!)

What is it to be born of the Spirit?

God has thrown an impenetrable veil over the beginnings and processes of life. That we live we know, but how we live no man can tell. Life is evident to the consciousness, manifest to the senses, but mysterious in its process. So it is with the life that is born of the Spirit. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," there is the fact; "and thou hearest the voice thereof," there is the evidence of the fact; "but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth," (St. John 3:8) there is the mysterious process of the fact. We know that we have entered into a new life, but how the Spirit of God operates upon the soul, enlightening the mind, renewing the heart, subduing the will, creating a new nature, belongs to the hidden things of God. The fact we know, the results are manifest, the method is a solemn mystery.

By spiritual birth man escapes from his imprisonment within the limitations of the fleshly life, and enters a new kingdom with new interests and activities. The intellectual, emotional, and volitional disqualifications disappear. Born of God he begins to know God and to receive the things of the Spirit. His hatred and dread of God give place to love and fellowship. His affections, desires, and feelings are changed from the things of the flesh to the things of God. His will is emancipated. He finds his freedom in surrender to the will of God, and his delight in obedience to that will. His derangement having ceased, his delusions disappear, and order being restored, his whole life moves with the spontaneity of a second nature in the spiritual kingdom. Born of the Spirit he lives in the Spirit, walks not after the flesh but after the Spirit, prays in the Spirit, lives, moves, and has his being in the realm of the Spirit. The new life fills up the lack of the natural man, endues every faculty with its utmost possibility, secures order and harmony throughout the whole being, and restores life to its true relation with God and the universe. By it man becomes a child of God and a citizen of Heaven, which is as far above the life of the flesh, as the life of man is above that of the brute.

(Samuel Chadwick, *Humanity and God*, pp. 46-48)

**GOD HAS POWER TO TRANSFORM YOU!
- AND YOU!- AND YOU!- AND YOU!**

God has power to turn a 'stumbling block' into a 'stepping stone', to turn a mess into a message, to turn a hard adversity into a tender empathy, to turn a hope into a reality, to turn a tear-stained face into a radiant face, to turn a tragedy into a triumph, to turn a sorrow into a comfort, to turn a broken heart into a healed heart, to turn confusion into understanding, to turn loneliness into companionship, to turn a loss into a gain, to turn humiliation into dignity.

God has the power to turn failure into success, to turn retreat into advancement, to turn depravity into purity, to turn a life of transgression into a life of obedience, to turn moral weakness into moral strength, to turn an evil habit into a righteous habit, to turn moral chaos into moral order, to turn a slave of sin into a slave of righteousness, to turn an irrational mind into a rational mind, to deliver one from a false religion and introduce him to the true religion, to turn one from self-centeredness to a life of Christ-centeredness!

God has power to truly transform any and all human beings! The mission of Christ is to turn each of us around - to make a 180 degree turn in the life of each and every one of us! The call of God is the 'call of repentance' - the call to leave our 'old way of life' and

to embrace the 'new way of life' - the life of righteousness, the life of integrity, the life of justice, the life of holiness, the life of peace, the life of holy love! Our call is the call to become a 'new creature' - a person who is 'centered in Christ's person', rather than a person who is centered in himself.

God has power to change every one of us - to change us initially at the time of 'conversion', and to change us progressively through God's call to pursue and to realize (imperfectly) the holy life, patterned after the holiness of Christ Himself!

Of course, we (believers) are not totally 'changed' (morally and spiritually and intellectually and socially) during the time that we are alive on this terrestrial ball! The Christian life is a life of 'constant growth', becoming more and more like the Christ of the Ages, but of course, never attaining the 'full stature' of Christ.

-By Ron Christian-



NOT MERELY A 'BETTER' PERSON, BUT A DIVINELY TRANSFORMED PERSON!

Change, change, wonderful change! The power of the cross and the power of the resurrection - the wonder-working means by which God alone can change a sinner into a saint!

The kind of change which is demonstrated in the amazing creation of the beautiful butterfly! From an ugly cocoon (the ugliness of the sinful life) to the emergence of the exquisite butterfly (the wonder of divine transformation). We (believers) humbly acknowledge that, if we are serious about following a 'Transforming God', we must be subject to the 'transformations' (changes) which God desires to bring about in our life (as believers)!

Think further of the wonderful changes which God is able to bring in the life of a human being!

God is able to turn revengeful bitterness into loving forgiveness, to turn overly-sensitive reactions into properly-sensitive responses, to turn introspective grief into socially-building projects!

God is able to turn cold isolation into warm fellowship, to turn hurtful deprivation into healthful prosperity, to turn negative criticism into positive affirmation, to turn dark

depression into joyous health, to turn boredom into engrossing work, to turn religious dogmatism into tolerant acceptance!

God is able to turn a worldly-minded person into a biblically-minded person, to turn a foolish person into a wise person, to turn a disappointed person into a gladsome person, to turn a duplicitous person into a transparent person, to change a deceptive person into a guileless person, to change a slanderous person into a charitable person!

God is able to change a double-minded person into a single-minded person, to change a lazy person into an industrious person, to change a half-hearted person into a whole-hearted person, to change a dishonest person into an honest person, to change a trouble-maker into a peace-maker, to change a drunk person into a sober person, to change a self-centered person into an others-oriented person, to change a self-pitying person into a self-giving person!

Transformation! That is what Christianity is all about! God is able to take a ‘bad man’ and turn him into a ‘good man’! “I once was lost, but now I am found. I once was blind, but now I can see!”

-By Ron Christian-



**WHAT MUST YOU DO TO BECOME A “FOLLOWER OF JESUS
CHRIST” (TRUE BELIEVER)?**

BY RON CHRISTIAN

FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?



I Timothy 2:4-6

I Timothy 4:10

II Peter 3:9

John 6:33, 51

Colossians 1:20



EVERYONE!

Romans 5:18

Romans 11:32

II Corinthians 5:19

Titus 2:11

John 7:37, 38

John 3:14-17

Revelation 22:17

Acts 17:30

I John 2:2

FOCUS ON:	ACTIONS ATTEMPTING TO SOLVE HUMAN PROBLEM:	RESULTANT STATE OR RELATIONSHIP
Outward Circumstances	Give up business which has evil companions; abandon evil reading; move into new locality; establish new environment.	Outward Reformation
Personal Habits	No longer Drink or Smoke or Lie, or Curse.	Personal Reformation
Personal Discipline	Exercise, Eat well, Develop the arts, perform good deeds, self-improvement	Self-Improvement Cultivation
Personal SINS	Confession; repentance; Faith in Christ alone; Restitution; Means of Grace	Outward and Partial Transformation (Conversion)
Unsundered	Total Surrender of Self (emotions, Intellect, will) in Faith to Sovereign Lord	Inner Purity and Love and outer Power to Witness. (Increasing conformity to Christ-likeness).

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF SIN?

SHAME! (Genesis 3:7)

HIDING FROM GOD! (Genesis 3:8)

GUILT!

BLAMING OTHERS! (Genesis 3:12-13)

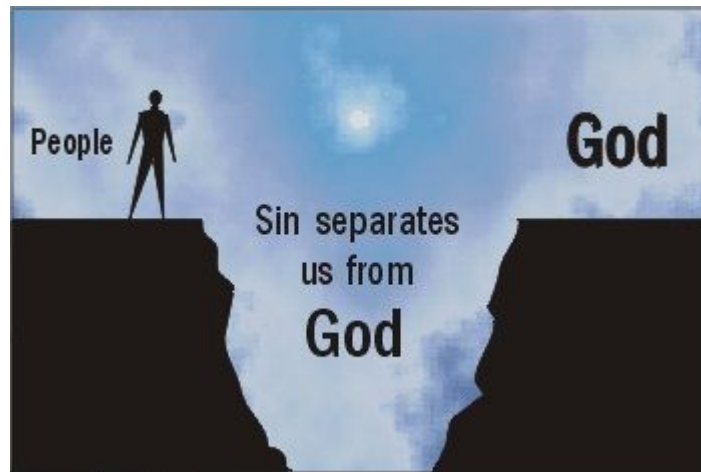
FEAR! (Genesis 3:10)

KNOWLEDGE OF EVIL! (Genesis 3:22)

KNOWLEDGE:

ALIENATION FROM GOD! (Genesis 3:23-24)

SIN IS
Separation From
God
Isaiah 59:2



WHAT CONDITIONS MUST I MEET TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S SALVATION?

AWAKENING – Right Attitude Toward Your Condition (John 16:8-11)

“I am a sinner and in need of a Savior!”

REPENTANCE – Right Attitude Toward Your Sin (Luke 15:11-32)

“I am deeply sorry for my sins and want the direction of my life to change!”

FAITH – Right Attitude Toward Your Savior (Romans 5:1-5 Living Bible)

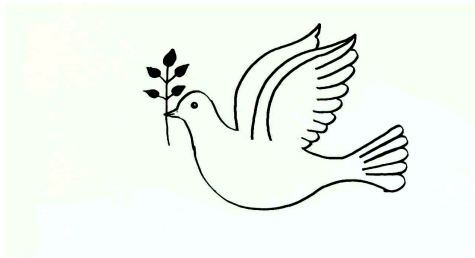
“I trust Christ alone to forgive my sins and to change my life!”

SURRENDER – Right Attitude Toward Your Self (Galatians 2:20, Luke 14:25-33 Living Bible)

“I turn over the full controls of my life (my will, my intellect, my emotions) to Christ, and will allow Christ initially and daily to exercise His Lordship in my life!”

LET'S LOOK AT THESE CONDITIONS MORE CAREFULLY:

AWAKENING



God's Holiness (John 16:8-11)

Man's Sins (John 1:4-9)

- ___ A 'Collision' With God!
- ___ Realizing I Am On The Wrong Road!
- ___ Admitting I Have A Spiritual Need!
- ___ No Longer Rationalizing My Sins!
- ___ Seeing My True Moral Condition!
- ___ Recognizing That I need To Be Saved!

“The Word that God speaks...exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man's heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12-13 Phillips)

REPENTANCE



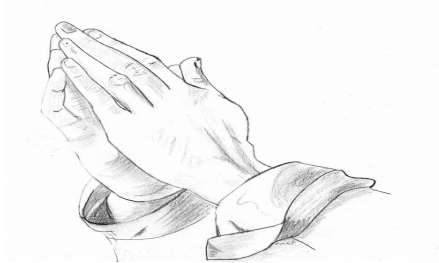
(Luke 18:9-14)

- ___ A Moral 'U-Turn'
- ___ Sincere Sorrow Over My Sins (II Corinthians 7:9, 10)
 - ___ Accepting Responsibility For My Sins
 - ___ Turning My Back On My Old Way Of Life
- ___ Humbly Confessing To God That I Have Been Wrong
- ___ Acknowledging My Personal Moral Bankruptcy

DEFENITION OF REPENTANCE:

A change of mind, from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of forsaking sin,
resulting in a change of direction, from a life of practicing sin to a life of practicing
righteousness.

FAITH



(Romans 4:1-5 Living Bible)

- ___ Turning From Sin To The Savior
- ___ Transfer Of Trust From Myself To The Savior
- ___ Putting Myself Into The Care And Keeping Of The Savior
- ___ An Intellectual Assent To Truth Coupled With A Life Commitment To The Savior
- ___ Putting My 'Weight' Down On The Savior
- ___ Total Commitment Of My Total Self To Christ

DEFINITION OF FAITH:

Entrusting yourself totally to God, like a man sinking in quick sand who ceases to struggle to save himself and instead clasps the saving hand of the man who is standing on the solid ground nearby.

SURRENDER



(Luke 14:25-33 Living Bible)
(Galatians 2:20)

Following Christ:
(Matthew 7:13-14)
(Matthew 16:24)

- ___ Forsake My Own Selfish Ways
- ___ Follow In The Footsteps Of Jesus
- ___ Turn Over The 'Title Deed' Of My Life To Christ
- ___ Put Christ On The Throne Of My Life
- ___ Allow Christ To Use My Talents In His Service
- ___ Learn To Live A Life Of Obedience & Love

“Were the whole realm of nature mine that were a present far too small! Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my ALL!”

THE WAY TO ETERENAL LIFE



3. WEALTH CANNOT BUY IT!
4. WORLDLY PLEASURES (EMOTIONS) CANNOT BRING IT!
5. HUMAN REASON (INTELLECT) CANNOT GRASP IT!
6. HUMAN EFFORT (WILL) CANNOT ACHIEVE IT!

BUT

FAITH ALONE CAN RECEIVE IT!

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

(Everyone Places His Faith In Someone Or Something)

The OBJECT of Your Faith Determines
The VALUE of Your Faith.

CHRIST Alone Is A Trustworthy Object For Your Faith.

(Titus 1:1, 2)

REVIEW:

GOD IS GOOD - “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:3)

MAN IS A SINNER - “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

SINNING HAS SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES - “Evil thoughts lead to evil actions and afterwards to the death penalty from God.” (James 1:5, Living Bible)

ALL HUMAN ATTEMPTS AT SALVATION ARE FUTILE - “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” (Proverbs 14:12)

CHRIST ALONE CAN FORGIVE SINS AND GIVE SALVATION - “Jesus said, ‘I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me.’” (John 14:6)

EACH INDIVIDUAL MUST MEET CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO BE SAVED

- ___ AWAKENING (“I need a Savior!”)
- ___ REPENTANCE (“I turn from my sins!”)
- ___ FAITH (“I place my trust alone in Christ for salvation!”)
- ___ SURRENDER (“I am willing obediently to follow Christ forever!”)

WHEN YOU SINCERELY MEET THESE CONDITIONS IN YOUR HEART CHRIST WILL:

- A. Forgive you (the sins you remember, and the sins you don’t remember!)
- B. Make you God’s Child (John 1:12)
- C. Come into your life and establish fellowship (Revelation 3:20)

LET'S MAKE A COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST NOW!

A PRAYER FOR SALVATION:

"Dear God, I acknowledge that You are altogether trustworthy in your character, and faithful to your promises. Abandoning all hope for salvation in myself, I cast myself helplessly and hopefully in your mighty saving arms! I realize that I am a sinner and in need of a Savior! I acknowledge that You alone can forgive my sins. I am genuinely sorry for my sins, and I desire to change the direction of my life, from a life of embracing sin to a life of forsaking sin! I now confess all my sins to Jesus Christ, the sins I remember and the sins I don't remember. I place my trust in Christ alone for my salvation. Thank You for forgiving my sins as You promised. Thank You for coming into my life. I intend to live for You the rest of my life with You as my Helper! In Jesus' name! Amen!"

IS THERE ANYTHING ABOUT THIS PRAYER YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND?
DOES THIS PRAYER HONESTLY EXPRESS THE DESIRE OF YOUR HEART?

YOU PRAYED:

"I now confess ALL my sins to Jesus Christ."

Was your prayer a sincere prayer?

If so, what has happened to your sins?

How do you know your sins are forgiven?

(Remember! We are saved by FAITH, not by feelings!)

ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE!

I John 5:12 says, "He (Jim, Sue, John, Mary etc.) that HAS (present tense reality) the SON HAS life --- NOW!"

ETERNAL LIFE is not only a Future State of Continuing Existence, but Eternal Life is a PRESENT Quality of NEW LIFE in relationship with CHRIST!

John 10:10

II Corinthians 5:17

___ NEW Attitude
___ NEW Desires
___ NEW Relationships
___ NEW Direction

WHAT MUST I DO NOW THAT I AM SAVED?

FOLLOW CHRIST...One Step at a Time!



1. DAILY CONFESS ALL SINS TO CHRIST – To experience :cleansing (I John 1:9)
2. DAILY READ THE BIBLE – To learn spiritual truths (II Timothy 2:15, Acts 17:11)
3. DAILY PRAY TO THE FATHER – To develop love relationship (Matthew 7:7-11)
4. SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH YOUR FRIENDS – To help fulfill Christ's great commission (Matthew 28:19-20)
5. ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY – To receive encouragement from fellow believers (Hebrews 10:25)
6. LEARN TO PRACTICE TITHING – To honor God and to support His work (Malachi 3:8-10)



WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO THE TWO OPPOSITE ‘PULLS’ WITHIN YOUR INNER BEING?

Both God (the Holy Spirit) and the sinful world seek the allegiance of the soul of a person. These are the two opposite ‘pulls’ – the pull of the Spirit (prevenient grace – or the ‘grace that goes before’ to make it possible for a sinner to be saved) – and the pull of the world (which seeks to exploit the fallen and lustful nature of the unconverted person).

This description of the struggle which every human experiences (as he is in the ‘valley of decision’) describes the reality of the human ‘free will’! God will, through the Spirit, seek to persuade the sinner (without coercion) to ‘come over on the side of righteousness and holiness – through man’s repentance and through the Spirit’s transforming power - but, in the ‘final analysis’, each person must exercise his own power of ‘free will choice’!

The Holy Spirit offers the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to every person (this twofold gift is called ‘prevenient grace’), but every person (sinner) must either accept or reject this twofold gift of the Spirit.

To reject God’s prevenient grace is to ‘shut the door of invitation’ to God’s ‘saving grace’ (the grace that converts one from sin to salvation). There is no ‘movement’ towards God without the initiating overtures (prevenient grace) of God. God’s overtures of Grace are drawing everyone to the ‘path of truth’ (Jesus) and to the ‘path of righteousness’ (which leads straight to heaven)!

All of salvation is the work of God – the grace that initially draws a sinner to God (prevenient grace), the grace that saves a sinner (saving grace), the grace that cleanses a believer (sanctifying grace), the grace that sustains a believer throughout his ‘faith journey’ (keeping grace), the grace that restores a wandering believer (restoring grace), the grace that empowers a believer when he comes to the end of his life (dying grace)!

Neither Satan (nor the evil world) nor God (through the Spirit) can ‘force’ a human being to ‘make up his mind’ (to make a choice) – for ‘good’ or for ‘evil’! The influence from both the ‘evil side’ and the ‘good side’ may be strong, but ultimately, each man must choose whom he will serve – the true God or the Baal (pagan gods)!

And then, with the moral choice, each person must live with the consequences of his choice! The ‘consequences’ of a person’s choice come with the kind of choice that he makes. The original choice God has finally left to each person, but the consequences (good or bad) are ‘attached’ to the original choice. The consequences are part of the

‘package’, tied with the original choice!

-By Ron Christian-



**CHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE - GOD WITH ‘NEW LIFE’,
OR SELFISH SINNING WITH ‘DYING EXISTENCE’!**

I can choose sin if I will. Grace will appeal to me, woo me, warn me, but it will not compel me nor can it. I can sin if I will and take the wages if I will and die if I will. Grace is here. I can yield to grace if I will. Sin will lure me and seek to blind me and traduce the God Who is near, but sin can have no power over me if I will yield to God. Sin cannot compel me. I can yield to God now and receive His gift now and begin to live now. And that, in spite of all the past. I do not want to know the past. I would not have you tell me the past. There is only One ear that ought to hear the confession of sin, and that is the ear of God. Perhaps someone is saying: “The past is indeed with me; the sin of it, the shame of it, the smirch of it, the contamination of it, the horror of it, and the paralysis of it, and my trouble is emphasized by the fact that I once yielded to Christ and walked in power, but I have turned my back upon Him.” Even if that be so, God desires to blot it out like a thick cloud and banish that past. He offers His gift without any reference to the past.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit, The Wages of Sin - The Gift of God*, Book 9, pg. 350)



THE IMPORTANCE AND THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE!

BY RON CHRISTIAN

SUBJECT: THE IMPORTANCE AND THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:1-12

TEXT: “*In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’*” Matthew 3:1

INTRODUCTION: God sent “John the Baptist” as “John the Preparer”, for John prepared the people for Jesus’ coming. John told them: *‘Get ready, the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world is coming.’* He preached repentance and preparation, getting the people ready for the appearance of Christ. Adequate preparation for the coming of Christ into one’s life always involves repentance.

I. WHY IS REPENTANCE SO DIFFICULT TO EXPERIENCE?

- A. Because Man Tends To Blame Others For His Own Wrong.**
- B. Because Man Tends To Rationalize His Behavior.**
- C. Because Man Tends To Procrastinate.**
- D. Because Man Tends To Avoid Anything That Is Unpleasant Or Painful.**
- E. Because Man Tends To Compare Himself Favorably With Other Persons.**
- F. Because Man Finds It Difficult To Humble Himself And Admit That He Is Wrong.**
- G. Because Man Tends To Hold On To The ‘Pleasures Of Sin.’”**

II. WHY IS REPENTANCE SO IMPORTANT?

- A. Because God’s Absolute Requirement For Salvation Is Repentance.**
- B. Because The Purpose For Which Christ Came To Earth, And The Central Message Of The Gospel Is That All Persons Must Repent.**
- C. Because Those Who Don’t Repent Will Perish In Their Sins.**
- D. Because The Kingdom Of God Cannot Come Without Repentance.**
- E. Because Personal And National Healing Can Only Come Through Repentance.**

III. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF GENUINE REPENTANCE?

SUBJECT: THE IMPORTANCE AND THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:1-12

TEXT: *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’”* Matthew 3:1

INTRODUCTION: “In our nation’s capital, Washington, D.C., traffic is often

interrupted by a motorcycle policeman with lights flashing and sirens screaming. Following him are one or two other policemen and finally a large limousine. In the automobile may be the President of the United States or some other important official of the Government. The policemen who speed their motorcycles before the limousine are important. They prepare the way and announce that someone of greater importance is coming.

“When God sent His Son into the world, He sent a sort of a motorcycle escort before the Savior. The escort wasn’t a group of uniformed policemen; it was one man. He did not come with screaming sirens and flashing lights. He came rather quietly. But like the modern motorcycle escort, he had a very important task. He was to say, ‘*The Lord is near!*’” (*The Christian Family Prepares For Advent*, pg. 31)

“Most people call Jesus’ cousin ‘John the Baptist’. That’s not a bad name, but is it the best? Maybe he ought to be called something else, something like ‘John the Preparer’, for that was his most important purpose in life. God sent him to prepare the people for Jesus’ coming. . . John told them: ‘Get ready, the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world is coming.’ . . . He preached repentance and preparation, getting the people ready for the appearance of Christ.” (Ibid. pg. 32)

PROPOSITION: Adequate preparation for the coming of Christ into one’s life always involves repentance.

If repentance is so important as a requirement for proper preparation for Jesus’ coming into our lives, we must ask ourselves three questions: (1) Why is Repentance so difficult to experience? (2) Why is Repentance so important? (3) What is the meaning of genuine Repentance?

1. WHY IS REPENTANCE SO DIFFICULT TO EXPERIENCE?

Repentance is a subject of great relevance to both Christians and non-Christians. Sometimes we Christians tend to think that repentance is only for the sinners, but repentance is also for believers. 1 John 1:9 is addressed to believers as well as to non-believers. It says, “*If we continue to confess our sins, faithful is He and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness.*” (Wuest’s translation)

Judgment and repentance must begin at the household of God – the Church. 1 Peter 4:17, 18 says, “*For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin first among God’s own children. And if even we who are Christians must be judged, what terrible fate awaits those who have never believed in the Lord?*” If the righteous are barely saved, what chance will the godless have? In other words, if even Christians are subject to judgment by God and need to repent, how much more are non-Christians subject to

judgment and in need of repentance? If believers are saved only because they submit to God's judgment which leads to repentance, how can sinners who are oblivious of their need for repentance ever going to stand a chance of being saved?

The narrow gate to heaven is the gate of repentance! Jesus said, *"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* (Matthew 7:13, 14)

Repentance is difficult for several reasons:

A. Because Man Tends To Blame Others For His Own Wrong.

Recall the fact that Adam blamed Eve for his disobedience in the Garden of Eden! How easy it is for us humans to place blame on someone else instead of accepting personal responsibility. Menninger, in his book *"Whatever Became of Sin?"* notes, "My proposal is for the revival or restoration of personal responsibility in all human acts, good and bad. Not total responsibility, but not zero either." (pg. 178)

Repentance is difficult because there is a tendency in human beings to blame others.

At three I had a feeling of
Ambivalence toward my brothers,
And so it follows naturally
I poisoned all my lovers,
But now I'm happy; I have learned
The lesson this has taught;
That everything I do that's wrong
Is someone else's fault. (Ibid. pg. 181)

It is hard to admit that we are wrong. Ego gets in the way of so many. But he who is always right is always wrong – wrong by his very attitude of self-righteousness!

B. Because Man Tends To Rationalize His Behavior.

Excuses, excuses, and more excuses – man becomes an expert at justifying his behavior. I once counseled with a couple. She was raised in the Church and knew the Bible rather well and claimed definitely to be a born-again Christian. Her husband did not claim to be a Christian. She tried to justify a divorce, based upon her claim that he was insensitive to her. He did not want a divorce. He wanted the marriage to work. Recently she got pregnant and was so distraught with this fact, that – on her own and against his

will – she went to a doctor and had an abortion performed! Think of it! A professing Christian, considering divorce against her husband’s wishes and then getting an abortion against his will – and then rationalizing the whole thing on the basis that he was not a Christian and that he could not provide adequate security for her and a future child!

The way of repentance is closed when the way of rationalizing of sin is open.

C. Because Man Tends To Procrastinate.

I dealt with another couple who wanted me to marry them. I talked in detail with them about the importance of knowing Christ. She seemed to deny her need and he seemed to admit his need, but he said (in effect): “Every man’s time comes to consider these matters, but I’m not sure it is my time yet.” Procrastination! *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”* (Hebrews 2:3)

The demons came to offer their suggestions, in turn, to Satan as to how mankind could best be deceived. Said one, “Tell them there is no God!” Satan said, “You fool, that won’t deceive man, for men know there is a God!” Said the second demon, “Tell them there is no hell!” “You fool,” said the Devil, “men know there is a hell!” Finally the third demon spoke up, “Tell them there is PLENTY OF TIME!!” “Yes, Yes” said Satan, “go tell them there is plenty of time. Millions of humans will be deceived!”

The way of repentance is closed when the way of procrastination is taken.

D. Because Man Tends To Avoid Anything That Is Unpleasant Or Painful.

Billy Graham notes that one of the most disturbing things about the last many years is the lack of clear preaching and emphasis on repentance. Because repentance involves honest reflection upon one’s sinful nature, repentance usually is discomforting to one’s self-image. It is easy to concentrate on one’s good, but difficult to face the fact of one’s sinful nature and sinful practices.

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 thank honestly about what sort of people we are.” (J.B. Phillips. *Good News*, pp.3, 4)

Conviction and repentance cause disturbance in people's lives. "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'." (E.S. Jones, *Conversion*, pg. 197)

Years ago, when I was a young pastor, I proposed a daily religious (Christian) program to the program manager of a 'country western' radio station. Said the Program Manager to me, "The men who listen to our radio station are the rough and tough 'cowboys' and they would tend to be greatly disturbed if those kind of programs were heard. It would disrupt their feelings."

The way of repentance is open only if one is willing to experience the pain of conviction because of acknowledged sin in his life!

E. Because Man Tends To Compare Himself Favorably With Other Persons.

How many times have you heard people say, "I am just as good as that person who attends Church all the time!" Perhaps so, but what does that prove?

Remember what Jesus taught in Luke 18:9-14.

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The way of repentance is closed when one takes the way of self-righteousness.

F. Because Man Finds It Difficult To Humble Himself And Admit That He Is Wrong.

Once I tried to lead a man to Christ – a man who was very bitter because of his wife, who was a professing Christian, deserted him and left him to raise a handicapped child. He was touched as I talked to him about Christ's love but then he quickly resumed his

hard posture and said, “If that woman who was once my wife is allowed to go to heaven after what she has done to me, then I don’t want to go to heaven. I would rather go to hell!” I shuddered as he said this, and I tried to appeal to him that God is willing to forgive her and that, after all, even though he claimed to be a good father, surely his sins were also great and that he needed forgiveness also. But his response was a self-righteous stance. Only after I talked for some time about sin and forgiveness, did he make a slip and say, “Well, my sins in other areas of life are probably worse than my wife’s sins.” Hardly realizing what he had just admitted (he opened the subconscious door to all of his own guilt) – he quickly withdrew his statement and said, “What am I saying?”

The way of repentance is opened only when the door of honest confession of personal guilt and sin is opened!

Some people refuse to repent even with a multitude of opportunities and when a mass of evidence for the truth is presented! The Bible says that the Goodness of the Lord is intended to lead a person to repentance. With all the blessings surrounding them, instead of surrendering to God in their attitude, some tend to take credit to themselves. Instead of repenting, they become more proud in their self-reliant attitudes!

Then, if the goodness of God doesn’t lead them to repentance, God allows severity to enter their lives, seeking to get the attention of such proud men. When severity comes, instead of humbly turning to God in repentance, some turn further from God and begin to blame God for their calamities. They say, ‘If God were a God of love He would not allow this to happen to me!’

So, men refuse to repent through either the goodness of God or the severity of God!

The very presence of Jesus among His people failed to produce repentance in many. *“Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few would welcome and receive him.” (John 1:11, Living Bible)*

Jesus’ mighty miracles failed to produce repentance in some. “Then he (Jesus) began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. *‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida: for if the mighty works done in you had even been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.’ (Matthew 11:20, 21)*

Some would refuse to repent even if one should rise from the dead and bring the message of God’s love to them!

G. Because Man Tends To Hold On To The ‘Pleasures Of Sin’.

There are pleasures in sin ‘for a season’. One cannot come to God until he is thoroughly ‘fed up’ with his old way of life. The devil is constantly baiting sinners with another pleasure in sin. However, in the moral realm, there is the ‘law of diminishing returns’. What gave great pleasure at one time, no longer gives the same degree of pleasure. Before there can be genuine repentance, a person must deny the false and short-lived pleasures of the world, and admit that *there is no true of lasting pleasure in them. God alone is my pleasure! (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 2)*

The Bible speaks of ‘lovers of pleasure, more than the lovers of God’. When men love sin, the way of repentance is closed.

II. WHY IS REPENTANCE SO IMPORTANT?

A. Because God’s Absolute Requirement For Salvation Is Repentance.

Acts 17:30 says, “*God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*”

B. Because The Purpose For Which Christ Came To Earth, And The Central Message Of The Gospel Is That All Persons Must Repent.

“*And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, ‘why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’” (Luke 5:30-32)*

The central message of the New Testament sermons was repentance and faith. Said Peter in one of his sermons: “*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*” (Acts 3:19) If there is no repentance, there can be no refreshing, no joy from the Lord!

C. Because Those Who Don’t Repent Will Perish In Their Sins.

“*As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?...Though I say to the wicked, ‘you shall surely die’, yet if he turns (repents) from his sin and does what is lawful and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he had taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die, none of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him: he shall surely live.*” (Ezekiel 33:11, 14-15)

16)

Jesus said, *“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* (Luke 13:3) The only options open to us are two: Either Repent or Perish!

D. Because The Kingdom Of God Cannot Come Without Repentance.

John the Baptist’s key message was repentance. The kingdom of God could only be ushered in through repentance. *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Matthew 3:2)

Not only did John prepare for the coming of the kingdom by preaching repentance, but Jesus himself preached repentance. *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”* (Matthew 4:17)

E. Because Personal And National Healing Can Only Come Through Repentance.

“When the news reached the king of Nineveh, He rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh, ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.’” (Jonah 3:6-9)

Do Christians need to repent of sin? To answer that question, one must understand what sin is.

Sin, according to the Bible, includes a lot.

Sin is failure to be what we can be, i.e., being less than what God intends us to be. Fruitlessness is sin.

Sin is failure in human compassion, having a lack of pity for those who hurt. Failure to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and those in prison. These failures constitute serious sins according to Jesus in Matthew 25!

Sin is a failure to live in fellowship with our fellow men, i.e., having an unforgiving spirit.

Sin is the absence of love.

Sin is the absence of prayer. Said Samuel concerning his responsibility to his people: *“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.” (1 Samuel 12:23)*

Sin is becoming a stumbling block to another (Romans 14) Paul did not want to cause his brother to sin by needlessly offending him. By insensitivity we can cause another to sin.

Sin is self-willed living rather than God-centered living.

Sin is the enthronement of Self rather than the enthronement of God.

Sin is deliberate rejection of God’s loving invitation to disciplined living.

Is there a need for Christians to repent? Always, if one properly understands the full Biblical teaching on sin!

III. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF GENUINE 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, unless the nature of the pig can be changed, the pig will go back to 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 in 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. Combined with mourning must be a genuine change of the will and of the mind.

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 religiousness. It is primarily an effort to convince oneself that he is right with God.” (Mavis, *The Psychology of Christian Experience*, pg.13) Some people 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." (E. Stanley Jones, *How To Be A Transformed Person*, pg. 79)

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

Repentance, next, involves a confession of sin to God. Confessing 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 accepting God's sole solution for salvation.

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)

John Murray writes, "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." (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 114)

The prodigal son is an example of true repentance. He changed his mind about his 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."

Genuine repentance is shown by a life of righteous deeds. To those who came to be baptized, John the Baptist said, "***Before being baptized, prove that you have turned***

from sin by doing worthy deeds.” (Matthew 3:8, Living Bible)

CONCLUSION:

Are you preparing yourself for the coming of Christ into your life? Adequate preparation demands genuine repentance. Turn from any known sin in your life, confess it to God, and follow Christ closely and conscientiously.



“IS GOD 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.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

What more can God do than what He has done to save humanity from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death?

God sent His Son to earth to live a sacrificial life, to die a substitutionary death, and to conquer the grave through the resurrection. God has spared His wrath and He has 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 repent and be saved.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, I thank You for the ‘finished work’ of Christ on the Cross. Your righteousness has been vindicated and your justice has been satisfied. By the one decisive act of Christ’s death, all persons are delivered from a condition of estrangement and are restored to fellowship with God - not automatically but potentially and dependent upon each individual’s personal appropriation of the purchased gift of grace.

Because of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, all enmity between Man and God is gone, and all the dividing walls of hostility are destroyed. You, the all-holy God, are able now to receive me – a sinner, ‘lost and undone’! I come, not to a God of wrath, but to a God of peace! All because of the suffering Love of the sinless Savior! Most Wonderful! Thank You! Thank You! Thank You! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

You can never fathom the degree of love that God, in Christ, has for you! Always remember that the deep wounds of suffering, revealed in the open hands of the Crucified Savior, are for the healing of your deep wounds of sin! Suffering love is healing Love!

-By Ron Christian-



ALLOW CHRIST TO RESCUE YOU FROM THE "QUICKSAND OF SIN"!

The Bible says that there is ‘pleasure in sin for a season’! But the ‘pleasure’ of sin (the indulgence of the ‘flesh’) soon gives way to the ‘miseries of sin’ (physical deterioration, mental confusion, volitional bondage resulting in destructive habits, spiritual paralysis, social alienation, psychological depression, personal loneliness, and more! These, and other consequences of sins! It is when a person (with many or fewer sins) comes to the place in his life (in his mind, in his emotions, in his spirit, in his will) that he realizes that he, indeed, is helpless and hopeless – that he is unable to save himself from his condition of spiritual death, that he turns hopefully to God. He feels like he is ‘sinking in the quicksand of sin’! It is then that this sinner cries out for mercy and for salvation and for rescue. Christ gladly pulls such a despairing person out of sin’s ‘quicksand’, to place him on the ‘Rock of Salvation’!

*In loving kindness Jesus came
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
Through grace He lifted me.*

*He called me long before I heard,
Before my sinful heart was stirred,
But when I took Him at His word,
Forgiven He lifted me.*

*Chorus:
From sinking sand He lifted me,
With tender hand He lifted me,
From shades of night to plains of light,
O praise His name, He lifted me!
(By Charles H. Gabriel)*

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS IS THE GREAT RESCUER!

Jesus is the Great Rescuer, The Rescuer from the devastating power of sin! He rescues us from the guilt of sin, from the power of sin, from the penalty of sin. And when He takes us to His heavenly Home, we will be rescued from the very presence of sin! Jesus is the Great Rescuer! He came to earth to 'seek and to save the lost', to give healing to the sin-sick soul, to give strength to the weary in life, to give hope to the discouraged ones, to give companionship to the lonely ones, to give guidance to the confused ones, to give vision to the purposeless ones, to give strength to the discouraged ones, to give assurance to the doubting ones, to give new beginnings to the failed ones, to give integration to the double-minded ones, to bring humility to the arrogant ones, to give chastisement to the disobedient ones, to give rich resources to the depleted ones, to give direction to the confused ones, to give discipline to the complacent ones, to bring purity of heart to the ones who have ulterior motives, to bring harsh and just judgment (punishment) to the stubborn and the unrepentant ones, to reward the humble and the obedient ones who have been faithful to fulfill their divinely-given call for their lives! Jesus (through the Holy Spirit) is 'all things unto all persons', in order that He might bring all persons to the 'foot of the cross' where thorough 'healing' is offered to all persons (specifically to the 'broken and contrite' souls)! Jesus desires to rescue every soul from the 'quicksand of sin'.

Reach Up, Take Jesus' Hand of Rescue!

-By Ron Christian-



THE SINNER'S EXCESSIVE WICKEDNESS GOD'S LIMITLESS FORGIVENESS THE BELIEVER'S LOVING SERVICE (TRUE CONVERSION!)

Once you were under God's curse, doomed forever for your sins. You went along with the crowd and were just like all the others, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air, who is at work right now in the hearts of those who are against the Lord. All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with evil natures, and were under God's anger just like

everyone else.

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. And now God can always point to us as examples of how very, very rich his kindness is, as shown in all he has done for us through Jesus Christ.

“Because of his kindness you have been saved through trusting Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it. It is God himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ages ago he planned that we should spend these lives in helping others.” (Ephesians 2:1-10 Life Application Bible)



GOD’S ‘UNCONDITIONAL LOVE’ WILL GIVE YOU SALVATION FROM SIN, AND ALSO ONGOING STRENGTH TO DISCOVER AUTHENTIC, ABUNDANT LIVING!

Everything stems from God’s love for us. He poured this out for us in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forget most of your old moral and theological associations with Jesus Christ. Think of Him now as Someone with Whom you can be yourself. Seek to be very simple and very honest, not because He knows all about you anyway, but because He loves you and you are safe with Him. Half our theological acceptance and half our moral rectitude are bolsters of our ego, keeping up with the religious and moral Joneses. Forget the Joneses, and think about Jesus. It is our pretense that damns us. We put up a front, even with God. Let His love melt it right down to the ground. We are all very needy, and all very sinful, and all very ashamed, and all very much in need of a strengthening kind of comfort. There is a lot of fear in us, and you can say the very worst of us and much of it will actually be true. You can also say that we would not be coming to church at all unless there were some spark of response to God which is the best thing in us. We are a mixed bag – every one of us. The person who makes the most effort to be relaxed is probably the most tense and self-conscious. And many who are surrounded by friends and family are the most lonely. We need some human approval – much more do we need Divine approval. We shall certainly not get the latter by being “good,” and complete approval from God is only the steady possession of the wholly self-deceived. What we can have from God, and what we need

much more than approval, is love – the knowledge that He knows all about us, disapproves of a lot of it, and goes on loving us just the same.

If we will stop assuming we have this because we belong to a church, or because we are nice and good people, or because we believe all the things we ought to believe theologically, and just realize that we have it for no other reason in the world than that God is like that, we may be able to let a little of the love we need seep into our souls and our subconscious.

The task that looks too big for you, the burden that looks too heavy for you, the pain that looks too sharp for you, can all be met with the addition of the help from God that comes largely in the form of an awareness that we are being loved by Him, and perhaps also by His people. It is not weakness but strength to realize these things about ourselves.

Our great Christian religion exists, I believe, not so much to make our thinking about God right, and not so much to order our conduct aright; but rather to help us to believe that “God is love.” The greatest mistake we can make is not theological error, nor even wrongdoing: it is to refuse to let ourselves be loved by God. As a child is a healthy child, not when it has no faults, but when it knows the security of great love from father and mother, so we are healthy children when we know ourselves to be surrounded by the love of our Heavenly Father. We shall err and we shall sin and we shall doubt: but if we come back again and again to Jesus Christ as the sure sign of the Father’s love we shall live from an inward center that is like a well that is ever being drawn on, but keeps ever filling up. I believe God’s Love is the final groundwork of this amazing universe in which you and I were given the unspeakable privilege of life.

(Samuel Shoemaker, *Our Emotions, 20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, vol. 11; pp. 90-91) (Emphasis added.)



“HOW CAN I KNOW THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN ME?”

It is the purpose of God that each person becomes a member of the Kingdom of God. It is not His will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. That is God’s perfect will for all men, made possible through the ‘Great Acts’ of God in Christ. However, God has a permissive will also. He will permit men to reject His offer of eternal life. ‘Many are called but few are chosen, because few are choice.’ Who are the choice or elect ones? Those who choose to receive Christ.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Jesus is the Greatest Catcher of men's hearts, and souls, and loyalties. Jesus may be either accepted or rejected. He cannot be destroyed. His message is like a fire or flame that can never be extinguished. Throughout the centuries, men have tried to destroy the light of the Gospel, but the Gospel continues to send forth its glowing message to all men.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

God, now I see that my seeming resistance of Jesus Christ has really been a rejection of caricatures of Jesus Christ. I would be a fool not to receive the Christ of the Bible! I will receive the True and reject the false! Amen."

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember, that in eternity Almighty God chose to make the human race His special people, and remember that (after the tragic Fall of Humanity), God chose to send Jesus Christ to this earth to rescue lost mankind (through the 'work' of Christ on the Cross). What God wills and what Jesus provides – salvation of humans – the Spirit now offers to each and every person! God wills (desires) that everyone comes to repentance and faith in the Savior. The offer of Salvation is given to every person! All persons may enjoy new life on earth and eventually eternal life in heaven – God has NO 'favorites'! He loves all equally! There is 'Room at the Foot of the Cross' for everyone! All are called to repent!

-By Ron Christian-



'MEETING CONDITIONS' TO RECEIVE SALVATION IS NOT MERITORIOUS ACTS!

The fact that God has created human beings with the capacity to make moral choices, quickly establishes the reality that there is a choice to be made, as to whether or not God's offer of new life will be accepted or rejected.

The idea of 'choice' is predominate, all throughout the Bible (both Old Testament and New Testament). God gave a choice to Israel – life or death, prosperity or poverty, sin or righteousness. Through Joshua, God challenged the Israelites: "Choose ye this day that ye will serve!" The gift of God – like life was offered, but God could not force anyone

to accept the wonderful gift of new life. Individual Israelites had to ‘meet a condition’ – namely, to exercise their will positively to follow the true God!

‘Meeting a condition’ is not the same as ‘earning salvation’ or performing ‘works of the flesh’ which invalidate the ‘grace of God’! There are numerous scriptures that describe certain ‘conditions’ – ‘conditions’ which God Himself has established, ‘conditions’, if not met, the ‘promises of God’ will not be fulfilled! If you received a large inheritance (from a deceased relative) you would not demonstrate that you ‘deserved’ or ‘earned’ the inheritance, simply because you fulfilled certain required simple ‘conditions’ in order for you to receive that inheritance. Of course, when we sinners fulfill certain (God-established) ‘conditions’, in order to receive the free gift of God’s salvation, we are not ‘working’ for the inheritance, we are not discrediting the ‘grace gift’ that we have received!

Any great inheritance (including the greatest inheritance of all) requires that the receiver of the inheritance meets certain requirements (established by the giver of the inheritance). That simple reality applies to the great Grace-giver (our blessed Lord), as well as it applies to any human giver (and receiver) of any earthly inheritance!

It should be obvious to ‘fair-minded’ persons, that there is a difference between ‘meeting certain conditions’ and ‘seeking to earn salvation through the commitment of good works’! We humans are in need of receiving a ‘free gift’ from God (God’s act of unmerited favor), but we should know (from understanding scripture) that the gift of God can only be received as certain ‘conditions’ are met! We are not taking away from the power and the authority of a grace-giving God, simply to suggest that certain ‘conditions’ must be met (conditions that the Grace-giver Himself has clearly established)!

-By Ron Christian-



“HOW CAN I POSSIBLY KNOW A GOD WHO IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE?”

It is true that no man is able fully to understand the ways of God, but, on the other hand, we are commanded in Scripture to have the mind of Christ within us! *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 2:5)

How is this possible? It is only possible because God has revealed Himself to humanity through the Incarnate Christ – the one who dwelt in our world for over 30 years!

What Jesus was in human form (Love, Compassion, Mercy, Longsuffering) God has always been in eternity! Jesus Christ is *“the image of the invisible God!”* (Colossians 1:15) *“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus).”* (Colossians 1:19)

To see Jesus (as He walks through the pages of the Gospels) is to see God! The Cross on Mount Calvary is the unveiled cross that had always been on the heart of the eternal God!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

In the New Testament, Paul declared the incomprehensibility of God. *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”* (Romans 11:33-34)

Therefore, while humankind can never comprehend all the thoughts of God, mankind can experience the love of God as revealed in the Son of God and as shed abroad in the human heart by the Spirit of God. *“... and hope putteth not to shame, because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us.”* (Romans 5:5)

The Bible often speaks about the possibility – indeed, the necessity – of ‘knowing’ God. Therefore, while God is ‘incomprehensible’, He is also knowable and capable of being experienced. According to Scripture, it is not presumptuous to claim ‘to know’ God – and to know Him with all the intimacies of a husband ‘knowing’ his wife or with all the warmth of a trusting child ‘knowing’ his loving father! The Bible teaches both the necessary ‘incomprehensibility’ of God and the possibility of an ‘intimate fellowship with God’!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“How great thou art, O God! Your greatness ‘cannot be fathomed’. Your limits are higher than the heavens and deeper than the seas! My finite mind can never comprehend your infinite wisdom. Yet, I thank You that You are not only big enough to rule the Universe, but that You are also small enough to live in my heart! Such majesty and such love!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

I well know that your fine (but finite) mind is not equipped to understand the mysterious

ways of God, but I also know for a certainty that you, precious one, are made to experience the intimate fellowship of the wonderful God who, admittedly, is incomprehensible! What your mind cannot grasp, your heart can experience – a growing and intimate relationship with the mysterious God of the Universe! So very, very amazing!

-By Ron Christian-



WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE CHANGED FROM A ‘MESS’ INTO A ‘MESSAGE’?

If I had the ‘chance’ to sit down with you, and if I could ‘screw up’ my courage to be honest with you, I would have to admit that, throughout my 68 years of living (including my many years as a pastor), I have made some ‘real messes’! I am not ‘proud’ of that fact, but I must be honest (or try to be honest, for we humans are ‘excellent’ at rationalization). The half-brother of Jesus, James, wrote a 5 chapter book that covers so many ‘practical’ subjects. Much of that book is about the importance of properly using our ‘tongue’. As you examine your own life, wouldn’t you agree that the ‘thoughtless’ use of your tongue has gotten you, occasionally, into a ‘real mess’ (in your human relationships)? To win back an offended ‘friend’ may be harder than winning back a conquered city! Some people easily ‘forgive’, and others seem to want to ‘hold a grudge’ against you forever! Forgiveness is the ‘oil in the machinery’ to keep all relationships ‘running smoothly’ but some people are depleted in ‘forgiveness’. But, without forgiveness, there will be no restored relationships (no reconciliation). The ‘mess’ (which your ‘off-the-cuff- comments caused) will not be turned into a ‘message’ if there is no humbling of one’s self to ‘apologize’. It takes a ‘noble person’ to put aside all the excuses, and to simply say “I was wrong. I spoke in an unkind way. I hurt you deeply. I caused our one-time (good) relationship to become a ‘mess’ (alienation and resentment etc.). I am so sorry. I am sorry that I was so ‘insensitive’ to your feelings. I value you as a person, and I want to resume our friendship and fellowship. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?” A ‘Mess’ can be turned into a ‘Message’ (of love and renewed understanding) if there is humility and honesty between estranged persons! In the great book of James (just mentioned), appear these very believable words: “Dear brother, don’t be too eager to tell others their faults, for WE ALL MAKE MANY MISTAKES.”

I mentioned (above) that (if I am honest) I would have to admit that I have made many mistakes. I have made some impulsive financial decisions that ‘turned out to be foolish’, resulting in a considerable loss of money. I have had, of course, to apologize to my (more ‘wise’) wife, for not ‘listening to her’ before ‘plunging’ into a ‘shaky investment’!

She is more ‘discerning’ than I, and I am learning (slowly) to listen better to her advice. This (and other) ‘mistakes’ did not involve a ‘moral decision’ to disobey God, but there were, nevertheless, consequences.

But what about the great ‘moral messes’ that people (with a ‘rebel spirit’) get themselves into? God came to earth (in the person of His Son) to heal the (spiritually) broken-hearted – that is, to turn a ‘mess’ into a ‘message’ (to lift sinners out of the ‘pit’ of evil, into the ‘towers of holy joy’). Notice what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church: “Don’t you know that those doing such things have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives, who are idol worshipers, adulterers or homosexuals – will have no share in his kingdom. Neither will thieves or greedy people, drunkards, slanderers, or robbers. There was a time when some of you were just like that but NOW YOUR SINS ARE WASHED AWAY, and you are set apart for God, and he has accepted you because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.” Just think of this – by Christ’s transforming power, the idol worshiper became a worshiper of the true God, the adulterer and homosexuals became ‘clean’, the thief became an honest man, the greedy and self-centered man became generous, the drunkard became sober, the slanderer became charitable, the robbers no longer stole! A ‘mess’ becomes a ‘message’ through the transforming power of God – ‘by grace, through faith, for good works’!

-By Ron Christian-



TWO MASTERS – TWO CHOICES – TWO DESTINIES!

There are, of course, several ‘distinguishing characteristics’ of human beings (in contrast to God’s ‘lower creation’), but probably the greatest (and most frightening) ‘distinguishing characteristic’ of a human being is his/her ability (power) to CHOOSE. ‘Free will’ is what decides between ‘moral alternatives’. We all know this (intellectually and experientially). Some of us (probably all of us) have exercised our ‘volition’ in ways that have caused us regrets and even tremendous ‘guilt’ (because we can’t deny, in all honesty, that we live in a ‘moral universe’, controlled by a ‘real and personal God’). When we ‘fail’ morally, by breaking the Laws of a just God, we feel “bad” (that is, unless we have sinned so frequently that we have paralyzed or ‘seared’ our conscience; that state is worse than physical paralysis!).

Joshua (the commanding officer who became leader after the great Moses died) made it very clear that all of the Israelites had to make ‘moral decisions’. He said (boldly): “Choose you this day whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the

Lord!” I would like to ask you (since everyone, without exception, serves someone or something): “Whom have you chosen to serve?” There are only two masters (God and Satan), and there are only two destinies (heaven and the other place which is too painful for me to name and to describe!). If you believe in God and in God’s Son (Jesus) – really believe, that is, trust in, adhere to, and rely upon Jesus – and if you continue to obey this wonderful Savior – **YOU WILL SURELY ENJOY HEAVEN AS YOUR ETERNAL HOME!** The Bible says that ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.” With that promise (from God) ‘in your mind’, why would you not want to surrender your life to the loving Savior? He is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should repent, and believe, and be ‘saved’ – wonderfully saved! But, again, remember that you have a ‘free will’ – and the way you exercise that ‘free will’ will ultimately determine your ‘eternal destiny’. That is why I say that the ‘power to choose’ is the most ‘frightening power’ that you have. Some persons (most foolishly) have used their ‘free will’ to ‘put their fist into the face of Almighty God’ (to resist every ‘overture’ of God’s initiating love – love that is urging them to choose heaven as their eternal home). The Almighty God could have sent the entire (rebellious and disobedient) human race to a ‘devil’s hell’, for after all, every one of us is a ‘sinner’ (by nature and by our own willful choice), but God (the God who is perfect love) chose to do the most ‘unbelievable thing in the entire Universe’ – that is, to step down from His throne in heaven to live (for 33 years) on this planet, and to ‘take the just punishment’ for sin – dying in the place of all persons (sinners) who should have died for their own sins. Such love! No one need take his own ‘just penalty’ for his own ‘willful transgressions against the known laws of God’! If a person (you and I) truly believes that Jesus is the sinless Son of God (the perfect ‘atoning sacrifice’ for sin that ‘paid the ransom’ for all sins, past and present), then **OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN**. Our sins “are hid in the sea of God’s forgetfulness.” “As far as the East is from the West, so far has God removed our sins from us.” (We ‘shout’ at a ball game, but shouldn’t we powerfully ‘shout’ about this glorious fact – ‘shout’ for the remaining ‘days of our life’?) And, remember, in heaven, you and a multitude of other ‘redeemed saints’ like you, will ‘raise your voice’ in praise to the ‘King of Glory’ – the ‘Prince of Heaven’! Take the way of Christ (love and kindness and peace, and so much more)! Remember: the way of sin is the way of hardship and misery ultimately. “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.” - Jesus

-By Ron Christian-



ARE YOU A ‘DOWN-AND-OUT’ SINNER OR AN ‘UP-AND-OUT’ SINNER?

The Bible makes it very ‘clear’ that there are both of these ‘kinds’ of sinners! Chapter

one and chapter two of the book 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 Almighty 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 severe 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 terrible eternal destination!

The man of self-righteous morality is shallow in his understanding of the nature of sin. He can easily condemn the immoral behavior of the ‘down-and-out’ sinners. Adultery, stealing, cheating, murder, and other such ‘gross’ 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.” (William Sangster) God says to the self-righteous (Jews) in Romans: “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.”

At the time of my conversion, I was an ‘up-and-out’ sinner. I was living a morally respectable life, with no noticeable ‘bad’ habits, and I was attending Church services three times a week. I read the Bible, I memorized some Bible verses, I even ‘said’ my prayers, and I 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, 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, and 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 of sinner! I finally ‘got my spiritual eyes opened’ – to reality! To God’s Reality! “There is a way that seems ‘right’ unto man, but the end thereof is the ‘way of death’”! How many persons are ‘deceived’ by thinking that their own morality (good works and ‘nice’ personality) will ‘give them a passport to heaven’! Thank God for His ‘awakening’ of my ‘blinded soul’! I realized that he who is born once, dies twice, but he who is born twice dies only once! BE BORN AGAIN!

-By Ron Christian-



“THE FULLEST CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IS SIMPLY THE FULLEST LIFE” ABUNDANT LIFE IN CHRIST!

Jesus boldly, yet lovingly, declared (not only to His contemporaries, but to all of humanity): *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.” (John 8:12)*

To walk in darkness is to walk in a strange land; to walk in the light is to walk in one’s native land. Man is not meant to dwell in darkness; he is made to live in the light of God’s love. To come to God’s Light is to find oneself. “The more man becomes irradiated with Divinity, the more, not the less, truly he is man. The fullest Christian experience is simply the fullest life. . . .Because it has always been in man to become the fulfilled man, which is the Christian, therefore for a man to have become a Christian is never wholly strange. . . .Know Christ that you may know yourself. . . . (To know Christ) is the true and natural destiny of all mankind.”

“Does it mean everything for you if Truth and Courage and Unselfishness and Goodness are indeed natural to man and all Evil is unnatural and foreign? Know how native is goodness and how unnatural sin is to the soul of man”. (Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the World*, pp. 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 23)

When one comes to Jesus the Light, he has the feeling of coming home to God and to himself.

-Phillips Brooks-



WILL THE LIVING CHRIST RECEIVE ‘GREAT SINNERS’ – LIKE ME?

Christ (the Son of God who came from His throne in heaven) is the ‘Friend of sinners’, the ‘Divine Redeemer’, ‘the Hound of Heaven’ in ‘heavy pursuit’ of the lost ones who are ‘running away’ from God! Jesus came to ‘seek and to save the lost ones’ – and that includes you, who may think that you are a ‘great sinner’! There is no sin so great but what God (through Christ) is able to forgive! The price of forgiveness is beyond calculation, for only God is able to forgive sinners. He can justify because of the price that Jesus paid on the cruel cross of Calvary. Only because of His death (in place of the death that you should have died for your own sins), can God now forgive you (and can declare you ‘justified’ – a new standing with God). So God is both ‘just’ and the ‘justifier’ of the ungodly! All because of the bloody sacrifice of Jesus Christ (God’s sinless Son)! Whether you are a ‘great sinner’ (having broken most of God’s Commandments, over a long period of time – and, thus, deserving eternal damnation), or are a young child (who has sinned very little) – either way, ‘Christ receives sinful men and women and boys and girls’! A song that I often sang when I was a young person is titled ‘Christ Receiveth Sinful Men’

Christ receiveth sinful men,
Even me with all my sin;
Purged from every spot and stain,
Heaven with Him I enter in.

The Bible says (book of James) that if you have broken only one of God’s Ten Commandments, you are (in the sight of God) as guilty as if you had broken several or all of the Commandments. We all should know that ‘guilt’ is ‘guilt’, and any amount of guilt brings God’s condemnation, and eventual ‘death’. It is like saying: A small amount of deadly poison in your milk can ‘kill’ you as quickly as a large dose of that same poison! All sin is ‘deadly’. “The wages of sin is death”, the Bible tells us! But the ‘Good News’ (i.e., what Jesus is all about) is that there is a total ‘remedy’ for our ‘sin problem’. The very purpose for which Jesus came to earth was to provide a means by which every human being (sinner) could be ‘saved’ – for time and for eternity! Abundant life on earth (freedom from sin’s bondage and guilt and power), and Eternal life (unbounded freedom and joy and life) after we die. You can be a ‘double winner’, instead of a ‘double loser’! IF (the biggest word of the English language) – IF you honestly accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, and seek to follow Him every day of your earthly life!

Do you remember Matthew the tax collector, who probably (like most tax collectors during the Roman times) was ‘shady’ in his ‘business dealings’? Matthew was so thoroughly converted by Christ that God eventually used him to write one of the four Gospels! Zacchaeus – the man of ‘short stature’ – was so thoroughly converted that he pledged to ‘give fourfold’ back to anyone from whom he had ‘stolen’ through dishonest (deceptive) business practices! Christ is able to ‘change the leopard’s spots’. He is able

to ‘save to the uttermost’. He is able to make a ‘bad’ man ‘good’! “God is of purer eyes, than to behold evil”, but, while God hates sin in every form and in every degree, God, nevertheless, deeply loves every sinner. God is ready and able to change the ‘corrupt’ into the ‘pure’ and ‘holy’ and ‘wholesome’ and ‘honest’! There is no ‘case’ that is too hard for the Almighty Savior, for He paid the price (with His blood), for the redemption of the ‘chiefest of sinners.’! Are you too ‘sinful’ for Christ to ‘save’? Never! Christ receives sinful men.

-By Ron Christian-



ARE YOU ON A ‘DEAD-END’ ROAD OR ON AN ‘OPEN-ENDED’ ROAD?

Do you ever long to be different, to be self-controlled, serene, loving, contributive, winsome, faithful, confident? Do you ever wish that you could start life all over again? Do you ever wish that your secret past would no longer haunt you? Have you ever wished that your guilt could be resolved and that your future could be bright with hope and cheer?

It seems that so many people in our world today think that they can find a positive answer to all these questions, ‘on their own’ (with no need of ‘outside help’). They think that, if they search diligently, if they work tirelessly, if they wait patiently, that somehow (somehow) they will find the solution to their problems, a ‘new life’ in which their ‘dismal past’ will no longer ‘haunt’ them! In other words, they will finally ‘make sense’ of their lives which have been ‘riddled’ with sorrow, lives that have been ‘full of grief and pain and heartbreak’! They are quite sure that they are not on the ‘right road’ of life, but they do not know (for sure) where to find the ‘right road’ – the ‘road’ that is full of joy and peace and love and meaning!

Solomon (son of David who was known as the ‘wisest man’ in his time) – this man (supposedly) wrote the book of Ecclesiastes (in the Bible). There are some ‘glimmers of hope’ in this ‘confessional book’, but this book is largely an account of a man (Solomon) who experienced so much ‘despair’ – because he ‘traveled’ so many ‘dead-end roads’. Very relevant to our modern-day! He traveled the dead-end road of materialism. A sampling of his disillusionment: “The man who speculates is soon back to where he began – with nothing.” He traveled the dead-end road of pleasure! Solomon again: “Of laughter I said, ‘It is madness’, and of amusement, ‘What does it accomplish?’” Solomon traveled the dead-end road of power and popularity, and for a long time he was applauded and honored as a great king. But, no power lasts forever, even for well-known persons. The day comes, of course, on this fragile planet, when (at best) the great leaders

are only occasionally talked about (or read about in history books). Solomon lost his glory and power. He also traveled the dead-end road of knowledge. “I said to myself, ‘Look I am better educated than any of the kings before me in Jerusalem. I have greater wisdom and knowledge.’ So I worked hard to be wise instead of foolish – but now I realize that even this was like chasing the wind. For the more my wisdom, the more my grief; to increase knowledge only increase distress.”

One man who (like Solomon) traveled many dead-end roads (before he finally found the ‘open-ended-road of Christ’) was a man by the name of Herman Cohen. “I searched for it in the poetic nights of glorious climate, in the clear waters of the Swiss lakes, in the most magnificent scenery. I have also sought it in fashionable drawing rooms, in splendid dinners, balls, and festivities. I have been looking for it in riches, in the excitement of gambling, in romance, in an adventurous life and in the satisfaction of an unmeasured ambition. I have sought happiness in artistic name and in all the pleasures of the senses and the mind. Indeed, where, O my God, did I not seek it, this happiness, and the dream of all human hearts? God alone can satisfy the longing of the human heart. And God has descended into the world in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ; he has become the companion of our pilgrimage, the Bread of our souls. But, someone may say, I do not believe in Jesus Christ. I can only answer: nor did I. And for this reason I was unhappy...Let us love Jesus. There is only one happiness, to love Jesus and to be loved by him.” Jesus is, indeed, the ‘open-ended road’ – the road to true fulfillment, purpose, wisdom, joy, forgiveness!

-By Ron Christian-



UPON WHAT ‘ROAD’ ARE YOU TRAVELING IN LIFE?

One of the ‘broad roads’ upon which many people today are traveling is the ‘road of materialism’. Don’t get me ‘wrong’. God made the ‘material’ world, therefore, it is legitimate to enjoy what God has made. And God has not condemned ‘money’, for money, obviously, is necessary, and money can be very beneficial as a means of helping other persons. Believers in Jesus are to be generous in the use of their money! No, it is not material things that we are to despise, and it is not money (as such) that we are to despise. It is not money itself (which is the result of our hard work, and which is to be used, in part, to help the ‘unfortunate’ ones in our midst). It is the ‘love of money’ that is the ‘root of all evil’! Making ‘money our god’ is what defines ‘materialism’. The person of ‘common sense’ needs to note (briefly) the limitations of money, and the folly of loving money! Jesus Himself, said that we cannot serve ‘two masters’ – God and Money – at the same time. We must serve God, and use money for the glory of God and the

good of mankind! The road of materialism is a dead-end road, first, because of the inheritability of laboriously-gained riches. Second, because riches cause sleepless anxiety. Third, because riches can be easily lost. Paul instructs us not to set our hopes “on the uncertainty of riches.” (I Timothy 6:17) Fourth, because money cannot be taken with us when we die. “We didn’t bring any money with us when we came into the world, and we can’t carry away a single penny when we die.” (I Timothy 6:7) Fifth, because material possessions do not have the ability to satisfy the inner longing of the soul.

There is the road of Pleasure. Don’t get me wrong. Jesus says that He came to bring us an ‘abundant life’ (not a life of grief and shame and misery). He came to give us life in all its fullness. There are (according to the Bible) ‘pleasures forever more’ (some now on earth, and fully in heaven) – for the believers! But, worldly pleasures are simply a ‘perversion’ of the true and wholesome and God-given pleasures – pleasures not ‘centered in our body’ (although there are legitimate sexual pleasures and other bodily pleasures, given by God). But the pleasure which God gives is centered in an intimate and loving relationship with our Creator. The mere pleasures of this world are short-lived, and ultimately lead to a ‘shriveling’ of the human constitution and personality! Many pleasure-obsessed persons engage in endless attempts to gratify their lusts, only to find themselves forever frustrated and heaven-starved.

There is the road of popularity and power. A ballerina dancer was asked if her fame had not given her much pleasure (as a popular person). She replied, “It is a strange thing, but after many curtain calls, much applause and tremendous acclaim, I go to my room. There, when alone, I feel a desert in my heart.”

There is the road of Knowledge. Knowledge, of course, is not to be despised or belittled – for all truth is God’s truth. But knowledge that is separated from God leads to madness and folly. Science as a methodology is fantastic, but science as a god is folly and can lead to the destruction of the human race!

There is the ‘Open-ended Road’ of Christ! Christ gives a new vision of new opportunities, and the strength to ‘conquer obstacles and to discover new vistas’! Hidden resources and potential are tapped by God (in cooperation with the obedient believer). And constant divine companionship!

-By Ron Christian –



IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU DEALING WITH YOUR ‘FEELINGS OF GUILT’?

One of the most respected and influential leaders (writers and lecturers and educators) in the ‘world of psychology’ was Dr. Karl Menninger (who founded the famous ‘Menninger Foundation’ in Topeka, Kansas). For many years, counselors (out in the ‘field’) recognized his ‘thoughts’ and sought to follow his ‘guidance’. His was a ‘household’ name among serious psychologists in America. Then, several years ago (during his later career), Dr. Menninger published a book that was to become quite ‘revolutionary’ (not only in the narrower world of psychology), but in the wider world as well (including the ‘world of Christian ministries’). The name of the book was rather ‘shocking’ to many psychologists: ‘WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?’ Imagine a well-known psychologist (perhaps even the ‘grandfather of modern psychology’) focusing upon the subject that was ‘off-limits’ to many (maybe most) psychologists!! In this book, Dr. Menninger (compassionately, but nevertheless, firmly and rather sternly) asks why ministers (perhaps many ministers) no longer speak boldly and honestly about ‘sin’ from their pulpits. Why are the ministers ‘afraid’ to tell parishioners that there is a serious problem, called sin, and that their ‘guilty feelings’ are the result of actually ‘breaking the universal moral code’ (the Laws of God). In this book that soon became ‘the talk of ministers’ as well as the discussion of professional psychologists, the author ‘pinpoints’ many, many sins (personal sins as well as societal sins), and he communicates that, facing the reality of these many different (overlooked) sins could finally ‘bring forgiveness and healing’. No, guilt is not the result of one ‘wanting to do something but can’t because of societal (or parental) restrictions’, but guilt is the result of actually having done something that he/she knew he/she should not have done (the actual breaking of an objective moral law of God).

How do you deal with the ‘guilty feelings’ which you experience when you know that you have deliberately ‘broken God’s laws’ (violated the universal ‘moral code’)? There are, of course, unfounded ‘guilty feelings’ (feelings you have when you know you have not done ‘anything wrong’ – but that is for another day and for another discussion). We are talking now about ‘genuine guilt’ (breaking of one or probably more than one of the 10 Commandments). You know about some of the ‘terrible consequences’ when you ‘sin’ (openly, or more likely, secretly). Mental anguish, bondage of your inner spirit, emotional disturbance, irrational behavior in your attempt to keep your sinful act concealed from others, social alienation with no ‘freedom’ of movement and laughter among your close friends, and even physical illness. A terrible toll, all because of ‘guilty feelings’ that invade your total life! Of course, just as there is the reality of ‘physical paralysis’, there is (tragically) the reality of ‘spiritual paralysis’ (that is, some persons have ‘sinned so long’ and ‘sinned with such variety’ and ‘sinned with such intensity’ that they no longer feel the ‘fever’ from their ‘wrongdoing’. They have resisted God’s Spirit so long, and they have broken God’s Laws so frequently, that they have ‘talked themselves into believing’ that there really is no such thing as ‘Sin’, and they many

times doubt that there is even a 'Living God' before whom they someday must give a 'final account' of the quality of their earthly life.

What do you do if you (an honest person) want to find relief from the terrible 'burden of your guilt'? There are 'inadequate ways' to respond: (1) Blame others, (2) Rationalize your behavior, (3) Deny any wrongdoing, (4) Project your guilt on others. Do what King David did (when he faced his terrible sins, Psalm 32 and 51). In deep humility, he confessed all his sins. (1 John 1:9)

-By Ron Christian-



“HOW SHOULD I BEST DESCRIBE THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE GOD?”

The three Words that best describe 'God' are 'GOD IS LOVE'!

However, many persons do not have a true (Biblical) understanding of God's love. Some say something like this: "God is love, therefore He understands my human weakness and sins and He will easily and gladly overlook them. After all, it is His business to forgive!" Alternatively, there are others heard to say, "God is a God of Love, therefore, He will never send anyone to hell!"

However, you must realize that, as mercy is one manifestation of God's love towards those who respond in repentance to God, so it is also true that judgment is another manifestation of God's love towards those who spurn God's mercy.

God always acts in holy love – sometimes in showing mercy, sometimes in showing just punishment! To reject God's mercy is to reap God's judgment!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

God is Love – God is Holy Love – is not mere sentimentality! There are those who wrongly see God as a 'celestial Santa Claus', one who indiscriminately showers out gifts on all his earthly children, regardless of whether they are 'naughty or nice'. Such people know nothing of the 'fear of the Lord' (which is the 'beginning of wisdom')!

Persons (Sinners) who come to the Lord, in need of forgiveness and peace and assurance, are individuals who are drawn to Christ, not only because of God's offers of mercy, but who are drawn to Christ because they are fearful of facing God at the end of their lives, guilty and undone and lost in terrible sin.

The tenderness of Christ is the greatest motivation in drawing sinners to a place of repentance, but the fierce ‘Vengeance of God’ is also a proper motivation for sinners to humble themselves before God in repentance! Both mercy and anger are manifestations of God’s Holy Love – and both are equally valid and revealed in the actions of a Holy God (mercy towards repentant ones, and anger towards those who spurn God’s offered grace)!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God of Love, I see now that your love is tender and tough – tender towards the humble, and tough towards the rebellious and hard-hearted. I want to respond just now to your tender love – the love that mercifully calls me to repentance and surrender to You!

“You are a ‘God of Love’. Now make me today and forever a ‘child of Love’, loving You supremely, loving others sincerely, and loving myself subordinately! May my focus for my entire short life, be fixed on the beautiful face of Christ, with His tender eyes of love and compassion! May my countenance reflect the loving face of my Savior, throughout my life! May I be a ‘channel of love’ to others, simply because my own life is transfixed on the most loving person in the Universe! May I never be presumptuous regarding your Love for me! Let me never lose the wonder of your amazing love for your entire world – and for me individually! Help me to maintain daily the ‘fear of the Lord’ (profound veneration, respect, worship, and adoration). May I be constantly ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise’! Thank You, my loving God! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember that the ‘fear of the Lord’ is one important manifestation of the ‘Love of the Lord’. The ‘Fear of the Lord’ is a great cleansing agent for your life, cleansing you from flippancy, fantasy, and folly!

-By Ron Christian-



HE TOOK OUR FLOGGING! (Hebrews 2:5-10)

How is God’s love best shown? God’s love for helpless, hopeless, sinning humanity is shown best – not through Christ’s great teachings concerning love, not through Christ’s

great miracles and healing works of compassion, not even through His sinless, loving actions and relationships among men. No, as great as the teachings, miracles, and life of Jesus were, it is not these that best demonstrate God's love for mankind. It is not these that save mankind.

There is no way that God could have saved sinning humanity – you and me – except through Christ's death! “*Christ died for the ungodly.*” (Romans 5:6) Christ came into the world, not just to give us powerful miracles, profound teachings, and a pure example to follow. Christ came into the world to provide a substitutionary death for every sinner. God's saving love for the sinner demanded that Christ “taste death for every man.” (Hebrews 2:9)

The penalty of sin is death. The justice of God demands the death penalty for willful transgressions against the known laws of God. The only way for an unjust sinner to be justly spared sin's penalty, is for the righteous Savior to unsparingly take the sinner's death. The justice of God can only be maintained through the exercise of the love of God – love that must suffer a substitutionary death for the sinner. Only through the exercise of such dying love can God remain just in His character and at the same time the sinner become justified in his standing before God. Someone must die for the sinner, and God's love compelled the Son to die for the sinner. Thus, the only way the sinner can be saved is through the cross of Christ. The cross is the meeting ground for the justice of God and the love of God. The cross satisfied God's justice and at the same time demonstrates God's love.

“In a school where student government ruled that any boy stealing should be whipped publicly, a hunchback stole a lunch, and when asked to take off his coat to be flogged, he pitifully begged, ‘Oh, no, not that,’ for he was ashamed of his crooked spine. A big boy, from whom the lunch had been stolen, arose and asked if there was anything in the rules to prevent his taking the punishment, and when told there was none, he came forward and took it on himself. The hunchback, now a preacher, said he was redeemed through that act, for he saw the cross through it.” (E. Stanley Jones, *How To Be a Transformed Person*, pg. 123)

“O Christ, your cross saves me from so much! You have saved me from the humiliation of sinful exposure and from the hell of righteous punishment. The cross is your great redeeming act for all time!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because He took my fearful flogging for me, Christ has saved me for a fantastic future in heaven!

-By Ron Christian-

EMPTY-HANDED, I STAND BEFORE THE CROSS!
(Hebrews 10:1-10)

We are concentrating on the love of God, as demonstrated by the cross of Christ. It is important to emphasize that God's love is in no way a contradiction of God's wrath. At one and the same time, God hates sin and yet loves the sinner. The wrath of God is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; and yet, the same God whose wrath is incited by sin is the God whose love for the sinner sent His Son to become man's Savior and sin's atonement. The God who justly hates sin is the God who intensely loves the sinner. In fact, the greater the love for the sinner, the greater the hatred for the sin which has ruined the sinner!

Think of a human analogy. The greater the love of the mother for the wayward son, the greater the hatred of the mother toward the sin which has debased the son. A mother can love her drunkard son intensely while at the same time she intensely hates the vice of alcoholism. The more she loves her son, the more she will hate his alcoholic bondage.

God's love planned this glorious salvation for mankind, even before man was created, and even before the foundation of the earth was laid. (Matthew 25:34) Salvation is not an afterthought. In God's foreknowledge, He knew that mankind would fall from God and would need a Savior. (Revelations 13:8)

God's love was manifested on the cross at a time in human history when every plan of man had been proven as powerless to save and to satisfy mankind. The Jews, for centuries, had sought to justify themselves by the works of the law. Jesus came to earth at a time when the glaring weaknesses of the law were most evident. The great period of Greek philosophy had had its opportunity, and had likewise proven to be powerless in unfolding truth and wisdom to man's questing heart. Jesus came at a time in history when the way of philosophy had left mankind empty and meaningless. Also, Jesus came to earth at a time when the glaring faults of Roman civilization, law, and culture were very evident.

Jewish law, Greek philosophy, and Roman culture all failed to save mankind. When mankind was most powerless to save itself through morality, philosophy, and culture, the Son of God came to die for mankind, in order to save mankind. (Romans 5:6)

"God, I am now seeing that my attempts at self-salvation are powerless and futile. You must save me if I am to be saved!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not seek to justify myself through law-keeping, or philosophy, or culture.

-By Ron Christian-

JESUS' WAY IS THE WAY TO LIVE!
(Acts 9:1-6, 26:9-18)

If you won't live for God, you can't live with yourself! Man is restless until he rests in God. Just as the lungs are made for the air, the stomach for food, and the eyes for beauty, so your soul is made for God. There is within you a God-shaped vacuum which can only be satisfied when filled with God. The soul that is in God is the soul that feels 'at home' with himself. Christ is your native land!

“A little boy was found weeping. They asked him what the matter was. He said, ‘I’ve been playing hooky all day from school, and I just found out this is Saturday!’ So when playing hooky against the Way of the Kingdom you play hooky against yourself.” (E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes*, pg. 49)

“The whole idea that the Christian Way is the hard way is totally wrong. It is the other way that is the hard way. A man came to Sam Jones, the evangelist, and said, ‘I only know one verse of Scripture, and I know the one verse is true. It is, “The way of the transgressor is hard.” I know this is true!’ Yes, the idea that the Christian way is hard is all wrong. His yoke is easy and his burden is light, for his yoke is your yearning and his burden is your blessing. When you find him, you find yourself. The laws of your being are the laws of the Way. The Kingdom of Heaven, the Way, is within you and is the thing for which you are made, and therefore, when you find him, you find yourself. There is more joy to the square inch in being his than there is to the square mile in the outside world of rebellion.” (Ibid. pg. 50)

“A surgeon said: ‘I have discovered the Kingdom of God at the end of my scalpel. It is in the tissues. The right thing morally is always the healthy thing physically.’” (Ibid. pg. 50)

“If you are a Christian, a real one, you are a wise man. And if you are not, you are a fool, fooling yourself by sinning against your own being, against your own happiness.” (Ibid. pg. 52)

You are made for God. Your destiny is stamped upon you by God. The way of the transgressor is hard! Running from God, you are running from yourself. Rebelling against God, you are rebelling against yourself. Estranged from God, you are estranged from yourself. Unwillingness to live for God is inability to live with yourself. To come to God is to come to yourself. To surrender yourself to Christ is to find yourself.

“God, I am now realizing that the Christian Way is the way to live! It is hard to ‘kick against the pricks’. It is hard ‘to spit into the wind’. Surrendering to You, I surrender to Life!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I am ‘out of sorts’ with God, then I am ‘out of sorts’ with myself!

-By Ron Christian-

NONE CAN REMAIN NEUTRAL TO CHRIST!
(John 18:28-32, 38-40, 19:1-15)

Christ's kingship is powerful, but not militarily powerful. Christ is powerful as king because He calls every man to make a moral decision. None can remain neutral to Christ! All must either accept or reject His Kingship!

Barclay notes various ways in which Pilate sought to avoid any personal decision regarding Christ. Pilate first tried to put the responsibility for handling Jesus on someone else. Pilate said to the Jews when they brought Jesus to him, “*Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.*” (John 18:31) But this didn't work. The Jews replied to Pilate, “*It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.*” (John 18:31) No man can evade personal responsibility in dealing with Jesus! The question is asked each man, “What will ye do with Jesus?” Each man must answer that question for himself.

Pilate then tried to engineer Christ's release by appealing to the custom of releasing a prisoner. Pilate's attempt failed when the crowd asked for Barabbas' release instead of Jesus' release. This shows that no man can resort to the world or to a group to make his decision for him regarding Christ. The world is hostile to Christ and is still crying out, “Crucify Him!” Each person must decide for himself, either to accept or to reject the Savior.

Pilate tried the way of compromise. Pilate did not want to crucify Jesus, and thought that the mob would surely be moved to pity if they saw Jesus scourged. But Pilate's attempt

at compromise – seeking to satisfy the Jews by scourging Jesus instead of crucifying him – did not work. When Pilate brought Jesus before the Jews again, the Jews cried out, “*Crucify him, Crucify him.*” (*John 19:6*) Compromise won’t work. Pilate had definitely to decide either to crucify Jesus or to release Jesus. The decision was that explicit. As in the case of Pilate, each person today must also definitely decide whether to accept Christ or to reject Christ.

Jesus is King. His Kingship demands a moral verdict from every man. Jesus divides all men into one of two categories – those who accept Christ and those who reject Christ. Jesus said that anyone who was not for Him was against Him! Every man is either a child of the light or a child of the darkness. Every man must either choose Barabbas, who represents hate and violence, or Jesus, who represents love and peace. “Choose ye this day whom you will serve!”

“O Thou King of kings, I see that your kingdom is universal! By right of creation and by right of the cross, you have a claim on every person! Your claim comes in the form of a call of love. How can I reject love?”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God’s personal ‘Love call’ in my life is my opportunity to live by Love!

-By Ron Christian-



ARE YOU LOOKING AT LIFE FROM THE RIGHT ANGLE? (Ephesians 1:19-23)

From all eternity, Jesus has been ‘King of the ages.’ In time, Jesus remains as the King. But earth is filled with earthly sovereigns. How does Jesus compare with earth’s powerful kings? His position may be challenged by the evil tyrants of earth, but Jesus continues to reign.

Jesus is rightly called ‘King of kings.’ This title acknowledges His eternal and continuing sovereignty in the midst of earthly kings. As King of kings, Jesus’ power is incredibly great, and all other rulers, whether they acknowledge it or not, are totally subordinate to Christ. Writes Paul, “*I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe in him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in heaven, far, far above any other king or ruler or dictator or leader. Yes, his honor is far more glorious than that of anyone else either in this world or in the world to*

come. And God has put all things under his feet and made him the supreme head of the church – which is his body, filled with himself, the author and giver of everything everywhere.” (Ephesians 1:19-23 Living Bible)

When my youngest daughter was only four years old, one day she said to me: “God has a whole bunch of power. He has so many people to take care of.” Yes, God is so big that He can rule the universe, and yet so loving that He can care infinitely for every person!

God is sovereign over the entire world – even the world of evil men. The modern-day poster motto expresses faith in a faithful God who still rules in a world seemingly out of control: ‘God Has Everything Under Control.’

“This is my Father’s world,
And to my listening ears,
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father’s world;
The battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and heaven be one.”

Have you ever observed that kind of special picture which has two pictures within one frame? Looking from one angle the picture reveals Christ on the cross, suffering for lost humanity, an apparent defeat. But move a short distance and look at the picture from another angle and the picture is no longer the crucified Christ, but rather the picture now reveals the resurrected, ascended Lord, accompanied by two angels, going up into glory with all the power of heaven and earth at His disposal. From which angle are you looking at life? Do you see only suffering, or do you see victory over suffering and sin, as you view the resurrected Lord from the proper angle? Are you looking at life from the right angle?

“God, I gladly acknowledge what You have declared: The crown of thorns has been replaced by the crown of glory! Jesus reigns; I will serve!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is Ruler yet!”

-By Ron Christian-



CHRIST’S “TRANSFORMING POWER” IN THE LIFE OF A SINNER IS LIKE

BEING “BORN AGAIN” (ALL THINGS BECOME “NEW”)!

He is bestowing this mystic, wondrous life on souls that may be described as waste and void, in darkness; on which souls He comes by the Holy Spirit, brooding on them, touching them with new life; communicating it to them, so that they rise to the realization of all that which in themselves was waste and void, to the fulfilment of all that which lay in chaotic disaster. The new birth is for finding and fulfilling every distinct capacity created by God in the first birth. To the individual soul born of God is communicated the very life of Christ, which, being possessed, takes hold of that life to which it comes, cleansing it, purging it, renewing it, energizing it, enabling it to rise to the fulfilment of that which lay within it, but in destruction; and, higher yet, to a range of being which is far beyond anything possible to humanity apart from sin, and apart from the redeeming work of Christ. The great possibility of that birth was that for which God became flesh and tabernacled among men. To make that birth possible He granted the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The first thing in the Christian fact is the new life of a soul; it is also the fundamental thing in the Christian witness in power by the Church in the world. (G. Campbell Morgan, *Regeneration, The Westminster Pulpit*, Book 10, pp. 123-124)



SAVED FOR HEAVEN – SAVED FOR EARTHLY SERVICE!

I was privileged to be God’s ‘tool’ (channel or ‘mouthpiece’), when I presented the ‘plan of salvation’ to many precious folks! After these persons sincerely met the ‘conditions’ for salvation, they began to grow dynamically in their newfound ‘faith’. After I led them to Christ, I, of course, sought to help these new believers to develop and to progress in the ‘fleshing out’ of their newfound faith (in many different ways). I stood back in observation of the life of these new believers, and I was thrilled and I was amazed at their growth!

As is true of all of us (believers), these new Christians had a lot to learn. They, like all of us, experienced some ‘advances’ and some ‘retreats’ in the living of the Christian life, but the majority of these precious new believers became responsible and loving servants of our God! Some, eventually, even assumed leadership positions within the local church!

Today, many years since their conversion, there are those one-time-baby Christians who are now strong and stalwart leaders in the work of God (including the local church)! God is a transforming God – a God who loves to change every one of us, a God who wants us to be strong in the things of God, a God who wants us to reach out in love to

everyone around us!

There are many and varied ways in which God's change in the heart and life of a person can be described. One of the most meaningful ways to describe divinely-wrought 'change' in the human life is to make 'contrasts'. This is what I was 'before' I was converted (or before I made a fuller surrender of my life to God), and (in contrast) this is what I have become since I yielded my life to the transforming God!

"Whenever someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun." (II Corinthians 5:17 Living Bible)

-By Ron Christian-



"WHY SHOULD I TAKE THE WAY OF CHRIST?"

The Roads of The World: The Road of Materialism, The Road of Sensualism, The Road of Worldly Fame, and The Road of Worldly Knowledge are all Dead-End Roads! These roads appear to be broad, expansive, and delightful. However, in reality, they increasingly become narrow and finally lead to nowhere. They all come to an end!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The man without Christ is a loser! He loses in this life and he will lose eternally! A DOUBLE LOSER!

"The way of the transgressor is hard!" But, in contrast to the roads of the world, the road of Christ leads to a happy end!

The Road of Christ is easy compared to the roads of sin!

Said Jesus, *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)

"Christ's yoke is our yearning, and his burden is our blessing!" The day comes in the Life of the unbeliever when he NO longer has pleasure in his sins! The roads of the world are dead-end roads, leading to ultimate misery! The road of Christ is the only open-ended road, and those who travel that road increasingly find joy and peace and

fulfillment (in spite of the trials, tests, and temptations, which they are called to endure)!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, I believe your Word which declares that your Road of Righteousness is a narrow road, traversed only by serious-minded, deeply-repentant, faith-filled persons who are committed to living obediently to your holy commands, and who are responsive to your warm overtures of tender love. With ‘fear and trembling’, I come to You, not worthy of the least of your favor, asking You to forgive all my countless sins, and also asking You to purify my heart of unspeakable corruption and defilement. Make me, through and through, ‘whiter than snow’. I want to take your road – the road of true holiness! Without You, my life has become increasingly filled with boredom and monotony. My life has become angry, with no glow and no purpose! My life has grown wearisome with vain repetition – no direction, no meaning! Nevertheless, in spite of many trials which I realize believers must endure (for a purpose), I know that many believers whom I have observed, have a distinct newness and freshness and purpose and confidence and joy about them. I want what these victorious persons have! Please put me on your wonderful road! Thank You, merciful God! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

There is a God-given ‘cross’ to bear, but there are also pleasures and joys ‘beyond compare’ when you walk with Jesus on the road which has as its destiny the place of eternal joys and pleasures!

-By Ron Christian-



“CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE!”

BY RON CHRISTIAN

DOES GOD HONOR THE EXERCISE OF MY ‘FREE WILL’ IN MY DECISION?

The Bible says that God ‘knows our ways afar off’. He honors our ‘free will’, and therefore, He will not ‘force’ His will on us. Without knowing (absolutely) the decisions we will make (in our future), God allows the ‘honest decision process’ to operate. He, nevertheless, knows what **LIKELY OPTION** we will choose.

It is true (as one views God’s reactions to our own personal decisions, or to national decisions, recorded in the Old Testament), I say, it is true that even God (at times) was ‘shocked’ when a person (and particularly the nation of Israel) made certain decisions (against God’s will).

When idolatry was chosen by Israel, rather than the worship of the true God, it is recorded that God was ‘shocked’, that God was even deeply ‘angered’! So, when it is recorded that God ‘knows our ways afar off’, this is not meant to be a statement of ‘divine determinism’.

God knows the options that you and I will have (in our future living), and God also knows the **LIKELY CHOICE** that you and I will make. But God, nevertheless, allows the exercise of ‘free choice’.

If God knew ‘ahead of time’ what choice Israel would make regarding their decision to be ‘Baal worshipers’, then why would God (after they made the choice of idolatry) be so ‘shocked’ and so ‘angry’? An individual person (including the person of God) is not ‘shocked’ (surprised) and he is not ‘angry’, if he knew ahead of time a decision that a person (or nation) will make!

It is important to ‘honor’ (to respect) the ‘doctrine’ of the ‘omniscience’ of God (on one hand), and the genuine exercise of man’s ‘free will’ (on the other hand). God knows everything that it is possible to know about each one of us, but God never ‘forces’ His will (of goodness) upon any human being (including Christians).

God knows the ‘likelihood’ of our choices (that is, what we, as ‘free will agents’ will probably choose), but – out of respect for the dignity and for the freedom of ‘free will creatures’ – God Himself ‘waits’ upon each person to ‘make his own moral decisions’!

There are many things that God (independently) chooses to do, but when it comes to ‘dealing’ with human beings, God (even with all the divine influence that He exercises towards each human) must allow each human being finally to ‘decide’ his/her own

ultimate destiny!

As Jesus wept, because of the ‘wrong choice’ of rebellion made by the city of Jerusalem, so Jesus still weeps when any sinner chooses to reject the ‘loving invitation’ to new life. Jesus still declares: “How often would I have gathered you to my intimate presence (for new life), ‘as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings’, but you would not!”

Even with all the ‘power of influence’ that resides in God Almighty, God cannot ‘force’ a person to come under the ‘wing’ of the Loving Savior! In light of all the special knowledge that Israel was privileged to possess (knowledge of the one true God), the living God thought ‘for sure’ that Israel would ‘be true to their God’ and would ‘turn their back’ upon all idols.

Instead, Israel (tragically) chose to worship ‘Baal’ (the licentious god of paganism). God allowed Israel to make her ‘horrible choice’! But God (the all-knowing God), who allowed Israel an ‘honest choice’, stood back with ‘horror’ and with ‘shock’ and with ‘anger’!

God’s ‘omniscience’ must always be understood in light of man’s ‘free will’. God (our Creator) knows us better than anyone else knows us, and God knows us better than we know ourselves! God ‘knows our way afar off’.

God knows our ‘uprisings and our down sittings’ – our ‘successes and our failures’, our ‘virtues and our sins’! God knows us ‘altogether’ – our hidden motives and our true intents and our untarnished desires!

There is nothing about us that God does not know! God made us; therefore God alone truly knows how we ‘tick’! (Henry Ford knew more about the mechanics of his car than anyone else, because Henry Ford made the car!). God knows all the different ‘options’ (the moral options and all the amoral options) that are going to be ‘presented’ to us – in our present life and also in our future life.

As the all-knowing God, He knows, not only all the various options that will be presented to us, but God, of course, knows what options we will **LIKELY CHOOSE**. God is fully aware of all the various ‘moral alternatives’ that we will have presented to us (now and in the future), and God knows which ‘moral alternative’ we will **LIKELY CHOOSE**.

It is important to stress the word ‘likely’, for God Himself (to preserve the sanctity of the free will of man) cannot know ahead of the time what the outcome of a person’s moral decision will actually be, what a human decision-maker will actually choose to do

(what course of action he will choose)!

The omniscience of God must always be ‘respected’, alongside the sanctity of the ‘free will’ of man! If God knew (for certain) what choice a person would make, before the choice is actually made between moral alternatives, then there is no longer the existence of human ‘free will’! There would be no such thing as ‘authentic free will’, but, instead, there would simply be ‘divine determinism’.

Instead of God waiting patiently and respectfully until a person exercises his ‘will’ to make a moral decision, if ‘divine determinism’ describes moral reality in our universe, then God will merely ‘use’ a human to carry out His determined ‘will’! If it is true that ‘divine determinism truly defines moral reality in this God-created world, then so-called ‘free will’ would not be ‘free’ at all, but rather ‘free will’ would be a ‘divine trick’, a mere ‘play act’ (i.e. If ‘divine determinism’ is what defines ‘reality’, then God is deceiving humans into thinking that they are independently choosing between moral alternatives – when actually it is God who is using humans like a magician who pulls strings on a puppet!).

A key question to ask is this: “Does the God of this world genuinely respect the exercise of authentic ‘free will’ (the exercise of which either helps or hinders the cause of the Creator), or, instead of ‘free will’, has God designed this world such that God simply ‘pulls all the strings’ – a world in which God determines everything that happens, without recourse to human choices?

As in the case of ancient Israel, who chose differently than what God wanted it to choose, and differently than what God expected, it is possible for a ‘free moral agent’ (you and me as believers), to choose wrongly and tragically. When that happens, God will be deeply saddened, and He will be ‘shocked’, and possibly He will be even very ‘angry’!

Offended divine love incites deep holy anger – anger because God has to stand back to watch Israel becoming ravished by its sins (idolatry, adultery, national chaos, exile and destruction). Just as Jesus wept, as He looked over unrepentant Jerusalem, and as Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), so the ancient prophets of the Old Testament were greatly angered (sharing God’s holy anger), as they pled in vain for the wandering and heart hardened people of Israel to return to their loving covenant relationship with Jehovah!

As Jesus was ‘shocked’ by the stubborn rejection of the Jews (the consequence of which would be eventual destruction of their capital of Jerusalem), so the prophets were ‘shocked’ (reflecting the ‘shock’ of Jehovah) when they observed the indifference (and

mockery) of their fellow Israelites.

Just as Jesus had to ‘wait’ to learn of the kind of decision that His listeners would make (acceptance or rejection of the light of God), so Old Testament Prophets (reflecting the mind of God) had to wait to see what the ‘outcome’ would be, based on the positive or the negative decision that the Israelites would make (when the light of God’s truth was presented to them).

God does not know ahead of time what the outcome of a moral decision will be. Even God (the One who is ‘all-knowing’) must respect the exercise of a human decision (the authentic exercise of ‘free will’)! Both the ‘all-knowing power’ of God and the authentic capacity of ‘free will’ must be profoundly respected. Both God and Man are called to work together, to change the world in such a way that the world will better reflect the nature of the Kingdom of God!

-By Ron Christian-



“MUST I STORM HEAVEN’S GATES TO FIND GOD?”

In the ‘scriptures’ of another well-known world religion, humanity is portrayed as pathetic and austere persons, storming heaven’s gates in an attempt to disturb God’s calm aloofness through human persistence!

Nevertheless, Christianity declares the startling and wonderful fact that God always takes the first step – the initiating step!

It is not God’s reluctance, but man’s reluctance, that must be overcome.

It is not man searching for God, but God searching for man! It is not man climbing up that ladder to find God, but God climbing down the ladder to find man!

Jesus, Son of God, is God’s arm reaching out to lost humanity!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Make no mistake about it. God hates sin, the actions and attitudes that degrade persons. But God loves people!

It is people that God came to love, and to redeem. Jesus came not to destroy but to save,

not to condemn but to forgive, not to subtract but to add.

“I am come that they (mankind) might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,” said Jesus.

Saint Augustine said, “God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to LOVE!”

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“God, I thank You that I don’t have to ‘Storm Heaven’s Gates’ to get to your attention! You loved me when I was loveless! You sought me when I was indifferent! As one poet testified to his own conversion, ‘O Christ, You are the ‘Hound of Heaven’; in heavy pursuit of my soul, when I was running away from your love and compassion!’ I no longer wish to run from You. To be ‘caught’ by You, is to be ‘caught’ by the ‘lover of my soul’, by the one by whom and for whom I was made! You are a great and caring God – the one and the only true God (among the world’s false and terrifying gods). Moreover, You are always the One who initiates – the one who pursues every lost sinner. I would be a ‘great fool’ not to respond to all your initiatives of love. The Incarnation (God becoming a human) testifies to your ‘grand initiatives’ to reach a lost and fallen race of sinners! O precious Lord, just now, I respond to your initiative of love, by giving my heart in faith to You! Thank You! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

The ‘lover of your soul’ seeks you. Surrender today and every day to the greatest of all loves!

-By Ron Christian-



OUR “BORN AGAIN” LIFE IS A LIVE “CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST”!

Our “born again” life is never our own natural life raised to its highest development. Rather, it is that life scrapped, dead, “crucified with Christ.” Then to take the place of that old natural life, the Divine life condescends to its lowliest home – your heart and mine.

*Walk in newness of life.
Romans 6:4*

-By Catherine Marshall-



CLIMB THE “MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD” (PSALMS 24)!

“Who may climb the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. They will receive the LORD’s blessing and have a right relationship with God their Savior. Such people may seek you and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob.” (Psalms 24:3-6; Living Bible) Those who have ‘pure hands and a pure heart’ (Psalms 24), are those who enjoy both inward holiness and outward holiness.

They are persons who are forgiven of their outward practices of sinning, and who are also delivered from their inward drives towards selfishness and self-centeredness. Humans are born with a tendency (bent) toward self-centeredness and pride, which results in outward behavior that can be rather ‘ugly’ (all kinds of sinful actions and schemes). Rebellious attitudes issue forth in rebellious actions – a certain choice to be ‘independent’ of God and of God’s will and commandments. In one word – Disobedience!

Only when such a rebel (running from God) finally ‘comes to the end of himself’, and realizes the utter futility of life without God, and decides that the wise choice is to ‘lay down his arms’ and to make a total surrender to the Lordship of Christ – it is only when his stubborn ‘will’ acknowledges these spiritual realities, can he accept the transformation of his character that only the Almighty God can give to him. The transformed sinner can then ascend to the top of “The Mountain of the Lord”!

-By Ron Christian-



YOUR DAILY “SANCTIFICATION” WILL KEEP YOU ON “TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN”!

This act of brokenness and contrition by the sinner is met by the ‘touch’ of regeneration (new life) by the God of Salvation! The sinner becomes a ‘new creation’ in Christ Jesus! The ‘old life’ has passed, and the ‘new life’ has begun. The man (sinner) of the ‘low life of wickedness’ is now a ‘changed man’ (believer) whom God allows to ‘climb the mountain of the Lord and enter where he lives’!(Psalms 24:3) No longer in the ‘low land’ of dreadful sinning, but now on the ‘mountain of the Lord’ where his perspective

in life is altogether different (and gloriously wonderful)!

Over a period of time (the longer he dwells with the Lord on the mountain), this ‘new creature in Christ Jesus’, sees ‘reality’ more clearly – more and more like Jesus sees and knows ‘reality’. Of course, his view is never as clear as the all-knowing God sees ‘reality’. This person, who is truly ‘converted’ and who dwells with God on the mountain, is committed to receiving the ‘daily cleansing’ of the ‘blood of Jesus’. Through the work of justification (initial holiness), and the further work of sanctification (deeper ‘heart cleaning’ of all inward motives), this ‘mountain dweller with the Lord’ has a ‘pure heart’ and ‘pure hands’! This alone is his passport that allows him to ‘ascend to the mountain of the Lord’, but he deeply desires to remain with the Lord on that mountain (unpolluted and holy). Therefore, he makes himself available every day to receive the ‘cleansing blood of Jesus’.

-By Ron Christian-



ACCEPTING GOD’S GIFT OF ‘LIFE’ IN THE ‘ABUNDANT’ CHRIST!

“Weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” – a description of both sorrow and of suffering! God does not desire that anyone should perish, that anyone should have to endure the ‘pangs of hell’, that anyone should ever have to shed tears in a most horrible place – a place not prepared for humans, but for the devil. “Prepare to meet thy God” – to ‘meet thy God’ in peace, because of the ‘forgiveness of sins’ made possible by the agonizing death of Jesus on that cruel cross!

Jesus ‘paid it all’ (the price of redemption), so it is imperative that you and I accept the ‘purchase price’ for our redemption. A ‘free gift’ of forgiveness, but you and I must, nevertheless, accept that gift! “To all who accept that gift, God gives the privilege of being called sons/daughters of God!” So freely offered, but will you humbly accept that ‘costly purchased gift’?

It cost Jesus His death (a terrifying death on a cross) – the purchased gift cost Him everything! A gift freely offered to you! Yes, free, because you could not ‘purchase’ the gift, you could not ‘earn’ the gift; you could not ‘deserve’ the gift!

While you cannot purchase or earn or deserve the gift (since the gift comes from the ‘graceful hand’ of God), on the other hand, if you accept the gift (by repentance and by trust in Christ), you become a ‘child of God’, and there are certain obligations that you must accept if you are a ‘child of God’. You must learn to obey your ‘Father’.

You must learn to love your fellow brothers and sisters. You must, as a child, forgive your fellow brothers and sisters if (when) they offend you. You must learn to live a 'Spirit-filled life', with the 'fruits of the Spirit' increasingly evident in your life. You must accept persecution, in many forms, for the sake of the Gospel, and you must learn to 'return good for evil' when you confront persecution.

-By Ron Christian-



BORN FROM ABOVE

*Born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.
1 Peter 1:23, NKJV*

It does not matter if you have done no harm and do not live in any willful sin. You must go further yet, or you cannot be saved. Even if you also do all the good you can and have improved *all opportunities* of doing good, yet this does not alter the case. Still, you must be born again.

Without this, nothing will do any good to your poor, sinful, polluted soul. You may faithfully go to church and observe the sacraments, say ever so many prayers in private; hear ever so many good sermons; read ever so many good books. Still, "you must be born again." None of these things – nor anything else under heaven – will stand in the place of the new birth to keep you from hell, unless you are born again.

If you have not already experienced this inward work of God, let this be your continual prayer: "Lord, add this to all your blessings – let me be born again. Deny me not this: Let me be 'born from above.' Take away whatever seems good to You – reputation, fortune, friends, health – only give me this, to be born of the Spirit, to be received among the children of God. Let me be born of the incorruptible seed by the Word of God. And then let me daily 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!'"

-By John Wesley-



"CAN GOD FORGIVE EVEN ME WITH ALL MY BAGGAGE?"

“If we say that we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins.” (1 John 1:8-9; Living Bible)

Remember: There is no ‘sin stain’ that has gone so deep in your life, but what the ‘blood of Jesus’ goes deeper yet – to purge your life of all sin!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Only open, honest, and humble confession of your sins to God will bring forgiveness and peace with God. God, because of Christ’s ‘finished work’ on the Cross, is prepared to renew your mind, to tender your heart, to quicken your conscience, to bring reverence to your spirit, to heal your emotions, to restore health to your body, to strengthen your damaged will, and to enable you to make ‘right your wrongs’ with your fellowmen (restitution). All of these aspects of true conversion are because of Christ’s sacrifice and because of your own faith and surrender to Christ’s accomplished work on the Cross!

God will take all your ‘baggage’ (your sins), and give you, in return, His loving presence, His mighty strength in your ‘inner self’, His daily guidance as you learn to make wise decisions, His restoring grace and forgiveness when you make mistakes and blunders along life’s way – and He will give you correction and discipline and instruction in righteousness!

As you ‘walk in the light’ of truth, God will give you greater understanding and greater growth, and He will give you greater responsibility and more work to do as a growing ‘Child of the King’! Your future is bright with the promises of God, and the development of your God-given talents is almost unlimited!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“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 do not remember! I confess, just now, all my ‘recalled sins’ and all my many ‘repressed sins’, in order that I can enjoy your unlimited forgiveness! I accept, with gratitude, your gift of eternal life, purchased by the sacrifice that you made on Mount Calvary! Amen!

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember the encouraging words of an old hymn writer:

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

-By Ron Christian-



**THE MOMENT WE RISE TO OBEY HIM,
WE DISCOVER THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION!**

The moment that we rise to obey Him, we discover a great fact: his words *are* life – with power to restore the atrophied will, to quicken pallid desire, to resurrect us from the grave clothes of a half-dead existence.

*And immediately the man became well.
John 5:9*

-By Catherine Marshall-



TERROR OF REJECTING GOD’S ‘CALL TO REPENTANCE’!

There are those who, because God has often approached them with the offers of forgiveness, are now so angry against God, that they show terrifying ‘tears of anger’! It is not a ‘light and trivial thing’ for a person to ‘hold out on God’, year in and year out!

God is patient and God is forbearing with sinners, but it is (frighteningly) possible for a recalcitrant sinner (who continues to ‘harden his heart’ against God’s overtures of love and against God’s offer of forgiveness), ‘to sin away his day of grace’! Hopefully, this sad set of circumstances does not often happen, but the sinner who continues to ‘harden his heart’ is ultimately ‘courting the wrath and the judgment of Almighty God!’

It is dangerous for anyone to ‘take the grace of God for granted’! “God is not willing that anyone should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance.” That signals God’s intention for every human being. Hell was not made for humans. It was made for

the devil and his demons. God definitely does not ‘will’ that anyone should perish eternally! God loves all persons. Jesus died for all persons.

God wants everyone to accept His offer of salvation (made possible through Christ’s death). Everyone is called to repentance. Everyone is ‘savable’ (i.e., capable of being saved). The Holy Spirit calls all persons to repentance. God has a place prepared in heaven for every person, and God, through the Holy Spirit, is seeking to get everyone prepared for that prepared place in heaven. The ‘gift’ of repentance and the ‘gift’ of saving faith are offered to every person (because of God’s special ‘initiating grace’ – called ‘prevenient grace’).

Every person (of all times) has received the ‘light of truth’ in one form or another (either general revelation or particular revelation), and each person has received ‘sufficient light’ of truth to enable him/her to make a commitment to God, sufficient grace from a loving God to give every person a ‘passport’ to heaven!

-By Ron Christian-



TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, merciful and gracious as Thou art, I thank You that, all because of Christ’s work on the Cross, my sins are forgiven and my guilt is resolved. I no longer am at enmity with You! The dividing walls of hostility have been broken down! I enjoy friendship and fellowship with You! All because of your grace, and because of my own sincere faith (trust) in You! My sins are hidden in the ‘sea of your forgetfulness’, never to be ‘remembered against me’! Those sins of mine (as horrible as they are) are removed ‘as far as the east is from the west’.

“I enjoy peace and rest – a clear conscience, a renewed mind, a restored spirit, healed emotions, a strengthened will, a greater love for others, and a completely new perspective on my life! O God, why are You so good and so merciful to me? I am a ‘new creature’ in Christ Jesus! Abundant Life here, and anticipation of Eternal Life after I die!

“A thousand ‘Thank You’s’. Help me, through all the ‘ups and downs’ of my future life, to always praise and to serve You! Amen!

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Always remember that you will always enjoy a growing Christian Life as long as you

daily experience the Power of Christ's Cleansing Blood!

-By Ron Christian-



WHY ARE 'GOOD WORKS' IMPORTANT TO GOD?

It is true that 'Jesus paid it all'! It is true that salvation is the product of God's unmerited favor (grace), but it is also true that persons 'saved by grace, through faith' are the same believers who are 'created to do good works'. We are 'saved by grace, through faith, for good works'. Works, of course, do not give us entrance into the 'family of God', but 'saved persons' are persons who are 'eager to do good works' – the works of love and service to our fellow men!

Those persons who are 'caught in the web of God's love' (that is, those persons who are 'born of the Spirit') are 'on tiptoe with joy', and their 'hands are equipped to do good works'. Not out of compulsion, but out of deep desire to love their fellow men, all because they are now 'in love' with their newly-found Heavenly Father. New motivation to worship the Father, and to love their newly-found 'brothers and sisters' in the great 'family of God'! These 'twice-born' folks gladly sing: "Were the whole realm of Nature mine that were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!"

-By Ron Christian-



"IS THERE ANY ALTERNATIVE TO MY PERSONAL LIFE OF DISILLUSIONMENT?"

There may be pleasures in sin for a season, but the way of sin is the way of sorrow! There may be occasional sorrows and heartbreaks in the Christian life, but the way of repentance and faith is the way of abiding love and abounding joy.

Just as Jesus grew in favor with God and with man, so the man whose heart is broken and whose spirit is contrite will find himself favored by God and loved by his fellowmen.

Sorrow because of repentance will last for a while, but sorrow will give way to 'joy that is unspeakable and full of glory'. Abiding love and abounding joy is the eternal

inheritance of God's people.

Is it any wonder that God's people are urged to rejoice and to shout!

“So rejoice in him, all those who are his, and shout for joy, all those who try to obey him.” He who is forgiven much will love much, and he who loves the Lord deeply will rejoice exaltedly.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The person who practices sin will eventually become disillusioned with life. Satan offers happiness, but he can only deliver misery! The result from one's sinning is like wishing for the wind and getting the whirlwind (tornado); like expecting a harvest of wheat and getting a harvest of tares instead; like spitting into the wind; like kicking the pricks; like expecting a refreshing rain on a cloudless day; like going to your birthday party and finding out that no one is there; like building a beautiful house and having it soon destroyed by fire; like being engaged to a beautiful girl, and then having her break the engagement a day before the wedding date; like thinking you have purchased a diamond ring, and finding out that the ring is made of cheap material; like investing in a growing company, and having all your money 'disappear; because of fraud in the company; like coming to your long-awaited retirement date, and then your passing away the first day of your retirement; like having your long-time friend reject you because of a misunderstanding, never to speak to you again! Disillusionment! Disillusionment! Disillusionment! That is what happens too many times in the everyday events of life!

These experiences of life are very hurtful, bringing untold sorrow and great disappointment. But the spiritual losses are far more devastating than any great physical-type losses! Because of the deceptive nature of sin, there are many who believe that sin pays great wages – pleasure, power, prosperity, popularity, etc. But, while it is true that there are “pleasures in sin for a season”, the season of pleasurable sin eventually (and sometimes very soon) comes to an end, only to leave the sinner with emptiness and shame and regrets and a sense of lostness and guilt! No sense of meaning and direction! No sense of close community with people who truly love and care! No sense of motivation and energy and personal discipline to achieve worthy goals and realize exciting dreams! Sometimes not even physical health and stamina, since the acts of sin can bring dissipation and destruction to the human body! Sometimes the bondage of hurtful habits (like drugs and alcohol), which have the power to cause an early death!

TIME FOR A PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, You are a God of righteousness (You are opposed to all wrong and evil of every

kind). You are a God of justice (You do all things fairly, with no prejudice or favoritism). You are a God of integrity (You never lie, but You are totally trustworthy in your character, speaking nothing but the truth in all circumstances). You are a God of holiness (You are totally pure in your motives, and totally separated from all sin, and You cannot look upon any sin with favor, but with a holy hatred). You are a God of peace, (committed to unity among all persons, regardless of race, color, or nationality, and You hate discord and disharmony and disunity among all persons). Above all (and foundation to all the traits and attributes of God Almighty) You are a God of Perfect Love (You have an unconditional love for every person, and You desire that all be saved, because of Christ's provision for Salvation). In contrast to You, O Loving God, is Satan (your arch-enemy) who hates mankind and who wishes to destroy every human being. He is a liar, a thief, a murderer, a master deceiver, an 'accuser of the brethren'. He offers so much to gullible persons (pleasure and power and positions and popularity and wealth), and those who accept his deceptive offers, find that they finally lose everything! Satan baits them with high expectations, but Satan has no good (lasting) thing to give anyone! Misery and personal bondage! But, Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan, and to set the 'captive free'! Jesus is the Victor over Satan, and those who place their trust in Jesus as Savior, become brand new persons – free to embrace the 'abundant life' that Christ came from heaven to earth to give to willing hearts! Praise my gracious and powerful God! Hallelujah!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

You will never 'unravel' all the mysteries, inequities, and injustices which obviously will bring questions to your mind and sadness to your heart, but, because you serve a God who is righteous, just, honest, holy, peace-loving, and full of holy love, you can rest assured that all will turn out well for you in the end of your life (if you keep trusting), and you will not become disillusioned!

-By Ron Christian-



“WHAT ABOUT YOUR HEART” - IS IT RIGHT WITH GOD?

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

“TRAGEDY OF ALL TRAGEDIES” IS THE TRAGEDY OF A “FREE WILL AGENT” (HUMAN) REJECTING GOD’S LOVE!

One of the greatest “mysteries” that I have often encountered (when I have seriously contemplated life and God and eternity) is the “mystery of the human will”. When I think of the various ways in which the “Loving Power” of God has been manifested to mankind, I stand amazed that any human being (including myself, for I too have been guilty) could “turn his/her back” on such a caring and loving God – a God who has done everything “short of coercion” to save humanity from the bondage of sin, to enjoy the freedom of true life! What more can He do than what He has already done (and continues to do) through His blessed and tender and convicting and convincing Holy Spirit!

But the fact of reality continues to be evident (all because God created humans “in His own image”) - the Almighty God, who exerts His unlimited power and control and authority in all parts of His universe and His planet called Earth, cannot FORCE His sovereign will and His saving purpose upon any human being! Man alone has the ability to “harden his heart”, “stiffen his neck”, “close his mind”, “retain his will”, “stop his ears”, and “choose his own self-centered life-style”. Man can “ignore all the Spirit-placed roadblocks” along life’s pathway, to alert the sinner of the way to destruction that he is treading. Just “short of coercion”, the Spirit of God is doing everything within His power to keep every soul out of hell, and to take every soul to heaven! God is not willing that any person should perish, but that all persons should come to repentance. But, even though the Bible makes it very clear that God has only good intentions (and a “perfect will”) for all persons – nevertheless, the “wicked, self-centered will” of some persons “truncates” and “overrides” the “perfect will” of God! There are, tragically and mysteriously, some persons who “choose to do their own thing” rather than to do “God’s will”! Sin is most terrible, for sin blinds people to reality. Sin deceives people and makes them believe that the “pleasures of sin” are more wonderful than the “pleasures of God”; that the ways of the devil are the ways of life rather than the ways of death; that the ways of self-centeredness are more satisfying than the ways of self-surrender and service; that the ways of the world, which give glamour and power and wealth, are far better than the ways of simplicity, generosity, and obscure servanthood. Yes, there are “pleasures in sin for a season”, but only for “a season” - to be followed by regret and remorse and shame and loneliness, guilt, loss, and ultimately spiritual death!

Perhaps the “mystery of all mysteries” in this earthly life is why any human being (a never-dying soul who will stand before God eventually to be judged) would allow himself/herself to be deceived by sin and by Satan – at a time when the POWERFUL SPIRIT is “trying so hard” to persuade every person (through several “means”) to

forsake his/her self-centered (pride-filled) life, and to turn in repentance and in faith to Christ Himself (who said that He was “*the Way, the Truth, the Life*”)!

But, in spite of everything God has done (Creation, Incarnation, Giving of Spirit, written Word, Influential Church, Conscience, Nature etc.), God Almighty (who exercises His power most phenomenally) reaches the limits of His power when a human being (made in God’s wonderful “image”) continues to “hold out” on God’s offer of forgiveness and love and reconciliation and abundant life and eventual eternal life in heaven! “The mystery of sin”, combined with the “mystery of human free will”, results in great and irrevocable tragedies, in the lives of unbelievers who choose to “turn down” every offer of “new life in Christ” to the very end of their earthly lives!

There comes a time in the life of every (self-conscious) human being when he/she is confronted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of conviction of sin and a call to repentance and faith. The Spirit awakens persons (sinners) to the fact that the direction of their lives is “dead wrong”! There is a desperate need to turn from a life of self-centeredness (the essence of all sins) to a life of Christ-centeredness (the essence of true life). Man is “dead in trespasses and sins”, and the “mother” of all sin is self-centeredness (selfish pride). The Spirit yearns with self-centered persons (who are “dead in trespasses and sins”) to turn from sin (repentance) and to turn to Christ (faith, trust, surrender to Christ as the center of one’s life).

There are only two kinds of persons in life – those whose lives are guided primarily by selfish interests (self-centered), and those who (imperfectly but genuinely) are seeking to turn their lives towards God and towards godly purposes (unselfish motivation). Perhaps it is obvious that those who are self-centered are nevertheless sometimes seemingly unselfish in their motivations and actions (because of God’s “common grace” that operates universally in the human race, even among non-Christians). Moreover, true Christians will quickly acknowledge that they sometimes (unfortunately) resort to selfish (carnal) actions and attitudes in their relationships. (One of my friends and my minister for a dozen years, said that one of his regular prayers, in the privacy of his early morning devotions, is a prayer to the Holy Spirit that the Spirit would (daily) 1. Crucify all sin and selfishness in his life, 2. Cleanse him of all sin, by the blood of Christ, 3. Control him in what he said and did in all his daily interactions. A most practical prayer, which I have adopted. Why? Because sincere Christians know that, even though they wish always to be self-surrendered and Christ-centered, it is too easy to be diverted, by sin and temptation, from the general direction of their life, which is Christ-centeredness).

Those who exercise their human will to follow God (as best as they understand Him), will certainly enjoy the glories of heaven, when they leave this earthly life, with their limited understanding of God and of God’s Son that they had while on earth. In heaven,

many largely ignorant persons will be enlightened as to the glories of Christ – the center of heaven’s glory – for all eternity! Growth in knowledge, love, and service forever in heaven! If they served God on earth (having a positive will in worship of God, as best that they knew on earth), they will also serve Him in heaven, but with the glorious personal knowledge of God’s Son – Jesus Christ!

On earth, there are people who belong to Christ without their even knowing it! Why? Because God Almighty – the All-Knowing God – looks not only at the ‘head’ of a person (i.e. The partial and inaccurate knowledge), but God “focuses” on what determines the spiritual condition of a person – namely, his HEART and his WILL!

C.S. Lewis (the greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century) saw this truth clearly: “There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ, but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. These are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ’s birth may have been in this position.” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 162)

Yes, those who have been fortunate enough to hear and to receive the Gospel message of Christ’s “Finished Work” – these persons are among earth’s most privileged persons, and the earth’s most responsible persons! “To whom much is given, much is required.” He/she who enjoys the message and the benefits of the message of Christ is he/she who is most responsible to share the Good News with those who “lie in darkness”!

But, after all the “unanswered questions” are laid aside, what is it that determines whether or not a person is on the “right track” that leads to heaven, or on the “wrong track” that leads to hell? Jesus gave us the answer in the Gospels, and the apostles emphasized the same message! Jesus, Paul, and the other early writers all said the same thing – it all boils down to the condition of a person’s HEART (WILL)! Not how smart one is! Not how religious one is! Not how well-to-do one is! Not what race one belongs to! Not one’s nationality! Not one’s tradition, background, status, or orthodoxy! These are not to be despised, but none of these can bring salvation (the forgiveness of sins) and a personal and intimate relationship with God!

What is in a man’s heart (will) determines the spiritual condition of a man! That is what Jesus (and the apostles) repeatedly taught!

“People often see you as you are outside; But Jesus really sees you as you are inside.”
(Words of a song, which I sang many years ago when I was a college student, on a
“Gospel Team Trip”)

So God – the Holy Spirit – challenges the “Free Will” of every human being, for unless the will of man (sinner) is surrendered to the Triune God (Creator of man), the human will continues to be wild and willful and hurtful to one’s own self and to everyone who “gets in his way” – and eventually that self-centered volition will bring havoc to himself – partially on earth and totally in eternity!

Many years ago, the great leader Joshua confronted Israel with the all-important choice: *“Choose ye this day whom ye will serve! As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!”*

Every person must make a choice – for time and for eternity – whom he will serve! God or Satan? Life or Death? Self or Others? Everyone must choose, for Jesus said there is no moral neutrality! As someone once said, *“There is no razor edge of neutrality upon which we may balance precariously!”*

Notes C. S. Lewis, “Their free will is trembling inside them like the needle of a compass. But this is a needle that can choose. It can point to its true North; but it need not. Will the needle swing round, and settle, and point to God? He can help it to do so. He cannot force it. He cannot, so to speak, put out His own hand and pull it into the right position, for then it would not be free will anymore. Will it point North? That is the question on which all hangs.”

-By Ron Christian-



“DOES GOD GENUINELY DESIRE FOR ME AND FOR EVERY OTHER PERSON TO GO TO HEAVEN?”

God loves the human race, including the “least” and the “last”, the overlooked, the “most unworthy”. The high and the low, the most gifted and the least gifted, the wealthy and the poor, the beautiful and the ugly, the powerful ones and the weak ones, the high profile ones and the obscure ones, the highly educated ones and the most illiterate ones. The highly-positioned ones and the most overlooked ones, the unusually beautiful ones, and the out-right repulsive ones, the young adults and the decrepit aging ones, the up-and-out moralistic sinners and the down-and-out immoral and ‘raw’ sinners!

If God would have His way, there would not be one person who would die in his (unrepented) sin! If God had His way (that is, if His “perfect will” were carried out) there would be universal, spiritual health, as the result of the forgiveness of every sin of every person! None would perish, and all would enjoy abundant life on this earth (amidst problems and trials) and enjoy eternal life hereafter! Hell was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels (demons) – Not for Human Beings!

God is doing everything in His power (short of coercion) to keep every soul out of hell, and to take every human to heaven! But, one’s eternal destiny depends upon one thing, and one thing only – the kind of “heart response” that a person gives to God’s revelation of Light that He gives to a person (even if that “Light” comes in a diminished form of “General Revelation” and not “Special Revelation”). Only those will be in heaven who have honestly and positively responded in their hearts to God’s revelation of “Light”! (Whether it is response to the “Concealed Christ” or response to the “Known Christ”)!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

It is encouraging for us members of a “Fallen Race” to know that God did not abandon us when, through our Race’s Representative, the entire human race miserably “fell into sin!”

Through a rather long and complex plan (over a period of many centuries), God finally brought His Son into the world to accomplish His plan for “world redemption”. No human can fully understand the “mystery of iniquity” (sin), or the “mystery of divinely – accomplished redemption through the cross and resurrection” or the “mystery of the human free will”. But God, nevertheless, mightily “works His miracles” of human transformation!

We humans seem to be impressed (even awe-struck) by large crowds – whether they are in an athletic stadium, or at a political convention, or even in a large sanctuary at a “mega-church”! However, the “large crowd” surrounding the “Throne of God” in heaven will be “mammoth” (huge, awe-inspiring, over-whelming when compared to any human crowd on earth). God of that great gathering of the Saints gave the apostle John a vision for all the ages!

He wrote, *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”* (Revelations 7:9-10)

Based on an understanding of the “wideness of God’s mercy” which encompasses every human being on earth – that mercy being extended to all persons. *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”* (Revelations 7:9)

Through the “light that lighteth every person who comes into the world”, revealing either the “concealed Christ” or the “known Christ” it is likely that the vast majority of the entire human race will compose that “vast multitude that no one could count” around the throne of God, all praising the “LAMB OF GOD”!

TIME FOR A PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“Dear Lord, I had to exercise sincere ‘faith’ in You when I became a Christian (believer), and to live a life pleasing to You, O God, I must live by faith (trust) in You! Even though I cannot see You, O God, with my physical eyes, I must believe that you are ‘real’, that you are a ‘person’, that your ‘Master Plan’ is being accomplished in some amazing ways (on the stage of human history and even on the little stage of my own life). I further believe that life on earth is being observed, and that the life of every human being will someday be examined and will be ‘judged’ justly by Jesus Christ. I also believe that justice will be vindicated, that integrity will be honored, that righteousness will triumph, that holiness will prevail against all sin, that peace will prevail against all trouble-makers, that the love of God will sweep over the earth like the huge waves roll over the ocean! Yes, I believe all of this, even though, O God, I admit that sometimes certain ‘doubts’ about these ‘spiritual realities’ plague me. When wrong seems often so strong, I still believe in You and your Word. I still believe in a glorious ‘HEREAFTER’! I still believe You, O God, will take me home SOMEDAY!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Many believers (like you) have met their physical death with sincere faith in Christ, and with joy in their heart! A few have left amazing testimonies behind, as they were dying: *“Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus!”* (John Arthur Lyth)

-By Ron Christian-



WILL YOU BELIEVE GOD OR SATAN?

It is as if nothing had changed since that moment eons ago when man was presented with his stark choice: Would he believe God or Satan? Time is still holding its breath for our answer. Which way will each man, each woman, decide now?

*“No one can serve two masters.”
Matthew 6:24*

-By Catherine Marshall-



HAVE YOU HEEDED GOD’S WARNING OF ONCOMING JUDGMENT?

Jeremiah, in the Old Testament, is called the ‘weeping prophet’. God called the prophet to go to the wayward and sinning nation of Israel (God’s chosen people), to warn them of impending doom and destruction. Jeremiah, who loved his Israelite brethren so very much, saw the downward spiral of his people.

The Israelites, for many decades, had been given warnings from God, opportunity to repent and to return to the worship of the one and only true God. But, instead, God’s people had chosen to forsake Jehovah and to follow after the pagan gods.

Idolatry was the ‘millstone’ around the neck of Israel, which eventually brought destruction to Israel (captivity in the pagan country of Babylon)! It is no wonder that Jeremiah ‘wept’ and ‘wept’. His people (Israelites) ‘turned their backs’ upon Jeremiah and they persecuted him bitterly! Jeremiah watched his brethren (the brethren he greatly loved) go ‘head-strong’ into ‘captivity’, and Jeremiah knew that this long-in-coming judgment from God was because of the hardened heart of God’s apostate people!

As Jeremiah carefully observed the downward spiral of sin, of his own people, Jeremiah had to ‘weep’. It is important to note that the tears of Jeremiah were simply the expression of God’s ‘invisible tears’.

When God saw the wayward ways of Israel, the gross practices of pagan worship, the insensitivity of the Israelites to the tender voice of God’s love – when God, through many decades, had been ‘seeing’ all of these wicked actions and attitudes of Israel, God’s heart was very heavy and His eyes were ‘full of tears’.

When God viewed the wicked practices of pagan religions, He was very ‘shocked’! How could Israel, who had received abundant ‘blessings’ from Jehovah (primarily, the

established 'special covenant'), how could Israel become so 'unfaithful to its covenant', how could Israel (like a 'dog in heat') chase after the disgusting worship of 'Baal' (with all of its 'degrading' and 'licentious' religious practices)?

God is 'shocked' and God is 'surprised' that His own people (Israel) could forsake their 'ancient teachings' (10 Commandments, etc.) and embrace such 'evil pagan practices'! And, we can easily add to this 'sad picture', that Jesus, doubtlessly, was not only 'sad' (He wept), but that Jesus was also 'shocked' when He realized that His own people (Jews) would choose wrongly (legalism, ritualism), rather than would choose rightly (transformed life through the Messiah, who lived and who taught, among them).

God (through Jesus) 'thought better' of the Jews, who were exposed to the truth of Jesus, during the time that Jesus traveled throughout Galilee and Judea. When Jesus 'wept' on that historic day, as He looked at the great temple in Jerusalem (and declared its immanent 'doom'), God (in heaven) was also 'weeping'.

Jesus' weeping was an 'outward and visible' revelation of the 'weeping' of God Almighty. Not only was Jesus' heart 'heavy' (grief-stricken) on that 'sad day', but the very heart of the Heavenly Father was 'very heavy'. Also, as noted, when Jeremiah was 'weeping' because he anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem (which, indeed, happened in 587 B.C.), God also was 'weeping'.

-By Ron Christian-



WHY DOES SCRIPTURE CALL UNBELIEF THE FOUNTAINHEAD OF ALL SIN?

Why does Scripture not only call unbelief a sin, but declare it to be the fountainhead of all sin, the sin that encompasses all other sins? Because by our unbelief we reject Jesus Christ, who He is, all He stands for, what He came to earth to do.

"[The Holy Spirit] will convict the world concerning sin... because they do not believe in Me."

John 16:8-9

-By Catherine Marshall

**CAN GOD BE 'SHOCKED' AND 'SADDENED' WHEN HUMANS
MAKE WRONG MORAL DECISIONS?**

- BY RON CHRISTIAN -

CAN GOD BE ‘SHOCKED’ BY THE DECISIONS THAT I MAKE?

By the ‘way’ we live, do we make God ‘weep’ or do we make God rejoice? There is no ‘being’ anywhere that possesses a ‘wider range of emotions’, than the ‘being’ of Almighty God. Because God is infinite, He, of course, can feel and He can express many different emotions (such as ‘joy’ and ‘anger’) ‘at the same time’, that is, simultaneously!

God can express great joy because a sinner just now got ‘saved’, and, at the same time, God can express great ‘anger’ because another person has just now left the ‘fold of goodness’ to enter the ‘fold of evil’! Not only does God have a ‘large range’ of emotions, but God also has the ability to express all of His emotions, according to His appropriate reaction to every single human being.

Because He is the ‘perfect’ God, He is able to feel perfectly with every single person (and, of course, simultaneously)! If it is ‘appropriate’(just) for God to express ‘shock’ because of an unanticipated ‘decision’ by a person, then, of course, God will express ‘shock’ (and this response is not a ‘play acting’ stunt by God; in other words, God is honestly ‘shocked’ because of a certain person’s decision!).

The moral decision that some persons (or nations) make ‘appropriately’ causes God ‘great sorrow’ (‘tears’)! There are some moral decisions that provoke God’s ‘anger’ (a redemptive anger, not a vindictive or a revengeful anger)! These emotional reactions are ‘basic reactions’ which all human beings experience.

If Man is made in the ‘image of God’, if humans (imperfectly) ‘mirror’ the being of God, then the fact that humans sometimes feel ‘sorrow’, sometimes feel ‘shock’, and sometimes feel ‘anger’, strongly suggests that God Himself expresses the same ‘kinds’ of emotions that humans experience.

Obviously, the God who made us humans is the God whose emotions are ‘perfectly under His control’, whose emotions are ‘totally pure and unpolluted’, and whose emotions are perfectly expressed! God reacts to persons at the right time, and with the right degree of emotional reaction, and always for redemptive purposes (i.e., for correction and for healing of ‘hurting’ persons).

-By Ron Christian-



WHAT ACTIONS OF MANKIND MAKE GOD ‘WEEP’?

When the Jews wrongly chose the way of legalism, and chose to reject the way of ‘justification’ through the ‘way of Christ’, Jesus was filled with sorrow (for there is no way to heaven except through the ‘regenerating power’ of Jesus).

When the Israelites (hundreds of years before the coming of Christ to earth) chose ‘Baal’ instead of ‘Jehovah’, not only was Jeremiah filled with sorrow (issuing forth in many ‘tears’), but God, too, was filled with sorrow (also issuing forth in ‘tears’).

Jeremiah was known as the ‘weeping prophet’, but we must remember that Jeremiah was simply the ‘outward’ instrument of the invisible God (whom Jeremiah was serving and obeying). When Israel was carried into ‘Babylonian Captivity’ (587 B.C.), and also when the city of Jerusalem was near to being razed to the ground, by the Romans (70 A.D.), God was the ‘weeping God’.

The ‘tears of God’ are ‘bigger’ than the ‘biggest tears’ of the most ‘grief-stricken’ and ‘sorrow-filled’ person on earth! There is no ‘grief but what God ‘feels’ it. “Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art. Enter every trembling heart!”

-By Ron Christian-



WHAT FREEDOM CAN I ENJOY IF I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

It is the glorious message of the Bible that man can be freed from his sinful bondage! Christ gives liberty to man. If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed! This liberty, however, is not a selfish liberty, but it is a liberty to serve Christ, instead of self!

The paradox of the Christian’s redemption is that he is redeemed to become a slave! A slave, not of passion, but of love; a slave, not of self-will, but of Christ’s will; a slave, not of sin, but of righteousness!

“But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” (Romans 6:22)

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Liberty is not to be abused. Christian liberty is liberty to serve Christ, and the motivation for this service is LOVE! Christ loved man so much that He bought man with the price

of His own blood! *“For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:20)*

How can God be glorified? By living a life of love and service to God and to our fellowmen!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, forgive me for my selfish ideas of freedom! Freedom to do as I please, leads me to bondage to my self-centeredness (a very cruel slavery). I am ‘sick’ of my own self-centered ways – ways that result in my bringing great hurt to others, and great disillusionment to myself. I see now that I was made to serve, not to be served; not to center attention on myself, but to center attention on the One who made me, and on the ones who live all around me. I am presently a ‘mess’; please save me, and make me a ‘message’ (of unselfish love)! Please transform me from within me! Give me what I most need – love for hate, a cool head for a hot temper, forgiveness for resentment, confidence for fear, relaxation for anxiety, peace for guilt, integration for divided loyalties, direction for confusion, companionship for loneliness!

You alone can truly change me – for time and eternity. Give me that ‘abundant life’ that You, Jesus, promised so long ago! The greatest freedom of all is the freedom from the tyranny of myself. I have found, Dear God, that myself at the center of my life, makes my life off-center and very miserable! Crucify my self-centered self, and give me resurrection to my ‘new self’ which is centered in the mighty and beautiful Christ! Then, my new self will daily bow low at the feet of Christ, and then (in humility and in confidence) I will stand tall before everything else! Freedom in Christ is the only true (and glorious) freedom there is! Thank You, a thousand ‘Thank You’s’! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Always remember that you are free to choose your master, but you are not free to accept or reject the consequences of your choice!

-By Ron Christian-



SALVATION – BOTH A MOMENTARY AND PROGRESSIVE EXPERIENCE WHICH BRINGS SECURITY, JOY, AND LOVE!

To be saved (in the New Testament sense) is to be re-made in Christ, or to be in process

of that great change. That is why the Bible sometimes speaks of the converted as being saved (Acts 2:47). When the Holy Spirit is within us and the transformation has begun, God anticipates the perfection of His work and says that we are saved.

The signs are not to be mistaken. Life has a new centre – Christ and not self. The fruit of the Spirit appears: love, even to the unloved; joy, which fills the heart and lights the eyes; peace, seeping into every crevice of our being; patience, kindness, goodness, integrity, humility and self-control (Gal. 5:22,23). These things can't be overlooked when they appear in anyone. *And they grow.*

What bliss there is in personal salvation – to know oneself clean and fully forgiven, to be sure of God and certain that life has purpose, to have the fear of the future and of death all taken away, to be convinced of heaven and of meeting our dear ones again..!

How can one help but thrill to the rapture of it. Saved! Assured! Tracing no part of our salvation to our own deservings, but believing it completely on the pledged word of God! In the exuberance of their gladness some Christians have said that no shadow falls on their happiness at all.

-By William Sangster –



HOW IS GOD'S 'ANGER' EXPRESSED TOWARD ME WHEN I SIN?

When I take the 'low road' of sin, rather than the 'high road' of righteousness, I invoke the 'anger' of God. God's anger is not a 'vindictive' anger, not a 'resentful' anger, not a 'destructive' anger. It is 'anger' borne out of the 'deep hurt' of God's heart. Like the illustration cited above, God is 'shocked' that I would fail to embrace all of the resources and the benefits and the advantages that God makes available to me!

The resources were available to me (during my particular trials and tests and temptations), so why did I not avail myself of those God-given 'resources' (resources that are capable of enabling me, in spite of my 'struggles', to 'overcome' my many problems, rather than to be 'overcome' by my many problems)? For instance, regarding 'temptation', the Bible tells me that, during my temptation, God 'will make for me a way of escape'!

God is with me during temptation, and He (wisely) has a specific way for me to 'escape pitfalls' of evil! God's anger, when I fail in a God-given test, is not a vindictive anger (a 'hurtful' anger), but instead, God's anger is a 'holy anger', an 'anger' that motivates God

to help me and to restore me to wholeness once again! It is the kind of ‘anger’ that a good parent experiences, as the parent eagerly awaits the return of his wayward child!

This divine ‘anger’ is borne out of the sad heart of a holy and loving God, the anger that God feels because of His knowledge of what His dear child is (tragically) experiencing because of the ravishes of sin, in ‘the far country’! God is ‘upset’ (emotionally disappointed) when I fail morally.

God (like a good parent) knows that I should maintain my steadfast ‘walk’ on the ‘high road’ of spiritual growth and dynamic involvement with people. That is, that I should maintain my creative involvement in God’s work through the use of my ‘spiritual gifting’ and my particular talents.

There is never any need for me to ‘waste’ my life in selfish and in ‘fleshly’ living! God’s resources are available to me, to enable me to ‘stay my steadfast course’ on the ‘high road’ of holy living.

If I leave that ‘path’, through my willful sinning, it is no wonder that my loving God is provoked to holy anger regarding my wrong actions! God sees what I could be (faithful), in contrast to what I have become (unfaithful, causing sin to ‘ravish’ me)!

As in the case of Adam and Eve, who were (tragically) devastated by sin (disobedience), so it is, likewise, true of every other person (including every Christian) – anyone can disobey God, and, thus, anyone can lose his fellowship with the Creator!

When a Christian sins, God ‘weeps’, God is ‘shocked’, God is ‘angry’! God is angry because He well knows how devastating (ruinous) sin can be in the life of the one who sins, as well as in the lives of persons around the sinning person! God hates sin, with a ‘holy intensity’, and God hates what sin can do to His ‘choice creatures’!

-Ron Christian-



HOW DOES GOD REACT WHEN HUMANS MAKE WRONG DECISIONS?

When the Jewish temple was first destroyed in 587 B.C., and then much later when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., God ‘wept’! But I believe that God also (understandably) was filled with ‘anger’.

Think of this simple illustration: When a son ‘goes astray’ (leaves his parents and

abandons his moral standards), the reaction from a caring (godly) parent is at least threefold: (1) great sadness and grief and ‘tears’, (2) great shock (‘how could my child, who was given so many privileges and so much Christian teaching, decide to reject his parents and decide to abandon the precious principles of Christianity?’) (3) Great anger – ‘I am incensed and, frankly, I am angry, that my wayward son has chosen the ‘low path of evil’ (immorality and selfishness), and that he is wasting valuable time that could be spent building his life and his character and developing his talents.

To see that he is now careless and wild and purposeless, in contrast to what he could be just now, if only he would have made wise decisions! Says the heartbroken parent: “I am very angry, because he is not the kind of person that he was created to be! He is spending his ‘resources’ on ‘evil endeavors’ which will ‘take him nowhere’ in his future life! How could my son, who had so many ‘advantages’, waste his life, living in the pig pen?”

If humans (fathers), whose children have abandoned the ‘way of righteousness’, experience all three of these reactions (‘tears’, ‘shock’, ‘anger’), why shouldn’t God (whose emotions are perfectly integrated) also feel these three ‘emotions’ (and why shouldn’t God express these three emotions) – when a nation today makes ‘foolish’ and ‘selfish’ decisions (like the tragic decision of the Supreme Court in 1973, to ‘abort’ babies)?

We love to speak about the ‘love of God’ (and rightly so, since God’s love is the major focus in the New Testament), but we seldom mention the ‘wrath of God’. God’s wrath is stirred (provoked) when I choose evil rather than righteousness, when I choose dishonesty rather than integrity, when I choose unfairness rather than justice, when I choose impure thoughts rather than holy thoughts, when I harbor ulterior motives rather than sincere motives, when I choose deceptive schemes rather than transparent actions, when I choose resentment rather than forgiveness. God’s wrath is stirred when I choose ‘the way of evil’ rather than ‘the way of righteousness’!

-By Ron Christian-



WHY SHOULD I TAKE THE WAY OF CHRIST?

To go against the grain of God’s will and way is to go against the grain of reality, and you cannot go against the grain of reality without going against the grain of your own being!

To refuse to serve God is to deny yourself joy and pleasure, for there is no lasting or real pleasure except in the will and the plan of God.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

To remember your Creator, is to respect yourself, for it is in the remembrance of your Creator that you find realization of your own personhood. Finding the Savior, you find your own truest self. Everyone in this life gets negative consequences for wrong moral choices, or positive results for right moral choices!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“I see now that I am made by God and for God, and that life that is lived without reverence for God is a life that is a useless and a miserable life! O God, my Creator, my Savior ‘in Thee I live and move and have my being’. Without You, I can do nothing of any true value to others or any lasting eternal significance. I was made to fellowship with You, my God! Trying to live without You is like a fish trying to live without water; like a stomach trying to exist without food; like a pair of lungs trying to function without oxygen!

“As the heart was made for love, so my Soul, O God, was made for You. One man said, “The soul is restless until it rests in God!” O God, I am ‘doubly’ yours – You created me as a special ‘God-breathed’ creature, and You redeemed me when You shed your cleansing blood on Mount Calvary! Increase my deepening sense of reverence for You, Almighty God, and finally welcome me to your heavenly home where I shall join the countless multitudes that will praise and reverence and worship You forever! What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see, and when I shall bow in worship at His Pierced Feet!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Learn daily to ascribe all praise and worship unto Him who bought you with the high cost of His own precious blood! Make worship your ‘way of life’!

-By Ron Christian-



**WILL SOME BE SURPRISED WHEN THEY FIND THEMSELVES IN
HEAVEN?**

Of course, only God knows who and how many will be saved at the end. But it is gratifying to know that the God of the Universe is a “God of Love”. As demonstrated by the Incarnation (i.e., the compassionate life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection of God’s Son who best demonstrated the “wideness of God’s mercy” which is wide indeed)!

Fulton Sheen, the highly respected TV and radio speaker to many millions, and probably the best known Catholic communicator during the 20th century, wrote some thought-provoking and insightful comments on Jesus’ words regarding compassion, in Matthew 25:31-46. “His (Jesus’) words even imply that philanthropy has deeper depths than is generally realized. The great emotions of compassion and mercy are traced to Him. There is more to human deeds than the doers are aware. He identified every act of kindness as an expression of sympathy with Himself. Only an Omniscient Will could ever judge the motives behind all philanthropy to decide when it was charity, and when it was self-praise. That He claimed He would do and with such finality that the repercussions would be eternal.” (Fulton Sheen, *Life of Christ*, pg. 209)

If we understand the amazing impact of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25, it seems quite apparent that Jesus, as a Judge in the End, will judge each person’s Heart Response to the needs of one’s fellow men, even if some of the compassion givers do not have a so-called ‘evangelical conversion’. Jesus said of the compassionate persons (who do all kinds of good deeds) that ‘inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’ There will be those, after they have died physically, who will be surprised that they were welcomed into God’s eternal adobe (heaven). It is the condition of the Heart (whether it is compassionate or not; whether it is self-preoccupied or instead others-oriented), not the theological accuracy of the Mind. It is not how much we know about God (although mental comprehension is not to be despised), but how available we are to love others. We must be Doers of the Word, and not simply Hearers.

A Tender Heart, which issues forth in Compassionate Actions, determines the authenticity of our lives – and (apparently from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25) it will be the tender heart and the active hand that will determine the eternal destiny of each person. I believe (according to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25) that there will be countless multitudes of persons in heaven who did many works of compassion on earth, without them truly understanding that their motivation for these loving and kind deeds was the ‘heart of God’. Without realizing it, they were ‘walking in all the light’ that they had, without realizing that it was the Compassionate Christ who was the One who gave them both the desire to do loving acts and also the power and energy and zeal and endurance to consistently do their ‘acts of mercy’. Many will be surprised that in eternity they are, praised and accepted, by the Christ of Mercy, whom they ignorantly

imitated imperfectly, but sincerely, on earth!

Only compassionate persons make it to heaven, but there are many truly compassionate people on earth who will go to heaven when they die – because their heart was a ‘channel of Christ’s mercy’ on earth, even though they did not have a personal ‘evangelical conversion’. Such compassionate persons are truly born again (living compassionate lives, pale but sincere reflections of Christ’s compassion), but these same persons could never be able to outline theologically the ‘steps in becoming a Christian’.

All they know is that they desire to help people, to alleviate their terrible sufferings, to befriend the lonely, to give a listening ear to the troubled words of persons, to give a generous portion of their money to help the poor. To visit those who are grief-stricken, to share their presence with those in prison, to give away their talents to bless the despairing, and so much more. You may respond to these compassion-oriented persons that they could not do all these ‘acts of charity’ unless they are ‘born-again Christians’. Precisely! These ‘fruits of godliness’ do not come from mere ‘sentimental inclinations’. No. The one who is humbly compassionate (i.e., the one who has sincere motives, not to glorify his own ‘ego’, but instead to genuinely help others, with no desire for personal profit or praise) – I say, the one who is humbly compassionate is the same one who is a ‘child of God’ – truly ‘born again’. Such a person has surrendered his heart and his will to others – to serve, to care, to empathize, and to be an instrument of healing. Such a person (and there are multitudes of these kinds of persons, among all classes and races and religious affiliations throughout the world) whose life is largely defined by voluntary works of charity, would be dumbfounded if you asked him if he had been ‘born again’. Because such persons cannot ‘pinpoint’ a time of personal conversion, and they cannot intelligently describe the meaning of ‘repentance’, ‘confession’, ‘justification’, ‘regeneration’, and all the other difficult theological (salvation) terms, does NOT mean that these persons are unconverted. When I accepted Christ (many years ago), all I said was “Save my Soul!” (I repeated that simple prayer about 4 times).

One thing is certain – the multitudes of compassionate-oriented persons in our world (i.e., those who obviously minister to the hurting ones, in a selfless and genuinely caring way) – these persons are the servants of Christ, doing the work of Christ, energized by the power of Christ, affirmed by the praise and blessing of Christ. When did these selfless persons meet Christ? When did they become ‘born again’? In the ‘case’ of many of these compassionate persons, with no ‘evangelical connection’, perhaps they were ‘converted’ when they first laid their eyes upon some suffering person. We do not know the ‘how’ and ‘when’ of their conversion, but Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them”. The fruit of Christ-like compassion means that they definitely belong to Christ.

Although, of course I cannot prove it, I personally believe (based on the teaching of

Jesus in Matthew 25), that there will be a multitude of persons in heaven who, while they lived on earth, did not profess a deep and personal relationship with Christ. But, who are in heaven (apparently to their own surprise), because they ‘walked in all the light of truth’ that they knew – namely, the ‘light of true compassion’ towards their fellow man on earth. They did not realize, while they carried on their active life of compassion on earth, that the very origin (fountain-head) of their compassion was the ‘compassionate heart of Jesus Himself’! Such persons responded to the ‘saving grace’ of Jesus rather ignorantly, when they committed their entire life and energies and talents and skills and training and motivations to caring for the imprisoned and the starving and the weak and the oppressed and the widow and the poor and the injured, etc., etc. They manifested the ‘fruits of Christlikeness’, so, indeed, they surely possessed the very person of Christ (the Holy Spirit) in their hearts, even though they never really understood the (theological) dynamics of ‘evangelical conversion’.

Even though some ‘sheep’ in the Shepherd’s fold may not personally know the Shepherd very well (intellectually), nevertheless all ‘sheep’ who are doing the will of the Shepherd (i.e., loving acts of compassion towards their fellow man) definitely ‘belong’ to the Shepherd and are loved by the Shepherd, and all sheep, regardless of the uniqueness of their ‘condition’, will be wonderfully rewarded (Matthew 25) after they die physically.

Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.” Yes, it is not hard to discern the ‘fruits of godliness’ in the lives of many Christians (and even in the lives of many ‘God-fearing persons’ like Cornelius in Acts 10, who believed in God before he believed in Jesus). However, Jesus also said, “Judge not that ye be not judged.” (Matthew 7:1) No one is wise enough, holy enough, or powerful enough to judge the ‘spiritual life’ of any other human being.

C.S. Lewis believed that, regardless of the outward appearances of people, no one knew for sure just, where another person was in his ‘spiritual life’. Lewis believed that all persons, at all times, were either ‘getting closer to God’ or were ‘moving farther away from God’ – and that some of the ‘most religious ones’ might be the very ones who, in reality, were ‘moving away from God’ at that time! In his very popular book, *Mere Christianity*, this greatest of the Christian apologists of the 20th century, wrote: “The world does not consist of 100 percent Christians and 100 percent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name; some of them are clergymen.” (pg. 63)

God judges all persons based on the light they have received and how they have responded (and are responding) to that light. The great Presbyterian scholar, J. Gresham Machen, said, “No one knows how little a person can believe and still be saved.” Let us leave the determination of people’s ‘eternal destiny’ in the hands of the all-wise, all

knowing, all loving, and all merciful God!

-By Ron Christian-



**GOD'S ABOUNDING MERCY FOR ALL WHO ARE IN 'IGNORANCE' AND
'DARKNESS'!**

UNIVERSAL LIGHT

By Charles Wesley

True light of the whole world, appear,
Answer in us thy character,
Thou uncreated Sun;
Jesus, thy beams on all are shed,
That all may by thy beams be led
To that eternal throne.

Lightened by thy interior ray
Thee every child of Adam may
His unknown God adore,
And following close thy secret grace
Emerge into that glorious place
Where darkness is no more.

The universal light thou art,
And turned to thee the darkest heart
A glimmering spark may find,
Let man reject it or embrace,
Thou offerest once thy saving grace
To me, and all mankind.

Light of my soul, I follow thee,
In humble faith on earth to see
Thy perfect day of love,
And then with all thy saints in light
To gain the beatific sight
Which makes their heaven above.

(Taken from John and Charles Wesley – Sections: pg. 117)

John 10:11-18: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” (Jesus)

“We think in terms of borders, boundaries, and other boxes, so Jesus’ statement that there are sheep from outside of our fold can be troubling to us. Can you belong to Jesus and not belong to the Church? Can non-Christians claim to membership with the people of God? What other folds could Jesus be talking about? No one knows the answer because God has consistently kept the list of who is in and who is out an impenetrable secret. In addition, God has proven over and over that He is just not into boundaries the way we are. We, like sheep, have little business wondering who might be in other folds of interest to the Shepherd.” (Taken from Devotional Book entitled “*Forward Day By Day*” - Feb. thru April 2012; pg. 94)

In the early Church (just following the ascension of Jesus back to His heavenly home), many thousands of persons accepted the message of salvation which the apostles preached. However, the Jewish unbelieving leaders (including the Jewish council), were furious and the apostles were brutally persecuted. On one occasion, the Jewish council was so furious that it intended to kill some of Jesus’ apostles. In that council, however, was one God-fearing member (though not a Christian), named Gamaliel. Gamaliel was a Pharisee who was respected as a teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures. He did not succumb to the strong ‘peer pressure’ of his fellow councilmen. Instead, He “stood up and ordered the men (the accused apostles) to be sent out so the council could confer.” Among the many words of warning to his fellow council members, he said the following: “Fellow Jews, you need to act with great care in your treatment of these fellows...So here’s my advice: in this case, just let these men go. Ignore them. If this is just another movement arising from human enthusiasm, it will die out soon enough. But then again, if God is in this, you won’t be able to stop it – unless, of course, you’re ready to fight against God!” What was the response of these angry Jewish leaders to this very wise fellow council member? The Bible says, “The council was convinced, so they brought the apostles back in.” Tragically (and unjustly), the apostles were flogged, but they were released back to their joyful task of preaching the ‘saving message’ of the living Lord! (Account from Acts 5:33-40)

Phillips Brooks, one of the greatest preachers of the 19th century, writes about the “wideness of God’s Mercy”, as vividly demonstrated in the wise response of Gamaliel (as recorded above). Even though Gamaliel obviously was not a Christian believer at the time he defended Christ’s apostles, this God-fearing man found acceptance by the Lord of love and truth! It is the ‘heart’ (intent) of a man – not his intellectual understanding – that God ‘focuses’ on! Whether or not Gamaliel became an informed believer of Jesus Christ on this planet, no one knows, but it is certain that God will not refuse ‘entrance into His (eternal) glory’ to anyone whose heart is open to truth (as he best understands

truth on this ‘fallen planet’). What such a searching person failed to comprehend (regarding ‘full salvation’) on this earth, he will surely more fully comprehend (and progressively) in eternity, taught by the loving Lord and by His assigned teachers. Gamaliel surely must be in heaven!

Brooks notes, “The final glory of Gamaliel lies there. He believed that God was the only life of this world, that all, which did not live in Him, must die. We do not know whether Gamaliel ever became a Christian before he died, whether, in this life, he ever saw that the true light, which these poor prisoners adored, was true and gave himself to Christ. The legends say that he did. History seems to say that he did not. At least we know that if we have rightly read his character and story, he made the Christian faith more possible for other men, and he must somewhere or sometime – if not here, then beyond – have come to the truth and to the Christ Himself. I wish that I could speak to the Gamaliel’s here today, men not Christians, but men who are earnest, thoughtful, tolerant, and sure of God, pure and sincere, and ready from the light which God shall show them. Be sure, so I would say to them; be sure that no man in this world can be earnest and sure of God without helping the world to faith, often to a faith clearer than his own, or without going on himself to a completer and completer faith, and certainly at last somewhere coming to the perfect faith himself. Therefore, be earnest and keep sure of God! Be earnest and keep sure of God! We who believe in Christ dare to be confident and say that we know that to every such soul the Way, the Truth, the Life must show Himself at last!” (Phillips Brooks, *“Sermons Preached In English Churches”*, pp. 263-264)

“Through the Word, the Son, God created everything. That is also, why the Word of God is very near to every person. John states that “...the light that enlightens every man”. In the heart of every person, there is this light, this spark of light that always lights up when we understand something, when something “enlightens” us.

Christ is this light – the light that has always enlightened every person who sincerely seeks the true and the good. Many people do not yet know where this light in their life comes from. They do still not know the source of the light. The light also meets with the resistance of darkness. Light and darkness are engaged in battle and have been at all times and in the heart of every person.” (Christoph Cardinal Schonborn, *My Jesus*, pg. 35)

Fulton Sheen (the most famous Catholic of the 20th Century) writes; “Traveling through all those worlds, I never saw so many ‘Christ’s’ in my life, Christ, yes. But you say they don’t know him. No, they do not consciously know him, but He is in them as long as they do not rebel; He is in them by their sufferings. I was hungry; I was sick; I was naked; I was homeless. When? When? When? No, they didn’t know, but Christ was in them. Remember these words were said to the nations, to the Gentiles, and that’s how

they were saved. We will be surprised to see that many of those who have not known Christ as we have known Him may be ahead of us in the kingdom of Heaven because they were always with His cross, even though it was unwitting.” (*Through the Year with Fulton Sheen*”; pg. 209)

-By Ron Christian-



**GOD’S ALL-ENCOMPASSING LOVE FOR YOU, FROM YOUR BEGINNING,
IS WONDERFULLY EXPERIENCED AT YOUR CONVERSION!**

What is it that comes in that day when a man begins the Christian life? Across a resolution which may be hard or easy for him, he sets forth into a new way of living. How often I have tried to tell to you the story of that newness! How many of you have known it well out of your own experience! He who has been living alone begins to live with God. He who has been living for himself begins to live for other men. New motives are open within him; new tasks are spread before him. Old things are passed away; all things are become new. And yet consider! Is not a very large part of the impulse which propels the new life born of the late discovered knowledge of what the life has been before? If you want to make a man a Christian, how shall you begin? Will you tell him of Christ as if then for the first time he and Christ had anything to do with one another? Will you emphasize the moment of the change so strongly that it shall seem as if, before that, as he had cared nothing for the Saviour, the Saviour also had cared nothing for him? No; you will tell him, if you know your blessed work, of a power which has been in his life from the moment that his life began. You will bid him open his ears and hear the voice of a Saviour who has been always pleading. You will call up, out of the past, signs of God’s love which he has never seen, but which have been always there. You will set those signs of a love which has always been, at the head of the progress which is yet to be. You will say, “I beseech you therefore, brother, by the mercies of God that you present your body a living sacrifice to Him.” “By all the love which He has shown you when you were most ungrateful now give yourself to Him, and go forward in His service.”

Conversion would be something very different from what it is if this were not so. The old life would go for nothing. No motive, no teaching, would come out of it. It would be as if the stream of Jordan were the stream of Lethe, bringing forgetfulness of all the past, and sending out the souls of men upon the other side as if that were the first beginning of their history. But no, take the new Christian and ask him what it means; and all the absorbing interest and hope of his story rests on this: “See what a life I have lived! I have neglected Christ; I have been selfish. I have done my will and not His; I have not

even thought about Him all the time; and yet see, He has been loving me all these years. He never has forgotten me. He has been loving me and helping from the beginning. My eyes have just been opened. I have just found it out. Henceforth that late-discovered love will be the power of my life. It will lead me forward into other ways than those in which I have been walking.”

Such be the new life when it comes to you, my friends! From childhood God has loved you, God has kept you. When you are moved to give yourself to God, let there come out of all that love and keeping one large, strong, deep assurance of God’s love. On that love cast yourself and beg forgiveness, and then go forward under its assurance, giving yourself always more and more completely to a God who does not need to give Himself to you because He has been always yours.

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the World*, pp. 300-302)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, for too long I have tried to ‘patch up my life’ through my own diligent efforts, but all my attempts at human change have proved inadequate, and sometimes completely futile and useless! I want my sins to be forgiven!

“I want my raw and injured emotions to be healed! I want clarity of thought in my confused mind! I want my dead ended conscience to be quickened and sensitized! I want my profane mouth and lips to be cleansed!

“I want my resentments and my hate for persons to be removed, and your love to replace my foul disposition.

“I want my hurtful memories to be replaced with the beautiful images of Jesus’ love for all persons.

“I want my depressed spirit to be replaced with that joy of the Lord that is ‘unspeakable and full of glory’!

“I want my body, which has been used as an instrument of unrighteousness to become a ‘tool’ for holy living – pure, noble, inoffensive, delightful, and radiant.

“Henceforth, I want to recognize that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, not the tool of uncontrolled lust and unholy passions! Make me, O God, a ‘fit vessel’ for your loving possession! Convert me thoroughly – both my conscious and my subconscious mind! I choose not to become a better person, but a new person, through the

transforming power of the resurrected Christ! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

If God can change a worm into a beautiful butterfly, then surely God is able totally to change you into the new beautiful person you want to become. The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power available to resurrect you to a NEW LIFE!

-By Ron Christian-



HOW IS MAN SAVED? (Isaiah 64:6, Ephesians 2:1-10)

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 perform 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, pg. 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 dependence 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 six-pence 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.” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 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 foolish mockery at the worst.” (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 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 altogether 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!

-By Ron Christian-



WHAT IS REPENTANCE? **(Luke 24:44-49)**

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.” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 59)

The Scriptures teach that repentance must be preached. Said Jesus, “*Thus it is written, and thus it behooved 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 (The Ten 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 one's 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.

-By Ron Christian-



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REPENTANCE **(Matthew 3:1-12)**

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 Savior, for sin can only loose its grip on one's life when one surrenders himself to the stronger hold of the Savior!

One is saved by faith. Faith is a transfer of trust from one's self to one's Savior. Saving faith is always accompanied by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin. Faith is a change of attitude toward the Savior, 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 Savior who, in turn, leads me to service. Conviction will lead me to conversion, sadness will lead me to gladness!

-By Ron Christian-



EVIDENCE OF A TRUE CHRIST-FOLLOWER!

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

WHAT SIGNS (EVIDENCE) OF “SPIRITUAL LIFE” CAN BE DISCERNED IN THE LIFE OF A TRUE FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST?

“I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, the person whose ears are open to My words – who listens to My message – and believes and trust in and clings to and relies on Him Who sent Me has (possesses now) eternal life. And he does not come into judgment – does not incur sentence of judgment, will not come under condemnation – but he has already passed over out of death into life.”

(John 5:24 Amplified Bible)

Here is a very literal translation of the Greek, noting the full significance of the Greek tense:

“Most assuredly, I am saying to you that the one who habitually hears my Word and is believing in the one having sent me, has right now eternal life, and into judgment and condemnation He does not come, but He is in a present continuing condition resulting from having passed out of death into life.” (John 5:24)

A. ESCAPE THE PRESENT CONDEMNATION AND THE JUDGMENT TO COME. (VS. 24)

John says in the third chapter, verse 36: *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

So he who is in unbelief, not only faces doom in eternity, but faces and experiences condemnation now. Likewise, he who believes in Christ, not only faces a glorious life in eternity, but experiences the very life of God within him right NOW. The punishment of rejection is both hell on earth and hell hereafter. The reward for believing is both heaven on earth and an infinitely more glorious heaven thereafter. You see, both heaven and hell are portable! They are not only places, but they are also states.

He who continues to believe in God and continues to listen to Christ’s words continues to enjoy eternal life – the very life of God within him NOW!

The Christian is not under judgment now, for he has already accepted Christ’s judgment for sin on the cross, and the Christian has judged his own sins through confession and repentance. His sins are gone, and thus the condemnation is gone.

For those who don’t believe in the Son and who don’t listen to His words, there is

condemnation now and terrible future judgment awaiting them. And Jesus will be the righteous and just JUDGE. Look at what the Word says:

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. ... To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. (John 3:22-23, 27-30)

B. STAND IN A NEW RELATIONSHIP OF LIFE. (Passed out of death into life) (vs. 24)

Man without Christ is 'dead in trespasses and sins'. Christ quickens the soul of man and resurrects him to new life.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God...An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan – the one you testified about – well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him. (John 3:21, 25-26)

One who continues (habitually) to listen to Christ's words and continues to believe (trust) in God is the one who continues to experience real spiritual life. What is real spiritual life? The Giant Redwoods of California grew gradually, and in the process of growing, weathered the storms. Spiritual maturity is the ongoing dynamic process of responding to the Spirit's call to love and obedience. We are not a finished product. Have you seen the little button which says, "PBPGINFWMY"? (Please Be Patient God Is Not Finished With Me Yet).

We are all CHRISTIANS IN THE MAKING.

Thus, spiritual death results when one has stopped trying. "It is to have come to look on all faults as ineradicable and all virtues as unattainable." (Barclay; pg.191)

C. SPIRITUAL LIFE ALSO MEANS BECOMING MORE SENSITIVE TO LIFE AND TO RELATIONSHIPS, AND TO RIGHT AND WRONG.

To degenerate in sensitivity (Feelings) is to degenerate into death. A high degree of sensitivity is a sign of a high degree of life. To no longer feel the pangs of guilt or the sword of grief and pity is to be pronounced spiritually dead. One may be physically existing and yet spiritually dead.

Someone said that what we all needed is a ‘revival of feeling’. What a statement! To feel deeply is to communicate deeply, and life depends upon communication.

He who continues to listen (give heed) to Jesus’ words and continues to commit his life to God, will find his feelings becoming increasingly sensitized. Do you have strong feelings of love? Do you feel deep hatred for sin and injustice? Is your heart moved with compassion? Do you have a heart for the lost and straying? Do you readily respond to the music of grace and glory? How is your heart? This is an indication of how carefully you are listening to Jesus’ words and believing in the Father.

D. ANOTHER SIGN OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IS TOUGH-MINDEDNESS.

If real life means tender-heartedness, it also means tough-mindedness. “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope within you.” The man of spiritual life is the man who is always listening to Jesus’ voice – and that means keeping one’s mind open to accept new truths. He who loses the thrill of new concepts and new methods has become static and plastic in his thinking, and is in the process of spiritual degeneration. Someone said that the last seven words of the dying church are: “We Never Did It That Way Before.” Unwillingness to reason, and unwillingness to adapt and to change!

The discovery of new truth is a sign of vitality and life. Are we excited to enter into religious dialogue? Are we challenged to think hard about moral and social issues, without coming to easy CONCLUSIONS? Do new books excite us? Are we enjoying the memorization and application of Bible portions? Are we open to new and different ideas, and can we discern the false from the true? Are we willing to hammer out the truth for ourselves, or are we satisfied to accept ideas secondhand from tradition and authority? Are we, like the Berean Christians in the Book of Acts, receiving the Word with all readiness of mind, and searching the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11)? Remember. “The heart cannot delight in what the mind rejects as false.”

“It has been commonly said that it is what people do that matters most, but we have frequently neglected the further observation that what people believe determines, in large measure, what they do. It may be better to worship God than to believe in Him, but if we did not have the latter we shall not long have the former.” (Trueblood, *New Man*

For Our Times, pg. 110) In other words, what our concept of God is will determine how we worship. What a man believes determines what he is. Shallow thinking means shallow living! “The Christian who wishes to be truly modern (and relevant) will have to pay the price of rigorous thinking.” (Ibid; pg.111) “It is better to face the uncomfortable truth than to accept the comforting falsehood.” (Ibid; pg.114)

E. ANOTHER SIGN OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IS THE EXERCISE OF HUMILITY AND CONFESSION.

Wrote James: “*Confess your sins one to another.*” Says Bastian: “The Christian who has caught a glimpse of the holiness and love of God will not be slow to confess his unworthiness. Nor will he be tardy in confessing his mortal weakness and his omission if he has become conscious of such. Often the impassioned prayer of the psalmist will tumble from his lips, ‘Cleanse thou me from secret faults’ – faults hid not from God or others, but from himself. And if he has knowingly sinned, he will be quick to confess and forsake that sin in the light of 1 John 2:1-2)” (*The Mature Church Member*, pg.114)

-By Ron Christian-



CAN I BE ASSURED THAT GOD WILL FORGIVE ALL MY SHAMEFUL SINS?

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”
(Psalms 32:1-2)

Sin can be defined as ‘transgression against the known Laws of God’. God’s Laws are objective and real, and violation against God’s Law incurs guilt.

The sinner stands guilty and defenseless before God and must confess nothing but moral bankruptcy. The sinner can plead nothing but God’s unmerited grace and mercy. The sinner can only receive free pardon from the hand of a forgiving God. It is not because of works of righteousness, which we have done, but it is according to God’s mercy that we are saved!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Not only are transgressions forgiven with pardon granted, but sins are covered with shame removed!

The Bible says that sinners are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we must deal – God Almighty. There is an ‘all-seeing eye’ that sees us at all times – our motives and desires and intents and secret plans. We can hide nothing from God.

Adam and Eve could not hide their sins from God. Their shame was openly exposed. The shame, which the exposure of David’s sins brought to David because of the brave prophet Nathans’s rebuke, was almost more than King David could bear. However, David’s confession of sins resulted in his sins being covered, and in his shame being removed.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O Loving God, I know that I have shamefully sinned against You, and this means that I have not only broken your Holy Laws (i.e., The Ten Commandments), but I have broken your heart (violated my sacred love relationship with You). So I am guilty on ‘both counts’: Broken the Covenant of Holy Laws, and Broken the Covenant of Holy Love! Unfaithfulness, Rebellion, and the Pride of Selfish Independence! Going my own way, rather than going your Way! Taking things into my own hands, rather than committing everything into your Loving Hands!

“Thinking I knew best, instead of acknowledging that You are all-wise, and that You alone know what is best for me! Taking the Sacred gift that You have given to me – ‘Free Will’ – and using it to pursue my own elusive ‘happiness’, instead of realizing that there is no lasting happiness for me outside of your Sacred and Satisfying Will for me! How foolish I have been, and how spiritually-blind I have been, to think that life outside of Christ can have any meaning! How can I go ‘against the grain of reality’, and not be hurt? My sinning has brought to me only temporary pleasure! Now I experience so much guilt, shame, bondage, fear, isolation, lack of meaning in my life! I am not worthy of your forgiveness and healing, but I am helpless and hopeless without You, O God! Have mercy upon me, and save me from guilt and from shame! I believe, and I now accept your new life in Christ! Thank You! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

What joy to know that God not only pardons the wrong, but that He also removes the shame and the embarrassment of sin, and that He restores dignity! Esteem, and honor to the sinner!

-By Ron Christian-



COMMUNION WITH GOD IN NEW BIRTH

Created in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 2:10 NASB

Having been born again from above, one may now be properly said to live. God has quickened him by His Spirit and he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. He lives a life which the world knows not – a life which is “hid with Christ in God.” God is continually breathing upon the soul, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, and the soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into the heart, and prayer and praise are ascending to heaven. By this communion between God and himself, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, the life of God in the soul is sustained. The child of God grows up, till he comes to the full measure of the stature of Christ (see Ephesians 4:13).

We see that the nature of the new birth is *that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it to life, raising it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness*. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when the soul is created anew in Christ Jesus, renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness (see Ephesians 4:24). The love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice into a sincere, tender love for all. In a word, it is the change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the mind that was in Christ Jesus. This is the nature of the new birth: “*So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*”

-By John Wesley-



AS A SINNER, HAVE YOU EVER FELT THE ‘PIERCING AND AWAKENING LIGHT’ OF GOD’S UNCOMFORTABLE ‘CONVICTION OF SIN’?

I say, when any one, man or woman, young or old, is conscious that he or she is going wrong, whether in greater matter or less, whether in not coming to church when there is no adequate reason, neglecting private prayer, living carelessly, or indulging in known sin, - this bad conscience is from time to time a torment to such persons. For a little while, perhaps, they do not feel it, but then the pain comes on again. It is a keen, harassing, disquieting, hateful pain, which hinders sinners from being happy. They *may* have pleasures, but they cannot be *happy*. They know that God is angry with them; and they know that, at some time or other, He will visit, He will judge, He will punish. They try to get this out of their minds, but the arrow sticks fast there; it keeps its hold. They

try to laugh it off or to be bold and daring, or to be angry and violent. They are loud or unkind in their answers to those, who remind them of it either in set words, or by their example. But it keeps its hold. And so it is, that all men who are not very abandoned, bad men as well as good, wish that they were holy as God is holy, pure as Christ was pure, even though they do not try to be, or pray to God to make them, holy and pure; not that they *like* religion, but that they know, they are convinced in their reason, they feel sure, that religion alone is happiness.

Oh, what a dreadful state, to have our desires one way, and our knowledge and conscience another; to have our life, our breath and food, upon the earth, and our eyes upon Him who died once and now liveth; to look upon Him who once was pierced, yet not to rise with Him and live with Him; to feel that a holy life is our only happiness, yet to have no heart to pursue it; to be certain that the wages of sin is death, yet to practice sin; to confess that the Angels alone are perfectly happy, for they do God's will perfectly, yet to prepare ourselves for nothing else but the company of devils; to acknowledge that Christ is our only hope, yet deliberately to let that hope go! O miserable state!

(John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, pp. 1523-1524)



CAN CHRIST SAVE THE “CHIEFEST OF SINNERS”?

“HOW WIDE IS GOD’S MERCY?” It is wide enough to ‘save’ the “Chiefest of Sinners”. The persecuting Saul of Tarsus, gave that title to himself. Saul of Tarsus (who thought he was ‘doing God a great favor’ when he ‘hunted down Christians’ to imprison them and to destroy them) was awakened to spiritual reality by the Spirit of God! Saul dramatically and quickly became “Paul the Apostle of Christ” and eventually went on to become the greatest Christian missionary/evangelist/theologian in history! Great is God’s mercy towards sinners (to forgive), and great is the application of God’s mercy in the transformation of character – from a godless person into a God-honoring person! Someone said that the greatest proof of Christianity is its power to make a “bad man good”!

John Henry Newton (1725-1807) a slave-trader who was drastically converted, wrote about his amazing transformation in his famous hymn “Amazing Grace”. Millions have sung his words in that Hymn: “Amazing Grace that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see.” Such change can only take place in the life of any person, by the mercy, love, and power of a great God!

-By Ron Christian-



DO YOU SINCERELY BELIEVE IN GOD'S 'AMAZING GRACE'?

For many decades, the song 'Amazing Grace' has been most popular, and has been recognized even on some 'secular music charts'. It is an old song, written hundreds of years ago! Why have so many people chosen this 'ancient song' as one of their 'very favorite songs'? Have you ever really reflected on the words of the song – words that 'cut to the quick' of the heart?

Amazing grace! How sweet that sound,
That saved a WRETCH like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Why do you sing this 'heart-searching song'? Simply because it is the 'culturally right thing' to do? Many military funerals (with bag pipes) use this 'old song'. And (at one time, at least) many radio stations played the song. When you sing the song (or simply listen to it), are you 'thinking about what you are hearing', or are you (like probably millions of other persons) 'simply mouthing the words thoughtlessly'? Is 'God's grace' sweet to you – experientially and personally? Grace (God's unmerited favor on you) - how much do you appreciate it? Do you believe that, without God's grace, you truly would be 'lost' in your sins, for time and for eternity? If you do not have these thoughts about the meaning and application of 'God's grace' in your own life, then (realistically and honestly) you should not sing this song - ("Amazing grace, How sweet that sound"). Only those persons who know that they are 'lost in sin' (in a hopeless and in a helpless moral and spiritual condition) – only such persons deeply 'crave' the grace of God (the 'unmerited favor' of God).

When you sing this remarkable song (just the first verse), do you truly 'identify' with the words? Can you say (as you are singing): "Oh God of grace, I am 'lost in my sins', and I ask you to 'find' me (to rescue me from the bondage of my sins)?" Can you say (as you are singing): "Oh God, I am spiritually blind (not able to see 'reality' from your viewpoint), and I sincerely ask you to give me spiritual sight?" What is your personal response to the phrase 'that saved a WRETCH like me'? Too 'harsh', too 'evangelical'? What? Or, to be truly 'honest' with yourself (even though only God can totally 'evaluate' the inner condition of your 'heart') – I say, to be honest with yourself, you really know that you need a transformation in your inner life. Perhaps you want to 'identify' with the words (of the Song that you have often sung). Maybe you want to be

‘courageous enough’ to pray this ‘daring prayer’ (along with John Newton who wrote the song): “O God, I know I have sinned many sins, with considerable intensity, and for a long time. To be honest with you, O God, I know that the word ‘wretched’ describes the inner condition of my heart. I haven’t been ‘guilty’ of all the following ‘sins’, but the committing – practicing – of even one of them, makes me feel ‘wretched’ inside. There are too many ‘wretched sins’ to name, but I know that the following are some of those ‘wretched sins’ – ‘wretched’ because these sins hurt all three (God, Myself, Others)! I have broken many of the Ten Commandments! Lying, stealing, hate (which Jesus said is really murder), blasphemy, profanity, treating holy things with contempt, lust (which Jesus said is really adultery), plotting hurtful things against others (which the Bible says is very serious), gossiping, slandering, and more. God, just like you transformed John Newton (a slave trader) into a loving and compassionate ‘servant of God’ (preacher), please forgive all my sins and take away my ‘wretchedness’ Grace!”

-By Ron Christian-



TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, nothing can satisfy my soul – worldly knowledge, worldly pleasures, worldly powers, and worldly wealth! I was made for ‘greatness’ (for nobility and for godly living); I lost my ‘greatness’ (through willful transgressions against divinely-given commands), and I am truly helpless and hopeless unless You extend your mercy, O God, unto me – a lost and undone sinner! ‘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.’ *“As the deer pants for water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. Where can I find him to come and stand before him?” (Psalms 42:1-2)*

“Satisfy my parched soul with the Water of Life! I believe that You, O God, just now are able to forgive my sins, and to restore ‘greatness’ to my soul – now and forever! Greatness in my soul means that I will ‘do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before my God!’ By God’s grace, I intend to live a ‘great’ life! Thank You! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Even though the entire human race lost its ‘greatness’ because of the historic Fall of Man, it is wonderful that Jesus’ work on the Cross brought new hope and life to everyone.

You can be restored to a greatness that is greater than what Adam and Eve experienced

before they fell! Your greatness is found through your new life in Christ as you walk obediently in His ‘footsteps of Holy Love’! March Forward – In Gladness and Humility!

-By Ron Christian-

HAVE YOU PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED THE ‘INDESCRIBABLE DELIGHT’ OF FELLOWSHIPING INTIMATELY WITH THE GOD OF LOVE?

As wine enlivens, and bread strengthens, and oil is rich, and honey is sweet, and flowers are fragrant, and dew is refreshing, and foliage is beautiful; so, and much more, are God’s gifts in the Gospel enlivening, and strengthening, and rich, and sweet, and fragrant, and refreshing, and excellent. And as it is natural to feel satisfaction and comfort in these gifts of the visible world, so it is but natural and necessary to be delighted and transported with the gifts of the world invisible; and as the visible gifts are objects of desire and search, so much more is it, I do not merely say a duty, but a privilege and blessedness to “taste and see how gracious the Lord is.”

(John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, pg. 1530)

HAVE THE FACULTIES OF YOUR ENTIRE BEING EXPERIENCED THE GLORIOUS TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE MIGHTY SPIRIT OF GOD?

If we hold by Jesus Christ, who died for us, and let His love constrain us, His Cross quicken us, and the might of His great sacrifice touch us, and the blood of sprinkling be applied to our eye-balls as an eye-salve, that we may see, we shall wake from our opiate sleep – though it may be as deep as if the sky rained soporifics upon us – and be conscious of the things that are, and have our dormant faculties roused, and be quickened into intense vigilance against our enemies, and brace ourselves for our tasks, and be ever looking forward to that joyful hope, to that coming which shall bring the fullness of waking and of life.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*, vol. 15; pg. 215)



ONCE YOU VERILY MEET CHRIST, YOU WILL EXPERIENCE AN

INSATIABLE 'HUNGER' TO KNOW HIM FULLY!

Every man or woman who really meets Jesus feels the impress and challenge of His life. There is something utterly unique in meeting Him. Everybody here who has had the experience – and a multitude of you have – is behind me in this assertion. When Christ looks at you, you know that He sees you through and through; your secret hopes, your nameless fears, your gusty passions, your dirty, furtive sins. You cannot pose to Him.

Yet, when you see how truly He loves you though He knows the worst about you, and 'beckons you His road'...all that is decent in you leaps out in response. Your heart cries out for Him. You know it. You feel it. You would be lying if you denied that He pulled the heart out of you.

That's the proof you were seeking. He embodies all that you have 'willed or hoped or dreamed of good'. He does not need to display any other credentials. Your heart knows Him; cries out to Him; will not be satisfied without Him.

Oh! you can run away from Him like the Rich Young Ruler, but it is only your body that will run. Your heart will play you traitor. It knows its Lover and will abide with Him. Having truly seen Him once, it will hunger for Him forever.

'None but Christ can satisfy.' Though you live a whole long life through in willful rebellion, and will not have this Man to rule over you, nothing and no one else can give you peace.

Therefore, I say, if you would prove Him, meet Him. Open your heart to Him. Fashion your lips in prayer. And...listen...He will make your heart burn within you, and He will stir in you longings after the noblest life.

(William Sangster, *Westminster Sermons*, vol. I, pp. 45-46.) (Emphasis added.)



THE MOTIVATING FORCE AT THE CENTER OF OUR PHYSICAL BEING IS OUR WILL.

The motivating force at the center of our physical being is our will. It is the governing power in us, the spring of all our actions. Before God we are responsible only for the set of that will – whether we decide for God's will or insist on self-will.

The Lord knows the thoughts of man.

-By Catherine Marshall-



WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE LOVER OF MY SOUL?

The Cross on Calvary is the unveiling of the Cross, which has eternally been on the Heart of God!

The Cross is the greatest of all revelations concerning God. For the revealed Cross in history is the result of the hidden Cross on the Heart of God!

The Cross shows that at the heart of the Universe is the self-giving sacrificial love. God is love and the Cross on Mount Calvary gives concrete expression to that truth!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Because God is suffering love, the Cross is an absolute necessity. Only as man could see Jesus on the Cross of Calvary could man see the Christ of the ages who has always borne a Cross in His Heart!

Jesus reveals the nature of God. Everything Jesus was, God has always been. When Jesus was suffering on the Cross, God was suffering on the Cross!

Jesus' love for humanity was supremely expressed when He suffered for man's sins. *"But God commendeth His love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Jesus, Lover of my soul, 'let me to thy bosom fly'. Looking at the Cross, I am looking at the Heart of God! Jesus, the Cross is thy magnet to draw me to God! 'The blood, the blood, is all my plea! O Hallelujah, it cleanses me'. 'There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins; sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains,' There is hope for me, even for me with all my sins! I thank You, dear God, for the powerful 'Blood of Jesus'. Because He died in my place, I may live a new life, with no more guilt and no more condemnation!

"There is no 'sin stain' so deep but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet – to purge

my conscience of all haunting memories of evil! My sins are 'hid in the sea of your forgetfulness'. 'As far as the east is from the west so far have my sins been removed from me!' I have assurance, because of Christ's provision for me, that I can meet my Master in peace when I die! Thank you, Jesus, for Your Mighty Cross! Help me always to live within the 'Shadow of the Cross'. Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION

The 'Precious Blood of Christ' is God's most precious gift to all humanity – and to you specifically!

-By Ron Christian-



THE ONLY REMEDY

When they heard this, they were stung in the heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. - Acts 2:37-38 (MEV)

Here are some amazing home remedies you will be interested in: If you're choking on an ice cube, simply pour a cup of hot water down your throat. Presto! The blockage will instantly remove itself...You can avoid cutting yourself when slicing vegetables by getting someone else to hold the vegetables while you chop...For those of you with high blood pressure, simply cut yourself and bleed for a few minutes, thus reducing the pressure on your veins. Remember to use a timer...You only need two tools in life – WD40 and duct tape. If it doesn't move and should, use the WD40. If it shouldn't move and does, use the duct tape...Some views about getting to heaven are as laughable as these 'home remedies.'

Laughable remedies include the following advice: Just live by the Ten Commandments (Rom. 3:20)...Or, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe. Try that with a can of poison, a traffic sign, and counterfeit money. I heard about two women who picked up a Chihuahua in Tijuana: took it to the vet and it turned out to be a river rat...And, how about this one? There are many roads leading to heaven. Oh? Check out Mt. 7:13-14...Then, this fallacy: The "saviors" of the world are equal. I saw a magazine that depicted the world's religious leaders seated around a conference table with this caption: "Will the real Savior of the world please rise...from the dead?" See Rom. 1:4. All analogies break down because of the reality of sin and the sinner and the Savior.

The only remedy is the one God provided. The “gos-pill” is the only medicine (Mk. 16:15-16)... Living water is the only tonic (Isa. 55:1; Jn. 4:10; 7:37-39)... The Great Physician is the only doctor (Acts 4:12). The Great Physician now is near/The sympathizing Jesus/He speaks the drooping heart to cheer/O hear the voice of Jesus/Sweetest note in seraph song/Sweetest name on mortal tongue/Sweetest carol ever sung/Jesus, blessed Jesus.

There are a lot of Elvis imitators in the world and when you see them perform, you know they’re fake. There was only one Elvis. There are a lot of phony “saviors” in the world but when you go to them for help, you discover how phony they really are. There is only one Jesus. He is the only remedy for what ails you...which is sin.

-By Dr. Jack Jarrett-



TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, enable me to ‘believe’ in You, not with a mere ‘head consent’ to certain doctrinal statements, but with a true ‘heart commitment’. As one ‘lets his body weight down on a chair to sit comfortably’, enable me to ‘put my weight down on You’ to rest comfortably and reliably amidst life’s trials!

“You are trustworthy! Your character is spotless! You have promised eternal life to all who repent of their sins (i.e., to those who make a moral U-turn), and to those who place their trust and their confidence in You alone! To those who truly believe that You, O Christ, are the sinless Son of God (who died for the sins of all), to those believing hearts You have always spoken words of forgiveness and words of assurance of eternal life.

“You have never turned anyone away from You! You have said, ‘Come unto me, all ye that are weak and burdened, and I will give you rest!’ What You say, You mean! You are not a deceiver (liar); You are totally trustworthy! All of those above stated truths I accept as realities for myself. I believe, I receive, I trust, and I thank You! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Always remember that you are saved by believing, and you remain saved by believing – believing in the Son of God!

-By Ron Christian-



ARE ALL PERSONS, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, ACTUALLY SINNERS, AND IN DESPERATE NEED OF A FORGIVING SAVIOR?

There is need to examine our own hearts. Have we been loyal to our central message? Have we applied it faithfully and fearlessly in the modern world? Have we failed in the proclamation of the faith? Do we still believe that all men need to be saved, or has the secularism of the world so seeped into our churches that it is tacitly accepted among us that to be a decent fellow is all that we can reasonably ask of men?...It is not just stupidity from which a man needs to be saved. It is sin. Man is utterly incapable of saving himself – now or at any conceivable time in the future, alone or in the mass.

We have many differences with our chief opponents in the world today, but they all centre in this. They deny the existence of God and believe that man can save himself. We assert the existence of God and deny that unaided man can ever find peace in his own soul, or peace in the world. It is no part of our purpose to disparage the achievements of modern science and technology. We are not of those who deride the machine, or deny the operations of the Holy Spirit outside the organized Church. We bless God for all that the research student has found for the blessing of mankind, and yet we still assert that all men are sinners and need to be saved. God forgive us if, failing to emphasize that, we have encouraged men to think that redemption is by human effort alone, and that there is no great loss to those who do not bow the knee ‘unto the Father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named’.

(William Sangster, *Proceedings of the Eighth Ecumenical Methodist Conference*, 1951, pp. 73-74)



AN UGLY WORM CAN BECOME A BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLY!

It is the fundamental belief of Christians that, without the resurrection, one's faith in Christ is an illusion, one's hope is useless, life's injustices are permanent, man's deepest aspirations remain unfulfilled, and man's transformation is impossible. It is this last point that we must look at today.

Christianity believes that the resurrection is the foundation of personal transformation. Christians point to the many New Testament passages which state that the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to transform lives and to change society. Wherever resurrection power has touched individuals or society, things

have drastically changed!

Do you ever long to be different, to be self-controlled, serene, loving, contributive, winsome, faithful, and confident? Do you ever wish that you could start life all over again? Do you ever wish that your secret past would no longer haunt you? Have you ever wished that your guilt could be resolved and that your future could be bright with hope and cheer?

The Bible says that your past guilt can be removed and that you can be totally forgiven. Under the power of the resurrected Christ, your human nature can change! Everything can become new! An ugly worm can become a beautiful butterfly, and a dried up root can bloom into a sweet-smelling flower. A bad man can become a good man! “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (II Corinthians 5:17 NIV)

The great writer, Alexander Pope, muttered: “O Lord, make me a better man,” and his spiritually enlightened page replied: “It would be easier to make you a new man.” Perhaps you, like Pope, have longed for sweet peace. Then no longer simply try to patch up your life, but let the great and powerful Lord – the resurrected Christ – come into your inner life to remake you, to convert you, to transform you within. Remember, reformation is a human attempt at change; transformation is a God-wrought change. The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to transform your life! You don’t have to remain the kind of person that you are. Your conscious and subconscious mind alike can be converted. You can start anew!

One girl who accepted Jesus as her Savior was so changed that someone told her that she appeared to have ‘swallowed sunshine’.

“An alcoholic came to a place of prayer and said, ‘O Jesus, if you are going to save me, why don’t you do it?’ Then he opened his eyes and claimed, ‘Boys, he has done it.’” (E.S. Jones, *The Divine Yes*; pg. 92)

“O Thou Christ, who defied the power of death and left the tomb empty, let that same power that accomplished the humanly impossible be exercised in my life to change me into a new person.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I choose, not to become a better person, but a new person, through the transforming power of the resurrected Christ!

-By Ron Christian-



I PRAISE GOD FOR THE AMAZING CHANGES THAT HUMANS CAN EXPERIENCE!

Someone said that the greatest evidence of the validity of Christianity is that Christianity can make a ‘bad’ man ‘good’. The transformation of a human character is the greatest evidence – practically speaking – that Christianity has a power beyond any human power. Christianity, based on a relationship with the Living Christ, teaches that any human being can change ‘for the better’!

Christianity teaches that, because of the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, ‘old things’ can pass away – sin – and ‘new things’ can become a reality – right and holy living! The New Testament is ‘packed’ with the teaching that describes, in one way or another, divinely-wrought ‘transformation’ of human character. Based on God’s grace, not based on human effort, the New Testament teaches that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven, and no sinner that cannot be made into a beautiful and loving believer!

There are many teachers and ministers and evangelists (both past and present) who could give a hearty ‘Amen’ to the above-stated affirmations! Some of the above-mentioned Christian leaders have been the personal ‘witness’ to the conversion of literally thousands of sinners! I am personally thankful that God allowed me, a pastor of a small church, over a period of about 20 years, to witness the conversion of many scores of sinners (almost all of these conversions, around the dining room table of their home)!

-By Ron Christian-



WHAT DID THE CROSS ACCOMPLISH?

I understand that there is a painter who has painted a picture of the boy Jesus in Joseph’s carpenter shop. Mary is looking on as Jesus is working with Joseph. The sun is just going down over the Palestinian hills and, as Jesus is building an oxen yoke, He is crossing two boards. The crossing of the boards forms a long shadow that is the shape of a cross. Upon seeing this shadow of a cross on the floor of the carpenter shop, a sudden look of fright and sadness comes over the face of Mary – as if Mary can see into Jesus’ future. Of course, we know that this painting is only the creation of an artist’s mind. However, the Gospels do indicate that, figuratively speaking, the shadow of the cross

was cast across the pathway of Jesus during His entire ministry before He finally died upon the Cross. Jesus came to earth – to die upon the cross (to provide the means by which every human being could be redeemed from his/her sins)!

What did the Cross accomplish? THE CROSS APPEASED GOD’S WRATH. God is a God of love, but His love demands that His own holiness be honored and that sin, which offends God’s holiness, be punished. The penalty of sin is death, so he who sins must die. But when Jesus died, God’s wrath against sin was turned upon Jesus. Because Jesus is God, God in reality turned His wrath against sin upon Himself! Therefore, the sinner is shielded from God’s wrath, and the sinner is treated as if he had never sinned! He/she is released from the terrible penalty of sin – death!

THE CROSS SATISFIED GOD’S JUSTICE. God could not allow sin to go unpunished, and at the same time remain a just God in the universe. God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly, because of what Christ did on the Cross. This is a moral universe, where right must be rewarded and wrong must be punished. If God could forgive the guilty one by a mere ‘wink of the eye’, then God would no longer be just and the universe would no longer be a moral, safe, reliable place to live. All basis for morality (right and wrong) would be destroyed. Jesus took the penalty for man’s sin so that man could be forgiven justly. A person cannot make himself just before God by any good thing that he can do (any more than a murderer can do anything to justify or to clear himself from his crime). Jesus’ death was a ‘substitutionary death’ (a death in place of the guilty sinner – to provide a ‘just’ way for the sinner to be set free from the ‘death penalty’!)

THE CROSS DEMONSTRATED GOD’S LOVE. The cross reveals more about God than any other reality. The cross on Calvary is the unveiling of the Cross, which has always been on the heart of God eternally! God is love and the cross gives concrete expression to that truth. God is suffering love and therefore the cross is an absolute necessity. Only as man could see Jesus on the Cross of Calvary could man see the Christ of the Ages who has always borne a cross in His heart! The cross is the greatest of all revelations concerning God. For the revealed cross in history is the result of the hidden cross on the heart of God. The cross shows that at the heart of the Universe is self-giving, sacrificial love. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16) Someone has called John 3:16 ‘the Heart of the Bible – the Gospel in miniature.’ It is so simple that a child can understand this amazing truth! God loves all persons. All persons are capable of ‘being saved’ from the ‘bondage of sin’. God (through His loving Holy Spirit) calls every person (sinner) to repent (i.e., to turn away from his/her harmful lifestyle of sinning). Because of His great love (and mercy), God offers the ‘gift of saving faith’ to all! Amazing love!

-By Ron Christian-



“AM I A PERSON OF TEMPORARY EXISTENCE OR ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE?”

The contrast between the ‘bigness’ of the universe and the ‘smallness’ of man could result in a contemptible view of man!

Indeed, many who have abandoned any belief in a personal and caring God, have adopted a view of man that is both ignoble and tragic.

Stated atheist Bertrand Russell, “Brief and powerless is man’s life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls to pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way.”

How tragic is Mencken’s impious creed: “The universe, a gigantic wheel in rapid revolution; man, a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on the rim thereof; religion, the fly’s illusion that the wheel was constructed to give him the ride.”

One cynic stated that man is “a boisterous bit of organic scum on one small planet.” Another said, “Man is but a rash on the epidermis of the Universe.” All statements from atheists!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

It is easy to see why one would become cynical if he did not believe in God or in God’s special creation of mankind. It is true that, in light of the magnitude of the universe in contrast to the puniness of man, it would be easy to conclude that man is totally inconsequential and a creature that will inevitably perish in total oblivion. He who abandons belief in a personal God and in a unique creation has no alternative other than despair and cynicism. But he who believes that God created man in the divine image, investing special honor and worth and meaning in mankind, is the one who, like David, is filled with wonder. Said David, “*You (O God) made him (man) a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him (man) with glory and honor.*” (Psalms 8:5)

Every person is of incalculable worth to God, the crown of God’s special creation, the object of God’s special love, gifted by God’s grace. Man is a God-breathed creature, a tri-unity – i.e., one who is created with a body, with a mind, with a spirit. Man is capable of thinking rationally, of feeling deeply, of acting purposefully. Man is capable of

thinking God's thoughts with his mind, of feeling God's compassion with his heart, of fulfilling God's plan with his will. Because God created man in his own image and because God redeemed man by His Son's blood, man is capable of working as a co-laborer with Almighty God to fulfill God's redemptive plans for His world! Man is an eternal being, built in his soul to live for God on this planet and with God eternally in heaven!

TIME FOR A PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, I thank You for your amazing creation of human beings, including me. There is much about myself (and other persons) that I will never understand. Because You are the eternal and infinite God, life is filled with much mystery. Your ways are higher than my ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth, and so are your thoughts greater than my thoughts. But You, in your mercy, have condescended to reveal some important truths to the human race. We humans are created in your ‘own image’! We are unique, above all of your other creatures. We have ‘lost our greatness’ because of our willfulness (sins), but You have come to “restore our greatness” through the life and death of your Son. Bowing low (in repentance and faith) at the ‘foot of the Cross’, we now can stand tall and confident (through Christ) in the face of all of life (both in the ‘storms’ and in the ‘sunshine’)! We have dignity and honor and strength and competency to live in peace with ourselves, and to live with kindness with everyone around us. Not self-centered, but Christ-centered! Not self-preoccupied, but others-oriented! Not selfish in personal pursuits, but generous in love projects. Not worshipping the gods of the world (materialism, sensualism, etc.), but worshipping the one and true living God! Humility without humiliation, dignity without pride! Thank You for ‘breathing’ worth into me, human and fallible as I am! I love and praise You! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Yes, it is true that you are not worthy of the least of God's favor. If human beings received what they deserved (because of gross sin), all would perish! But, God so loved the world that He gave us a Savior! Because of your special creation and because of your amazing redemption by Christ – you can hold your head high – without hurtful pride!

-By Ron Christian-



**FOCUS ON “JESUS THE LORD” – THE SOURCE AND SUBSTANCE
OF SALVATION!**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

OUT OF THE IVORY PALACES

(Philippians 2:4-8, II Corinthians 8:9)

“Many years ago, when the Duke of Windsor was the Prince of Wales, he one day left Buckingham Palace, journeyed west into the coal mining country, put on a miner’s cap, and went down into the dingy tunnels to see for himself the conditions in which men toiled in a difficult and dangerous branch of British industry. As a member of the royal family he was as much a prince in the coal mine as he was when he lived in the palace in London. But, while his essential equality with royalty was unchanged, there was no longer an equality of experience. He had consented to enter into experiences that never came to him amid the elegances and immunities of the palace.” (Paul Rees, *Proclaiming the New Testament*, pg. 44)

Jesus was still the royal Son of God while he dwelt on earth, but Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to accept the poorness of humanity. As II Corinthians 8:9 points out, the costliness of the Incarnation is seen in three facts: (1) how rich Jesus was, (2) how poor He became, and (3) how wealthy he made us.

Jesus came out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe – all because of His great love for a fallen race of people! He who was invested with the full powers of divinity, He who was co-equal with the Father and the Spirit – this powerful, eternal Christ became a lowly human!

Says Bishop Sheen: “In the filthiest place in the world, purity was born. He who later was to be slaughtered by men, acting as beasts, was born among beasts. He who would call himself the living bread, descended from heaven, was laid in a manger, literally a place to eat...There was no room in the inn, but there was room in the stable...The stable was the last place that the world would have looked for Him. Divinity is always where one least expects to find it. No worldly mind would have suspected that He who makes the sun warm the earth, would one day have need of an ox and an ass to warm him with their breath. That he, who, in the language of the Scriptures, could stop the turning about of our tourists, would have his birth place dictated by an imperial census. That he who clothed the fields with grass, would himself be naked. That he, from whose hands came planets and worlds, would one day have tiny arms that would not be long enough to touch the heads of the cattle. That the feet that trod the everlasting hills, would be too weak to walk. That the Eternal Word would be dumb. That omnipotence would be wrapped in swaddling clothes. That salvation would lie in a manger. That the bird which built the nest, would be hatched therein. No one would have ever suspected that God coming to this earth would be so helpless. And that is precisely why so many miss him.”

“Jesus, your very name means ‘Love’ to me! Love can go down. You went down into the very pits of sin to rescue sinners! You left the glories of heaven to experience the miseries of earth! All because You loved a sinner like me!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus humbled Himself to serve all; I will surrender myself to serve Him!

-By Ron Christian-

NO MAN LIKE THIS MAN!
(Colossians 1:13-17)

Many who have testified of a personal experience of God have spoken of ‘God’ in terms of Jesus. Those who seem to ‘know’ God best are those who speak most often of Jesus. Christians claim that the greatest fact of Reality is this: what Jesus was as a human, God has always been eternally! Doubtless the eternal God is more than the human Jesus, but God is no less than Jesus! Christians claim that Jesus was God in human form! Jesus gives God a face! When one sees Jesus, he sees God! These are startling claims!

Testifies E. Stanley Jones: “In the Congo when those in charge were about to pull up the idol from the idol-pit, the people fell back terror-stricken. They cried: ‘If we look on the face of “our father”, we will die.’” “But,” continues Jones, “as we look on the face of ‘Our Father’ in the person of Jesus, then we do not die, but live! We see God not terrible but tender, not forbidding but forgiving. We see in Jesus God as He is – really is! ...God is like Jesus in character. Transfer every characteristics of character from Jesus to God, and you do not lower your estimate of God – you heighten it...Jesus is God simplified, God approachable, God understandable, God lovable.” (E. Stanley Jones, *Word Became Flesh*, pg. 24, 37)

“There is a picture of a face of Jesus surrounded by dark clouds. Apart from Jesus there are dark clouds of mystery surrounding God. But in the midst of these clouds I see that one dear Face. We smile at the boy who when asked by his mother what he was doing replied: ‘I’m drawing a picture of God.’ ‘But no one knows what God is like,’ said the mother. ‘They will when I get finished,’ said the boy with finality. All attempts to tell or draw what God is like a childish picture. Except one – Jesus!” (*Ibid*; pg.48)

Why believe in Jesus Christ? Because Jesus is believable! Jesus is believable because His unique claims were backed by His unique life and teachings, and ultimately by His victory over death! Why believe in Jesus? For at least five reasons. Using a series of

rhyming words, it can be said: (1) No man ever sought like this man. (2) No man ever taught like this man. (3) No man ever wrought like this man. (4) No man ever fought like this man. (5) No man ever caught like this man. We must look at Jesus' life in view of these five wonderful facts.

“God, because You are infinite and I am finite, I need a visible, approachable God! I need a forgiving God, not a forbidding God! I need a tender God, not a terrible God! I need a God who has lived with mankind and who understands mankind! If Jesus is God, I need Him! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus' claims are unique! If they are true, He is the greatest personality in History! I will honestly examine His claims!

-By Ron Christian-



THE INITIATING LOVE OF GOD!

(Luke 15:1-7)

First, no man ever sought like this Man. Who could ever imagine that God, in human flesh, would actually take the initiative to seek out sinful man! No other religion besides Christianity teaches that God, through Christ, actually stepped down to rescue lost mankind! “I have sought thy nearness, with all my heart I called thee, and going out to meet thee, I found thee coming toward me.” (*Springs of Devotion*; pg.13) Draw near to God, and He draws nearer to you!

But Jesus' seeking love seeks even those who are running from God! This initiating love of God is movingly portrayed in Francis Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven'.

“I fled Him down the nights and down the days:
I fled Him down the arches of the years:
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat – and a Voice beat
More instant than the feet -

‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’

And then there comes the time when the fugitive was beaten.

“Naked I wait Thy love’s uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten to my knee,
I am defenseless utterly.”

And then there comes the end:

“Halts me by that footfall;
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
‘Ah, houndest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me!
(Quoted by Barclay in *Romans: Daily Study Bible*, pg. 165-166)

Jesus is like the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes into the wilderness to go after the one sheep which is lost, until He finds it. (Luke 15:4).

“O, thou ‘Hound of Heaven,’ You loved me when I was loveless; You sought me when I was lost; You cared for me when I was indifferent; You pursued me when I was running away from Life. Thank You for hounding me with such Love! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Religion is the record of Man’s proud attempts to reach God; Christianity is the story of God’s loving pursuit of sinful Man!

-By Ron Christian-



THE MASTER TEACHER (Matthew 7:24-29)

Second, no man ever taught like this Man. Jesus was a Master Teacher. Jesus adapted His teaching to His audience. He was direct, simple, and forceful in His teaching. Step by step He introduced truth in the most interesting way. The crowds followed Him to hear Him. He masterfully used illustrations and parables. He allowed men to think for themselves. He stimulated thinking rather than offering pat answers.

He taught openly. *“I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.” (John 18:20)*

Jesus taught authoritatively. *“The people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Matthew 7:28, 29)* No second-hand pronouncements of tradition, or quotations from ancient Rabbis, but rather firsthand declarations of the bedrock facts of Reality! Jesus came straight from God and He spoke directly about God. Who better knew about God than He who had dwelt eternally with God!

Jesus’ teaching was authoritative because of its source. Said Jesus, *“I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father taught me.” (John 8:28)* *“My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.” (John 7:16)*

Jesus taught uniquely. Jesus taught that He Himself had brought the Kingdom of God (the Rule of God) to a present reality! *“The Kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17:21)*

Jesus taught compassionately. At the heart of Jesus’ teaching was the flame of holy love. Jesus was moved with compassion as He looked at the multitudes who were wandering as sheep with no shepherd.

No man ever taught like Jesus, for Jesus taught His followers to call God ‘Father.’ Because of commitment to Jesus as Savior, Jesus’ followers had the right – a daring thing – to address God, using the tender and intimate title of ‘Father,’ the very word which Jewish children used to address their human fathers!

Jesus taught by example. Jesus’ teaching was not speculation or theory or abstract principles. His teaching was practical, experiential, and concrete! He practiced what he preached!

“God, dare I call You ‘Father’? I see You in the stars and feel your power in the wind. I know You are Mighty Power, but are You Fatherly Love? If Jesus is God, then my question becomes exclamation!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If Jesus is God, then everything Jesus taught about God is true! Glory!

-By Ron Christian-



THE AMAZING MIRACLE WORKER!

(Luke 11:14-21)

Jesus' uniqueness is becoming increasingly apparent. No man ever sought like this man. No man ever taught like this man. Thirdly, no man ever wrought like this man.

The miracles which Jesus performed were not merely acts of compassion, as important as compassion was to Jesus, but primarily they were demonstrations and signs of Jesus' Kingdom power. Both Jesus' Words (parables) and Jesus' Works (miracles) must be seen as complementary ways in which Jesus communicated the present reality of the Kingdom. The miracles were further proof of the Kingdom's inauguration.

Notes A.M. Hunter, "The miracles are tokens of the coming of God's Reign in Jesus. They are the Kingdom of God in action – God's sovereign grace and forgiveness operative in Christ. 'If I by the finger of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.' The miracles are signs, after all, but only signs for those whose spiritual insight enables them to discern the sovereign saving activity of God in Jesus. Jesus regarded not only His 'teaching with authority' but also His 'mighty works' as wrought by the Spirit of God through Him. His 'powers' are manifestations of the Supreme Power. His signs are the creative works of the Spirit operating through Him to save sick and sinful men and women. 'The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.'" (A.M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus*, pg. 59)

The miraculous nature of Jesus' works is altogether 'reasonable' if Jesus is God in human form! As one writer so ably said; "If the universe is dominated by a Spirit, miracles are possible; if by a Spirit that is Love, probable; and if that Spirit becomes incarnate, this miracle would make further ones very probable."

The miracles which Jesus wrought were dramatic signs – acted out parables – to demonstrate that Jesus had come to spearhead an attack against the powers of sin, sickness, and Satan. Said Jesus, "*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.*" (Luke 11:21, 22 NIV) Jesus' miracles are foretastes of the kind of power that will be exercised by God for the purpose of totally and eventually destroying the kingdom of evil. Jesus is the 'strong man, fully armed, who attacks and overpowers' Satan. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil. The miracles are God's power in action!

"God, the work of Jesus is becoming focused in my understanding. I see that Jesus came

to destroy evil and to impart good – to save helpless creatures like me from the harmful works of the Enemy! Thank You for your manifest Power! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If Jesus is God, then He should do the works of God – destroying the works of Satan!

-By Ron Christian-



THE DAY DEATH DIED!

(Hebrews 2:14-18)

If it is true that no man ever sought like this man, that no man ever taught like this man, that no man ever wrought like this man, it is also true that no man ever fought like this man. Jesus fought and won against Satan! Said Calvin, “There is no tribunal so magnificent, no chariot so elevated, as is the gibbet on which Christ has subdued death and the devil, and trodden them under His feet.”

The Death of Jesus on the Cross was altogether unique. The greatest of all paradoxes is this: Through the means of death, death was forever destroyed! The day Jesus died was the day death died! *“Through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrews 2:14, 15)*

Jesus’ parables were parables of the Kingdom. Jesus’ miracles were demonstrations and signs of Jesus’ Kingdom power. Jesus’ death was a redemptive death – the necessary means by which God was given opportunity to demonstrate Jesus’ power over death. Jesus’ death was a substitutionary death for the guilty sinner. Jesus paid the penalty for sin. Therefore, he who puts his trust in the Christ who paid the penalty for sin, puts his trust in one who proved to be more powerful than death! For Jesus arose from the dead!

The death and resurrection of Jesus are inseparably connected. They are the means by which God irrevocably defeated the powers of darkness! The death of Christ became the death warrant of Satan! Satan overstepped himself when he crucified the Lord of Glory! For Satan crucified one in whom the very power of God was resident! Jesus’ power was so great that not even death could silence Him. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” (I John 3:8)

‘Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Savior!
He tore the bars away,

Jesus, my Lord!

‘Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o’er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives forever with his saints to reign;
Hallelujah! Christ arose!’

“God, your ways are amazing! I would never have dreamed that You would destroy death by dying, and that You would give healing through suffering! Thank You for your death and resurrection! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus died, I may live! Jesus’ darkest day makes possible my brightest day – victory over sin, death, and hell!

-By Ron Christian-



THE GREATEST CATCHER OF MEN’S HEARTS!

(John 1:5-13; Acts 2:47)

Jesus sought, Jesus taught, Jesus wrought, Jesus fought. Because of the Incarnation and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God was able to establish His Church. No man ever caught like Jesus Christ!

The Rule of God assumes the Realm of God. Subjects in the Realm of God’s victorious Kingdom compose the true Church of God. God is forever reconciled to Mankind through the Cross and Resurrection, and God is progressively realizing His purpose of reconciliation in each sinner’s life.

It is the purpose of God that each person becomes a member of the Kingdom of God. It is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. That is God’s perfect will for all men, made possible through the ‘Great Acts’ of God in Christ. However, God has a permissive will also. He will permit men to reject His offer of eternal life. ‘Many are called but few are chosen, because few are choice.’ Who are the choice or elect ones? Those who choose to receive Christ.

Does Man’s rejection of God’s call affect the validity of the Kingdom of God? Does Man’s rejection destroy the Kingdom? Indeed not! “God’s Reign exists, however men respond. It claims the obedience of men truly; but it is there before the claims are made, and it is still there if men reject them.” (A.M. Hunter, *Introduction to New Testament*

Theology, pg. 26)

Jesus is the greatest Catcher of men's hearts, and souls, and loyalties. Jesus may be either accepted or rejected; He cannot be destroyed. His message is like a fire or flame that can never be extinguished. Throughout the centuries, men have tried to destroy the light of the Gospel, but the Gospel continues to send forth its glowing message to all men.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, well-known historian, notes that Christianity is today more widely distributed geographically and more deeply rooted among more people than it or any other faith has ever been. He observes that during the past four hundred and fifty years and especially in the last century and a half, Christianity has been more influential in the life of the human race than at any previous time. (Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Preface pp. XV, XVII)

The Church of Jesus Christ has grown in spite of almost every conceivable obstacle. Jesus is the Universal Christ who attracts peoples of all ages, all cultures, and all backgrounds. Jesus' winsome spirit catches men. He is almost irresistible!

"God, now I see that my seeming resistance of Jesus Christ has really been a rejection of caricatures of Jesus Christ. I would be a fool not to receive the Christ of the Bible! I will receive the True and reject the false! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Though millions have come to Christ, there is still room for me!

-By Ron Christian-



THE ANSWER TO MAN'S DREAMS!

(Luke 1:26-38)

In the previous devotional the popular historian, Kenneth Latourette, stated that "Christianity (during the last century and a half) has been more influential in the life of the human race than at any previous time."

There is abundant evidence that Jesus is God! If Jesus were not God, could He have influenced so many so much, throughout all of history?

Through prophetic inspiration, Isaiah wrote, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called*

Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting father The Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) Who other than Jesus Christ could fit this description? The uniqueness of Jesus is even found in His genealogy, as recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In tracing Jesus’ genealogy back to King David, Jesus is presented as the long-looked-for Messiah, the Deliverer of Israel, the ‘Anointed One’ from Heaven. Jesus is seen as the answer to Man’s dreams!

David’s kingdom was glorious and powerful. During Israel’s days of decline, the Jews longed for a kingdom like unto David’s to be restored to Israel. Eventually this hope of kingdom restoration was transferred into a spiritual hope. The Messianic expectation borrowed the language of kingdom glory, a glory like unto the glory of David’s kingdom, excepting that the glory of the Messianic kingdom would be much greater. Therefore it was natural that Mary should hear the angel announce Jesus’ coming in the language of kingdom glory: *“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”* (Luke 1:31-33)

The kingdoms of earth rise and fall; Christ’s kingdom abides the same forever! Christ is the only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords! (I Timothy 6:15) One writer described Jesus’ influence this way: “Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever have sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth.”

“God, I am a part of the universal longing of Mankind. I too long for a Great Deliverer, a Wonderful Counsellor, a Prince of Peace, an ‘Anointed One’ from Heaven! If Jesus is all this, then I want Him to be the Lord of my life! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who is the ‘Son of the Highest’ will have highest place in my life!

-By Ron Christian-



THE ‘PERSONALISM’ OF JESUS

(Matthew 1:1-17)

The genealogy of Jesus, mentioned in yesterday's devotional, significantly reveals something about the nature of God! Can a long list of hard-to-pronounce names be significant or interesting? Dr. Paul Tournier, famous Christian counsellor, believes so! He says, "When I was young I used to think that they (the long genealogies) could well have been dropped from the Biblical Canon. But I have since realized that these series of proper names bear witness to the fact that, in the Biblical perspective, man is neither a thing nor an abstraction, neither a species nor an idea, that he is not a fraction of the mass, as the Marxists see him, but that he is a person." (Quoted by William Barclay in *Daily Study Bible, Hebrews*, pg. 61)

The genealogy of Jesus helps us to realize the importance of the individual from the Biblical perspective. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was always concerned with individuals. It is true that He was moved with compassion on the multitudes, but His compassion went beyond the multitudes to the lonely individuals. He saw each person as unique and worthy of His personal attention. Even in the midst of the crowds, He took time for the individuals. Surrounded by a crowd, Jesus healed the woman who had been sick for twelve years with an incurable disease. As the crowds thronged Him, Jesus spotted the curious Zacchaeus, and he became the object of Jesus' special attention and love within the privacy of Zacchaeus' home. The healing of the blind man near Jericho vividly shows Christ's personal compassion. *"And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging; and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him that he should be brought unto him."* (Luke 18:35-40)

There is no problem too small but what Jesus is interested in it! Jesus' heart is touched with your personal grief. He cares when your nights are long and when your days are fraught with care. He cares for each person and desires to fold each to His loving bosom. It is important to know that Jesus cares for individuals, and the genealogy of Jesus helps us to realize the 'personalism' of Jesus.

"God, I thank You that I am not 'lost in the crowd,' but that I am an object of your special love! You are so powerful that You can rule the vast universe, and yet so personal that You care for me personally! Thank you for Jesus who has shown me your 'personalism'! Amen!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If God, through Christ, is so personable, I will never be satisfied until I know God personally!

-By Ron Christian-



SYMBOLIC MEANING OF JESUS' GENEALOGY

(Romans 5:6-11; Matthew 1:21)

Each of the three sections in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17) symbolically represents one of the three stages in the history of mankind, and, indeed, in the history of every individual.

The first section of the genealogy which is from Abraham to David is the section which describes Israel's greatness. It represents the first stage in Man's history – the stage of man's greatness. Man, created in God's image, was made only for greatness and fellowship. Innocence, uprightness, strength, and obedience characterized Man's beginning. Man's body was strong, his mind superb, and his spirit was unblemished.

The second section of the genealogy is from Solomon to the Exile and portrays Israel's decline and decay. It represents the second stage of man's history – the Fall into sin. Even though man was born for greatness, man lost his greatness through self-will and rebellion against God's law. Alienated from God, Man started on a course of action that produced civilizations and cultures saturated with crime, lust, hate, greed and war. As G.K. Chesterton once said of man: "Whatever else is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be." Man was made for communion, but is plagued by feelings of separation and rejection. Man was made to only enjoy peace, but hears constantly the clamor of disharmony. Man was made for love, but is too often a creature of hate. Man was made to be integrated, but is a bundle of frayed nerves. Man's innocence became blemished by guilt, and his capacity for nobility became shriveled by self-centeredness.

The third section of the genealogy is from after the Exile to the Coming of Christ. Christ is the one by whom Israel could have regained her true greatness. This section represents the third stage of man's history – Redemption and Reconciliation. Notes William Barclay, "Man can regain his greatness." (*Daily Study Bible, Matthew*, vol. 1; pg.4) Christ came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to rescue the perishing, to restore the downtrodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul. He came not to condemn, but instead to save (John 1:17). He came to "save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered life, to make a strong character out of a shallow life, to make a confident and radiant life out of a guilt-ridden life. Through Christ, mankind can come once again to know true greatness. Notes Barclay, "In his genealogy Matthew shows us the royalty of kingship gained; the

tragedy of freedom lost; the glory of liberty restored. And that, in the mercy of God, is the story of mankind, and of each individual man.” (*Ibid*; pg. 4)

“God, the history of mankind is the history of my personal life. I was born for greatness, but I have lost my greatness through choosing self. Restore my greatness through personal repentance and faith. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Rescuer of Human Race came to rescue me! I, who am lost, will allow myself to be found!

-By Ron Christian-

ONE IN CHRIST JESUS!
(Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:13-18)

The appearance of four names, in particular, in Jesus’ genealogy reveals something very significant, and foreshadows what was accomplished through Christ’s ministry. What are the four names? Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. Ruth, the Moabitess. Tamar, an adulteress. Bathsheba, the woman whom David seduced and took deceitfully from Uriah. The appearance of these names in Jesus’ genealogy symbolically declares that Jesus came to earth to destroy the man-made barriers!

First, there are no longer barriers between male and female. The appearance in Jesus’ genealogy shows that God considers women important – so important that women are named in the ancestry of the Son of God! Jesus came to destroy all contemptible attitudes towards women. We see the tenderness of Jesus as He wept with Mary and Martha over the death of Lazarus. Jesus won the heart of the despised Samaritan woman. In restoring life to the son of the widow of Nain, we see the great love of Jesus for this woman.

Second, there are no longer barriers between saint and sinner. Great joy is experienced in heaven when only one sinner repents (Luke 15:7). Christ takes the despised woman of Samaria and makes her an honored messenger of love. Christ takes a demon-possessed outcast and makes him a respectable citizen. Christ takes a high-browed Pharisee and makes him a humble and faithful follower. Christ takes a doubting Thomas and makes him a flaming evangelist. Christ takes a thieving Onesimus and makes him a faithful servant. Christ takes an adulterous outcast and makes her a pure and respectable lady. Christ takes the dying thief and makes him a son of paradise. He takes the guilt-ridden publican and makes him a free and justified believer. Christ restores a wandering

prodigal to the status of full sonship. Christ breaks the shackles of sin and sets the prisoner free! Christ seeks and finds the lost sheep. He restores the downtrodden! *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:17)*

Third, there are no longer barriers between Jew and Gentile. Christ came to break down all racial barriers. Not all in Christ’s genealogy were Jews! Ruth was a Moabitess. Wrote Paul, about Christ’s mission: *“For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us.” (Ephesians 2:14)* We are one in Christ Jesus!

“God, I thank You that You love all indiscriminately – Jew and Gentile, male and female, saint and sinner. Teach me, like Jesus, to destroy the barriers that divide persons from one another. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus is the Universal Christ! I will seek to follow Christ, and be universal in my concern for all humanity!

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS IS THE LORD OF HISTORY!
(Revelations 11:15-19)

As King of kings, Jesus has sovereign control over all the kings of the earth. *“The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.” (Proverbs 21:1 NASB)*

Concerning Jesus, Isaiah wrote: *“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:7)*

“When the renowned artist, Dannecker, was requested by Napoleon to make a painting of Venus for the Louvre, he declined even though an enormous sum was offered. The emperor’s anger was stirred and he demanded an explanation. The painter answered simply: ‘I have painted Christ, and I can never lower my brush to paint an inferior subject.’” (Merv Rosell, *Shoe-Leather Faith*, No. 27)

Jesus is the God of all gods. He alone is worthy to reign. He stands as King of kings. E.

Stanley Jones, that great veteran missionary, went around the world introducing the sign of Jesus' Lordship; namely, three fingers pointing upward, which stands for 'Jesus is Lord.'

The Bible says that all men will someday bow the knees to Jesus and confess with the tongue that 'Jesus is Lord.' All men will either voluntarily or involuntarily give to Jesus His rightful place which is His inherently – Sovereign Lord!

Said Napoleon, the great military victor: "If Socrates would enter the room we should rise and do him honor. But if Jesus Christ came into the room we should fall down on our knees and worship Him."

It is Jesus who divides all of history into BC and AD. Jesus stands at the center of time and gives meaning to the whole. Pagan religions make no sense out of history, but believe history endlessly and regularly repeats itself in eternal cycles. To them, history is going nowhere. But Jesus gives meaning to history, for Jesus is the Lord of history. History is going somewhere. History has a purpose and a plan and a destiny. History was divided into BC and AD because of Jesus' first coming. History will find its fulfillment and consummation when Jesus comes the second time!

"Stanley Jones said the awful events of earth did not disturb him because he knew 'how it would all come out.' ... The genuine 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." (Donald Demaray, *The Minister's Ministries*, pg. 20)

"God, help me gladly give to Jesus the same place in my life which He inherently possesses in the universe – Lordship!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus is not one 'great' in a class of 'greats'; Jesus is the incomparable one!

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS IS THE KING OF THE STONES!

(Luke 19:28-40)

Jesus is 'King of the Ages' eternally. Jesus is 'Lord of History' in time. Jesus is also 'King of Life' – physical life and human life.

On Palm Sunday, the disciples were praising and worshiping Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. *“And some of the Pharisees from among the multitudes said unto him, Master; rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.”* (Luke 19:39, 40)

Jesus is King of the stones! The very stones are subject to Jesus and are made to praise Jesus as King of earth and creation! Because Jesus is king of nature, “the Christian way is written into the very structure of the universe.” (E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes*, pg. 48)

All of nature is created by God and for God. *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein...who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.”* (Psalms 24:1, 10)

As one poet wrote, “Earth’s crammed with Heaven; and every common Bush afire with God.”

The Universe belongs to God and will be redeemed by God from the effects which sin has had upon it. The universe is at the command of God. It is subject to Christ, the King. The universe is the friend of God, and is constantly singing praises to God. Barclay notes that if a man sins against God there is a sense in which the whole universe becomes his enemy.

Christ is not only King of physical life, but He is also King of human life. Both physical life and human life are made by God and for God.

Christ is King of human life for Christ’s way “is written into living tissues – nerves, arteries, organs, cells.” (E. Stanley Jones; *Ibid*; pg. 48) Christ is king, for He has His claim upon every human being in the very constitution of the physical body! Therefore, going against God is going against oneself! To go against God is to go against the very grain of human make-up! “A pastor’s brilliant son, a personal man in a great corporation, told his father: ‘I’m trying hard to be an atheist, but I’m having a time of it!’” (E. Stanley Jones, *Conversion*, pg. 20) It is hard to go against God, for when one goes against God he is going against himself. Man is made by God and for God, and to go against God is to go against the very purpose of one’s existence!

“O God, You have your stamp of ownership on me – in my mind, in my body, in my spirit! To reject You is to reject myself! To accept You is to find myself! Glory!”

AFFIRMATION OF THE DAY: To sin against Christ is to sin against myself. To bow to Christ's Lordship is to stand tall before everything else!

-By Ron Christian-



HE IS NEARER THAN YOU THINK!
(Psalms 145:14-21)

The Incarnation teaches us that God, far from being detached and disinterested in man, is instead the God who has taken the initiative in seeking and saving mankind! There is a story of a woman who was trying to find God. "She had a certain dream which she dreamed more than once, namely, that she was standing in front of a thick, plate glass window. As she looked at it, she seemed to see God on the other side. She hammered on the window, trying to attract His attention, but without success. She grew more and more desperate, and began to call to Him and found herself shrieking at the top of her voice. And then a quiet, calm voice at her side said: 'Why are you making so much noise? There is nothing between us.' Perhaps that illustrates our difficulty, does it not? We have been thinking all along that God was somewhere far away, unapproachable... some place that was difficult of access...and we have been grouping around for a long time, and all the while He is standing beside us." (Peter Marshall, *Mr. Jones, Meet the Maker*, pg. 131)

It is a great thing to know that God loves the human race – corporately yes, but more amazingly, individually. Paul Rees tells of a community canvass being made. At a certain door the questioner asked the woman who answered his knock what children she had. She began, 'Well, there's Willie, and Horace.' But the canvasser interrupted, 'Never mind names, I just want numbers,' she protested. 'Every one of them's got a name.' Concludes Paul Rees: "they had personalities that spoke with all the eloquence of their individual characteristics... So God looks upon His human creatures." (Paul Rees, *Stand Up in Praise to God*, pp. 23-24)

Jesus was made rich but He became poor in order that, through His poverty, we might be made rich! The way God accomplished this purpose is most mysterious and wonderful! "It is fifteen hundred years ago that this apparently invincible Empire (of Rome) utterly collapsed, and all that is left of it is ruins. Yet the little baby, born in such pitiful humility and cut down as a young man in his prime, commands the allegiance of millions of people all over the world. Although they have never seen him, he has become friend and companion to innumerable people. This undeniable fact is, by any measurement, the most astonishing phenomenon in human history. It is a solid rock of evidence which no

agnostic can ever explain away.” (J.B. Phillips, *Good News*, pp. 162-163)

“God, forgive me for grouping around so long, trying to find You when You have already found me! You are nearer to me than I ever dreamed! Your initiating love is not only for the world as a whole, but for me as a person! Amazing!

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will listen attentively to the quiet calm voice at my side. It sounds like the voice of Love!

-By Ron Christian-



THE GLORY AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

MOUNTAIN PEAKS OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

(Ephesians 1:1-14)

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 Chapter 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 savior, 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 OF THE DAY: The bitter experience of repentance leads me to the blessed experience of enjoying heavenly blessings!

-By Ron Christian-



CHOSEN TO BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS!

(Ephesians 1:3-4)

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) The wonder of it all is that God would choose sinful man! The Infinite choosing 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!

-By Ron Christian-



DESTINED TO BE SONS! (Ephesians 1:5-7)

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 us 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 villain."

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

"I 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!

-By Ron Christian-

ENLIGHTENED AND ENLIVENED PEOPLE

(Ephesians 1:9-12)

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 bow the knee to Christ, either willingly or unwillingly, 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 praises 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 Savior. 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 genuine 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." (Don Demaray, *The Minister's Ministries*, pg. 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!

-By Ron Christian-



EMPOWERED BY THE POWERFUL HOLY SPIRIT!
(Ephesians 1:13-23)

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!

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS, I COME

Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come, Jesus I come;
Into thy freedom, gladness and light, Jesus, I come to thee;
Out of my sickness into thy health, Out of my want and into thy wealth,
Out of my sin and into thyself, Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of my shameful failure and loss, Jesus, I come, Jesus I come;
Into the glorious gain of thy cross, Jesus, I come to thee;
Out of earth's sorrow into thy balm, Out of life's storms and into thy calm,
Out of distress to jubilant psalm, Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of unrest and arrogant pride, Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into thy blessed will to abide, Jesus, I come to thee;
Out of myself to dwell in thy love, Out of despair into raptures above,
Upward for aye on wings like a dove, Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of the fear and dread of the tomb, Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into the joy and light of thy home, Jesus, I come to thee;
Out of the depths of ruin untold, Into the peace of thy sheltering fold,
Ever thy glorious face to behold, Jesus, I come to thee.

W. T. Sleeper



CAN GOD'S LOVING NATURE ACTUALLY INDWELL MY OWN HEART?

The miracle of all miracles is this: We humans (believers) can 'become partakers of Christ's holy nature!' "Christ in us is the hope of glory"! Anything that is contradictory to the nature and the character of Christ will be excluded from heaven! God is love, and (thankfully) that same love is 'shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit'.

A supernatural 'Source' (the Spirit) imparts a supernatural kind of love! "Love divine, all loves excelling; joy of heaven to earth come down; fix in us thy humble dwelling; all

thy faithful mercies crown!”

A heavenly love (God’s kind of love), given to us by the heavenly Agent (the Holy Spirit), that we (believers) might enjoy a ‘heavenly life’ (ability to love God supremely, to love our neighbors sincerely, to love ourselves wholesomely and unselfishly). God is love (intrinsically and inherently)! It is the essence of God’s character!

Love, by its very nature, wishes to ‘reach out in fellowship’ to others. God, because of His inherent love, desired to manifest that love, when He (out of love) created the human race. God, because of His inherent love, desired to rescue a ‘fallen race’. “For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son”, as a ransom for man who was bound by the cruel ‘chords’ of sin.

God, because of his inherent love, chose to send the Holy Spirit into the world, to convict men of their sins, and to convince men that the Righteous One (Jesus) wants to rescue everyone from their plight of sin, and He wants to give them an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter!

Love, powerful love, love that is in the very ‘core’ of God’s being; it is this divine-love that is the ‘driving force’ for all that is ‘good’ and ‘precious’ and ‘life-giving’ in this world and in the glorious world to come!

-By Ron Christian-



CONVERSION TO CHRIST IS BOTH A MOMENTARY EXPERIENCE AND A PROGRESSIVE EXPERIENCE!

God has power to change every one of us – to change us initially at the time of ‘conversion’, and to change us progressively through God’s call to pursue and to realize (imperfectly) the holy life, patterned after the holiness of Christ Himself!

Of course, we (believers) are not totally ‘changed’ (morally and spiritually and intellectually and socially) during the time that we are alive on this terrestrial ball! The Christian life is a life of ‘constant growth’, becoming more and more like the Christ of the Ages, but, of course, never attaining the ‘full stature’ of Christ.

We (as sincere, growing) believers know that often we ‘come short’ of being the persons we could be and that we ought to be (in terms of developing Christ-like character), but nevertheless, we (believers) keep trying (in spite of our moral failures), and we

(believers) keep praying (sometimes intensely and sometimes sparsely), and we (believers) keep reading our Bible (sometimes intently and sometimes lazily)!

We (believers) keep attending our local church services (sometimes we listen attentively and sometimes we fall asleep when the preacher is fervently declaring the ‘truth’ from the Bible), and we (believers) keep giving money to the church and to the charities (sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes reluctantly), and we (believers) keep resisting the devil (sometimes zealously and sometimes negligently)!

We (believers) keep trying to witness to non-believers (sometimes boldly and sometimes timidly), and we (believers) know that we are to return good for evil to those who spitefully use us (and sometimes we have the strength wholeheartedly to forgive our enemies, and sometimes we forgive our enemies very slowly and sometimes very reluctantly)!

We (believers) are called ‘believers’ because we honestly believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We honestly believe that Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life (the only One through whom our sins are forgiven, and the only One by whom we can gain ‘entrance’ into heaven, after we die!).

We want to be the ‘true blue’ – the authentic person, the true follower of Christ, the One to whom we give our sole allegiance and loyalty. It is our desire, amidst the hardships we experience and the temptations that befall us, to be ‘true and faithful’ to Christ, throughout our life, until we breathe our very last breath!

-By Ron Christian-



CAN I BE ASSURED THAT GOD WILL RESPOND TO MY SEEKING HEART?

“My heart says of you, ‘Seek His Face!’ Your face Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper, do not reject me or forsake me, O God My Savior.” (Psalms 11:8-9)

The condition for finding is seeking wholeheartedly. The reward for diligently seeking God is the glorious discovery that the face of God is a smiling and compassionate face.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The better instincts in one’s life which encourage him to seek God, must be obeyed as

reflected outwardly in a life that actively seeks God's face and His divine acceptance.

Every man, in his better moments, knows he ought to seek God, not merely to seek material possessions or physical security or professional achievements. The wise man obeys those inner spiritual stirrings in his heart and his conscience, and he translates the wholesome impulses of his heart into outward striving for God.

When your inner soul instructs you to seek the Lord, don't squelch those tender-stirrings of your heart. Activate those feelings and yearnings, and allow those God-inspired instincts and judgments to direct you actively and outwardly and earnestly to seek the Lord God Almighty!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, You have assured me that my inner impulses which compel me outwardly to seek You, will be met by an accepting God – a God who, if I take one step towards Him, will take a thousand steps toward me. "Draw near unto God, and He will draw near unto you." I do not fear that God will turn His face away from me in anger. He will never reject me or forsake me. He is a saving and accepting Savior. It is His nature to save, not to destroy; to accept, not to reject! He will never leave me nor forsake me. He who planted a desire within my heart to seek the Lord, is He who will gladly welcome me when I act upon my inner impulses and actually and outwardly seek Him."

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Perhaps, man has no greater fear than the fear of rejection. No one can be promised he will never be rejected by his fellow men, but the honest seeker after God can rest assured that he will never be rejected or forsaken by a loving and a merciful God!

-By Ron Christian-



**JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD (AT "CHRISTMAS TIME")
TO "SEEK AND TO "SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST ONES"
(YOU AND ME)!**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

CHRISTMAS IS FOR SINNERS!

SUBJECT: Christmas Is for Sinners!

TEXT: *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15)*

INTRODUCTION: Said Jesus on one occasion, just prior to his death: *“For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37)* What is the truth of which Jesus testified when He came into the world?

I. Jesus testified to the truth of man’s sinful and helpless condition.

Make no mistake about it! Jesus was sinless, but every other person is sinful and in need of forgiveness. Jesus said to His accusers, “Which of you can condemn me of sin?” In Jesus there was no sin at all. Even though He was tempted in all points as we are, yet He never once yielded to the allurements of sin. Jesus’ every thought, action, and motive was pure!

To the self-righteous critics who were eager to stone the woman who was caught in adultery, Jesus said, *“You who are without sin, you cast the first stone!” (John 8:7)* Every one of these men left, for all knew they were sinful! Said Jesus to the self-righteous persons of His day: *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Matthew 23:27-28)*

A spirit of self-sufficiency and pride is one of the terrible characteristics of sin which Jesus often recognized in His dealings with mankind. To the self-righteous Pharisees who prided themselves in their religious achievements, Jesus said, *“I have come into the world to give sight to those who are spiritually blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.” The Pharisees who were standing there asked, “Are you saying we are blind?” “If you were blind, you wouldn’t be guilty,” Jesus replied. “But your guilt remains because you claim to know what you are doing.” (John 9:39-41, Living Bible)*

Notes Barclay, “The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does

not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind and beyond hope and help. Only the man who realizes his own weakness can become strong. Only the man who realizes his own blindness can learn to see. Only the man who realizes his own sin can be forgiven.” (Barclay’s *John*; Vol.2; pg.50)

II. Jesus testified to the truth of His personal identification with the lost.

Jesus said that He came into the world to seek and to save the lost, to give his life as a ransom for sinners. Jesus was called a “Friend of publicans and sinners.” Jesus pictured Himself as the Shepherd in search of the lost sheep.

Said Jesus, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Mark 2:17) Even before Jesus was born, the angel spoke to Joseph about Jesus’ birth and his mission: *“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:21)

If Jesus was born to die, if Jesus came into the world to redeem His people, if Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, this means that Christmas is for sinners – for those who are helpless, hurt, lost, and wicked!

Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew 1 demonstrates Jesus’ identification with sinners. Jesus has some ‘black sheep’ in his family tree. He didn’t try to hide this fact. Tamar was an adulteress! Bathsheba was the woman whom David seduced and took deceitfully from Uriah and with whom he committed adultery! Rahab was the harlot of Jericho! All of these women were sinners and yet they were part of Jesus’ ancestry! The inclusion of these sinners in Jesus’ genealogy shows Jesus’ mission of redemption! (Note Matthew 1)

The gift of myrrh which one of the Wise Men from the East presented to the Christ child is a strange gift to give to an infant. Myrrh is used to embalm dead bodies. Giving this gift to Jesus symbolizes the fact that Jesus was born to die – to die as Savior for sinners! *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”* (John 3:17)

If Christmas is for sinners, then Christmas is not for me if I claim no need for forgiveness for my sins!

Jesus’ identification with sinners was at the deepest level – even to the point of dying on a cross for sin. Jesus became mankind’s ‘sin bearer’ when he died on the cross. So much did He identify with mankind’s problems (sins) that God turned His face away from Jesus while Jesus died on the cross. Jesus became the ‘personification of sin’ and, because God is so holy that He cannot even look at sin, Jesus felt terrible rejection even

by God. Jesus cried out from the Cross, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!”*

III. Jesus testified to truth of man’s need for deepest repentance and genuine conversion.

Said Jesus to a very religious Jewish leader (Nicodemus), *“With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this: Unless you are born again, you can never get into the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:3, Living Bible)*

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray about himself; ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ‘I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’ (Luke 18:9-14)

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)*

To repent is to change one’s mind regarding sin, from one of clinging to sin to one of abhorring sin. A change of mind regarding sin results in a change of direction, from one of following evil ways to one of pursuing godly ways. Repentance is a moral U-turn, turning ones back on sin, and turning one’s face toward the Savior. Turning to Christ is the essence of Biblical Faith and is the positive result of genuine repentance. 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!

But you may say, “I am a Christian and you are saying that Christmas is for sinners. Does that mean that Christmas is not for me, a Christian?”

I would answer first that it is great that you are a Christian. A Christian is one who is saved from his sins. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1) If one habitually and willfully sins, it is true that he is not a Christian. (I John 3)

But even if you are a Christian, you can identify with your need for daily forgiveness of

willful isolated sins, and sins of ignorance, and sins of omission. Repentance is not a once-and-for-all experience, but repentance is a life-time attitude towards all sin (willful or ignorant). Because Christmas is for sinners, and because all of us need forgiveness every day, we can all identify with the purpose of Christmas – Christians and non-Christians alike.

At Christmas time, we must not have a holier-than-thou attitude towards the unchurched and the unsaved, towards those outsiders who will make their way into our Church at Christmas time and Easter time. Let us be grateful that those sinners who visit our Churches twice a year at least instinctively recognize the fact that Christmas is for sinners – sinners like themselves.

It is only as sinners – unbelievers – see this spirit of humility in Christians that they will turn to our Christ and to our Church.

The following illustrates what we are trying to say. Nancy Covert Smith writes in her book *Journey Out of Nowhere*, “One afternoon I picked up a woman at the mental health day care center. I was on FISH call (FISH is an organization of Christians who work together to provide emergency help) and she needed transportation home. She was a tall woman, red-haired, loud-spoken. After she had crawled into the car and we had started, she said: ‘You’d better be scared. I’m a mental patient.’”

“‘I know.’”

“‘Well, aren’t you scared I’ll hurt you?’ She looked at me through a haze of cigarette smoke. ‘But I was in the hospital.’”

“‘I smiled, ‘So was I.’ We were like two children trying to outdo each other. ‘I had shock treatments,’ she said.”

“‘So did I.’”

“‘I had seven.’

“‘I had fourteen,’ I replied.”

“‘She looked at me a few minutes, and then she grinned. ‘You win. You were sicker. Now let’s talk.’” (Nancy Covert Smith, *Journey Out of Nowhere*, Word, 1973)

Says Robert Andrews who relates this incident, “After I read this I couldn’t help but wonder what might happen this Christmas if the following similar scene were to take place. He was a tall man, red-haired, loud-spoken. I saw him on the street and began talking to him about visiting my Church.

“‘You’d better stay away from me. I’m just a bum.’”

“‘I know.’”

“‘Well, aren’t you afraid I’ll contaminate you or ruin your reputation?’” He looked at me through a haze of cigarette smoke. “‘I’m a real bad sinner.’”

“‘So am I.’ We were like two children trying to outdo each other.

“I’ve done thousands of immoral things.”

“I’ve committed thousands of sins of pride, self-righteousness and neglect. I’ve been a hypocrite”

He looked at me a few minutes. “You win. You’re as bad as I am. Let’s talk.”

Please don’t misunderstand what I am trying to say. It is true that Christmas is for sinners, but we are not encouraging Christians to declare, therefore, that Christians are only saved in their sins rather than from their sins. Where sin abounds, grace super abounds. The atonement of Christ is able to cleanse from all sin – original sin and volitional sins (sins caused by wrong choice). We are not suggesting that because Christmas is for sinners that Christians have a ‘sin-fixation’ rather than a ‘grace-fixation’.

We are not to become preoccupied with sin and self, but we are to become preoccupied with the Savior, with His power to cleanse from all sin. It is true that we must be aware of our sins – our sins of commission, our sins of omission, and our sins of ignorance – but we must not fix our attention on our sins. We must glance at our sins, but we must gaze at our Savior.

Says Dr. A. J. Muste, “In Neo-orthodoxy we became obsessed with human helplessness and human corruption instead of being caught up in the transcending of them by the grace of God. We are still preoccupied with self, still self-centered and therefore still self-righteous. If we do not end with the experience of the grace and power of God as that which overcomes and blots out our preoccupation with our sinful selves, we are but giving another demonstration of the pretension and corruption of man, not of the grace of God.” (Quoted by E.S. Jones in ‘*Growing Spiritually*’, pg. 11)

However, even Christians need daily forgiveness. No one comes up to the perfect standards of God. Our attitude as believers must be an attitude of humility and confession. It is only as we continue to have a broken and a contrite and humble spirit that we can have forgiveness on a continuing basis. John wrote, “*If we continue to confess our sins, faithful is He and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned and are now in a state where we do not sin, a liar we are making Him, and His word is not in us.*” (1 John 9, 10, Wuest)

CONCLUSION: Christmas is for sinners – for respectable sinners with so-called respectable sins and also for repulsive sinners. Everyone stands on the same level at the foot of the cross. Remember, “He hath visited and redeemed his people.” (Luke 1:68)

Confess your sins at Christmas time. Christmas is a good time to receive forgiveness and

go on your way rejoicing. Whatever your sins are, today is the day to confess them. Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

-By Ron Christian-



SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' GENEALOGY

(Matthew 1)

A. The barriers between male and female are down.

The appearance of women in Jesus' genealogy shows that God considers women important, so important that women are named in the ancestry of the Son of God! Jesus came to destroy the despicable attitude of contempt that the ancient world manifested toward women. We can see the tenderness of Jesus as He wept with Mary and Martha over the death of Lazarus. We can see the winning love of Jesus which He patiently manifested to the despised Samaritan woman. We can see the heart of compassion as we see Jesus restore to life the son of the woman of Nain. Jesus cared for all – both male and female – and was not influenced by the hostile and indifferent attitudes towards women in His day.

B. The barriers between saint and sinner are down.

Christ takes the despised woman of Samaria and makes her an honored messenger of love. Christ takes a demon-possessed outcast, and makes him a respectable citizen. Christ takes a high-browed Pharisee and makes him a humble and faithful follower. Christ takes a doubting Thomas and makes him a flaming evangelist. Christ takes a thieving Onesimus and makes him a faithful servant. Christ takes an adulterous outcast and makes her a pure and respectable lady. Christ takes the dying thief and makes him a son of paradise. He takes the guilt-ridden publican and makes him a free and justified believer. Christ restores a wandering prodigal to the stature of full sonship. Christ breaks the shackles of sin and sets the prisoner free. Christ seeks and finds the lost sheep. He applies his healing salve to the sores of sin, and restores the downtrodden to wholeness and health. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."* (John 3:17)

C. The barriers between Jew and Gentile are down.

This dividing wall of hostility and enmity was brought to an end by the cross of Christ. Says Paul about Christ: *"For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity between us. By this sacrifice he removed the hostility of the Law, with all its commandments and rules, and made in himself out of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, thus producing*

peace. For He reconciled both to God by the sacrifice of one body on the cross, and by this act made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between them. Then he came and told both you who were far from God and us who were near that the war was over. And it is through him that both of us now can approach the Father in the one Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:14-18, Phillips)

-By Ron Christian-



“SPIRITUAL FEVER” ALERTS YOU TO YOUR NEED FOR YOUR “SPIRITUAL DOCTOR (JESUS CHRIST)”!

God knows my ‘secret sins’. God, in love, wants not only to expose my sins (for the purpose of my repentance), but God wants to forgive all my sins (made possible because of Christ’s sacrifice). God is not cruel when He reveals my sins to me – when He brings a thorough ‘awakening’ to my mind and heart (regarding the fact and seriousness of my sins). It is an act of God’s love to ‘convict’ me deeply of my sins, with the purpose of bringing me to a place of ‘true repentance, confession, and faith’. Admittedly, most (if not all) sinners do not like this ‘severe mercy’ (convicting) which God (in love and justice) brings to a lost person. Conviction, it has been said, is something like ‘spiritual fever’ (instead of physical fever). Sinners (under the ‘convicting hand of Almighty God’) feel the heat of God’s awakening and conviction – the ‘heat of exposure’ that reveals the seriousness of my sins, and the ‘hurts’ which my sins have caused to those around me – and this ‘heat’ is more than I can ‘bear’. To face the Horror of My Sins – the fact that my sins helped ‘crucify’ the Son of God; the fact that my sins have brought great ‘hurt’ to many others; the fact that my heart is (from God’s perspective) ‘*desperately wicked*’ (Jeremiah 33:9); the fact that my sins have adversely affected me in my mind and in my spirit and in my heart and in my will and in all my relationships; the fact that my sins have ‘tied me up inside’ and shriveled my total self and have kept me from realizing my God-given and creative potential; the fact that my sins have given me a ‘hard heart’ and a ‘closed mind’ and a ‘weakened will’; the fact that my sins have separated me from all relationship (and fellowship) with God, and have robbed me of any peace and satisfaction and happiness; the fact that my sins have made me a ‘loser in life’ and that I will be a ‘final loser’ at the time of my physical death – these are some of the reasons that must motivate me to ‘Run To Jesus For Forgiveness’ – Even Though I Admittedly Don’t Like My ‘Spiritual Fever’ (Awakening and Conviction From The Blessed Holy Spirit).

-By Ron Christian-



OUR GOD HATES ALL SINS INTENSELY, BUT OUR GOD LOVES ALL SINNERS INTENSELY!

He is the kind of God who, while He hates sin, nevertheless, loves sinners (sinners of all 'stripes' and 'colors' and 'conditions' and 'nationalities' and 'degrees' and 'backgrounds' and 'ages'). "Christ receives sinful men, even me with all my sin."

He is the kind of God who receives the young and the old, the ugly and the beautiful, the sophisticated and the common, the educated and the illiterate the moral and the immoral, the rich and the poor, the high profile and the ignored, the religious and the irreligious, the brilliant and the ignorant, the ten-talented and the one-talented, the clever and the dull, the influential and the overlooked, the powerful and the weak!

Jesus has no respect of persons! All persons may come to Him, if they simply go through the 'door of repentance and faith'! God has a 'place' for everyone in His vast Kingdom! None are arbitrarily excluded from His Kingdom! God loves all equally, and even those of a 'lowly position' in life need not feel intimidated!

-By Ron Christian-



CAN GOD'S SALVATION BRING DELIVERANCE TO MY VERY TROUBLED SOUL?

Have you ever felt weary in your soul, wishing for a time of rest from your heavy burdens? Have you sometimes felt tempted by the enemy of your soul to give up your faith? Have you ever felt attacked by unbelievers whose evil aim was to topple you from your lofty place of spiritual fellowship and activities? Have you ever wished you could turn the vessel of your soul upside down in God's secret presence, to share with the Lord your innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires?

Have you ever felt that you needed a stronger shoulder to lean on than the shoulder of your closest friend or loved one?

Have you ever wondered if this universe really is a 'moral' universe, when in this world wrong so often seems to go unpunished, and when right so often seems to go unrewarded?

Have you known people whose souls were very restless as they were trying to find satisfaction in something or in someone other than in God? Jesus said, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Are you weary; are you troubled in your soul? Has your pursuit for money or for pleasure or for prestige and position left your soul restless and discontent?

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Do you recognize your need for Salvation? Salvation comes from the same family of words as ‘Saved’. Do you recognize your need to be ‘saved’? “Saved from what?” you may ask. “Saved from your sins!” Your sins are the result of your deliberate breaking of God’s moral laws – The Ten Commandments!

Saved from your bondage, and your bondage is the result of hurtful habits you have formed in your life. Physical habits you have formed in your life. Physical bondage like alcoholism; spiritual bondage like pride; social bondage like inferiority; psychological bondage like worry!

Saved from condemnation, not only in this life but also damnation hereafter. To be saved from ‘hell on earth’ and from ‘hell after death’ is God’s miracle of grace made available for every human being.

Salvation from sin, from bondage, from condemnation. This is part of what ‘salvation’ means to a sinner. To recognize the need of Salvation is important, but it is just as important to recognize the source of Salvation. God alone is the source of Salvation. Some say (perhaps, lightly) statements like the following; “His job was his Salvation”, or “His marriage to that special woman was his salvation”, or “His grant of that loan was his salvation”, or “His relocation to that new city was his salvation”. Most of us know, in a lower ‘human way of talking’, that a new job, or a marriage to a particular person, or a relocation to a new city, or a receiving of a college degree, might all be considered a person’s ‘Salvation’. But to talk of ‘Salvation’ in these ways is almost to cheapen this marvelous word. ‘Salvation’, in the truest and most meaningful way, comes from God Alone!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O Lord, I acknowledge that if I put my trust in anyone or in anything other than in God alone for my salvation, I am putting my faith in an object that is powerless to save me! Money cannot save me! The Church cannot save me. Education cannot save me! Loved ones cannot save me! Military power cannot save me! My own morality, philosophy, or religiosity can’t save me. The Mighty Savior alone can save me – Now! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Your position, power, prestige, or popularity can't save you! Only God can save you! Wholehearted commitment to God alone brings sweet confidence that your salvation is real and that your security is lasting!

-By Ron Christian-



**VICTORY OVER MULTIPLE (SUBTLE) TEMPTATIONS AMIDST
SATAN'S BRUTAL (PERSONAL) ATTACKS!**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

“HOW” YOU CHOOSE, AND “FOR WHOM” YOU CHOOSE (ON EARTH) WILL DETERMINE YOUR PERSONAL (ETERNAL) DESTINY!

Man is free to choose because there is the presence of an objective moral standard (or law). Without such an objective moral law, there would be no such thing as right or wrong. In such a situation – the situation of moral relativism – everyone does what seems right to him, and in such a situation, no one has any authority to judge the actions of another person or another group of persons (a nation). It seemed “right” to Hitler to eliminate the Jewish people. If there is no objective moral law – i.e., if there is no law such as “Thou shalt not murder” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” - then no one can justly condemn Hitler’s actions on the basis of moral injustice and “sin”!

If the Genesis story of Man’s Fall teaches anything clearly, it teaches most clearly the fact of God’s objective moral laws, with attending rewards for obedience and attending punishment for disobedience! To deny the fact of objective moral law is not only to reject the revelation of Holy Scripture, but it is also to forfeit all possibility of clear intellectual understanding and moral freedom!

Consider Man’s rebellion. Man, possessed with the freedom to choose, determined his own destiny. Man yielded to the subtle temptation of Satan and was enticed by Satan’s allurements.

Satan implanted the seeds of doubt into Eve’s heart. Appealing to the gratification of Man’s desire, Satan succeeded in getting Man to overstep his God-imposed limitation, and thus to challenge God’s sovereignty.

-By Ron Christian-



AGONY TO ECSTASY!

Satan, whose own fall is attributed to the drunkenness of pride (Ezekiel 28:1-10), became the instigator of Man’s pride, which caused Man’s fall. When Man ate of the tree, he declared his independence of God and his desire to “run his own life”.

When Man invaded God’s territory of personal knowledge through eating from the tree, Man yielded to the temptation to play the part of God. Man’s relationship to the Creator was made to be one of servant to master. Man attempted to usurp God’s mastership when he yielded to Satan’s evil suggestions.

Let us look again at the nature of man's temptation. *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."' 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and was pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."* (Genesis 3:1-6)

What approach did the serpent take in plotting mankind's fall into sin? Satan was successful in causing Eve to question God's Word (Doubt), to overstep God's clearly-defined limitations (Disobedience and Rebellion), to gratify selfish desires (self-centeredness).

It must be said that there was no sin in Eve being tempted. In fact, what was from Satan's viewpoint a temptation – intended to destroy the woman – was from God's viewpoint a test – intended to perfect the woman. Eve had an opportunity, during the temptation, to demonstrate her loyalty to God and to mature her walk with God. But Satan's temptation of Eve was fatal, for Eve yielded to the temptation. Look more carefully at this fatal temptation.

(1) Questioning God's Word (Doubt)

"Right away the serpent insinuated a doubt into Eve's heart: 'Did God (really) say...?' (This is like the doubt insinuated with the words, 'If you are the Son of God...' in the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, as reported in Matt. 4:3-6) A deadly chink is opened up in the creature's love for his creator. And into this chink a little wedge is thrust in the form of the assertion: 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat (the fruit) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' (Genesis 3:4-5)." (Suzanne de Dietrich, *God's Unfolding Purpose*, pp. 37-38)

(2) Overstepping God's Clearly Defined Limitations (Disobedience)

Temptation tends to magnify man's desires for the forbidden and to erase the clearly-defined boundaries of God's laws. Satan seeks to befuddle the mind and, at the same time, to stimulate the lower desires of human nature during the hour of temptation. The forbidden tree did not look so forbidding after Eve began to rationalize! The Bible says, *"There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death!"* (Proverbs 14:12)

To the man who has learned to rationalize, it “seems right” for him to live with a young lady who is not his wife, or to date a young lady who is still married to another man, or to “fudge” on his income tax returns, or to tell a “white lie”, or to take a “pleasure trip” on Sunday when he should be worshiping at church, or to glance at the center page of a “Playboy” Magazine when no one is looking, or to use the tithe money to pay an overdue bill, or to watch an “educational program” on television instead of spending time praying and reading the Bible!

(3) Gratification of Desires (Self-Centeredness)

This temptation to Eve was fatal, for the temptation appealed to the desires of body, soul, and spirit. *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”* (Genesis 3:6)

(a) “Good for Food” (Appeal to Body)

Sin can be defined as fulfilling a legitimate desire in an illegitimate way or at an illegitimate time. It was not wrong for Eve to desire food, for food is a basic necessity of physical life. But it was wrong for Eve to desire the fruit of this specifically forbidden tree.

There are many physical desires, all of which are God-given and legitimate. For instance, there is the strong, God-given, physical desire for sexual gratification. But seeking to fulfill this legitimate desire in the wrong way (through adultery or through homosexuality) and at the wrong time (apart from marriage), results in sin.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger after a forty-day fast, it was an attempt on the part of Satan to get Jesus to fulfill a legitimate desire (satisfaction of physical hunger with food) through illegitimate means (by Jesus’ use of His extraordinary power to perform a miracle at a time which was incompatible with Jesus’ mission of full identification with mankind).

(b) “Pleasing To The Eye” (Appeal to Soul)

The forbidden fruit was not only good for food (physical appeal), but it was also pleasing to the eye (aesthetic or soul appeal). Man is created to appreciate beauty. To appreciate the beautiful in life is not sinful. Seldom does Satan offer that which is ugly and repulsive to a person. Satan seeks to deceive people by appealing to their aesthetic nature in order to get them to partake of the forbidden. Much of the so-called “sex therapy” today is based on the desire of man for the beautiful, the shapely, the attractive, the affectionate, the romantic. Just as the fruit on the

forbidden tree was most beautiful to behold, so there is much of the forbidden today that appears as beautiful. That which does not belong to us, and that which we are tempted to covet, appears as emotionally appealing and as aesthetically attractive. Someone else's beautiful woman, or beautiful house, or beautiful car, or attractive job – these are some of the more obvious objects of covetousness, all of which can (like the fruit in the Garden) appear to be most “pleasing to the eye”. Many are ensnared in sin because of the aesthetic attraction of the temptation. Again, seeking to fulfill a legitimate desire (enjoyment of a beautiful object or subject which appeals to our aesthetic nature) in an illegitimate way or at an illegitimate time is what constitutes sin.

(c) “Desirable for Gaining Wisdom” (Appeal to Spirit)

The fruit was appealing to the Body, for it was “good for food”. The fruit was appealing to the Soul (or aesthetic nature), for it was “pleasing to the eye”. Also, the fruit was appealing to the Spirit, for it was “desirable for gaining wisdom”.

There is an insatiable quest for knowledge and wisdom in our world today. To gain wisdom is to gain a most wonderful possession – a possession which will protect you throughout your life. The writer of Proverbs considers the possession of wisdom to be all-important: “Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her ... My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver ... For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.” (Proverbs 8:11, 19, 35, 36)

Surely, to desire wisdom is a good thing. Eve cannot be faulted for wanting wisdom, any more than she can be faulted for wanting physical food or aesthetic enjoyment. What was wrong was Eve's attempt to find wisdom through a forbidden means (by eating the forbidden fruit). As in the case of Eve, there are many today who wish to be wise and understanding, but who are attempting to find wisdom and insight through forbidden means – such as spiritism and witchcraft and horoscopes and mediums. Others seek to be wise through the study of worldly philosophy or psychology. Still others seek to be wise through their involvement in false religious systems – cultism or the occult or oriental religions. All of these above-mentioned examples are “forbidden fruit”.

What, to the world, appears as “wisdom”, is to God as “foolishness”, and that which is the essence of true wisdom – the “cross of Christ” - is utter foolishness to the world. Wrote Paul, *“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks*

look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (I Corinthians 1:21-35)

Seeking wisdom is a natural and legitimate desire. But seeking wisdom in the wrong ways and in the wrong places is both folly and sin. Say "No" to the "Forbidden fruit" of the world which promises to make you wise if you eat of it. Christ alone is the source of all true wisdom! *"Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, it is written, 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'"* (I Corinthians 1:30, 31)

It is not religion or philosophy or education that can give you wisdom; it is Christ alone who can make you wise unto salvation! Boast alone in Christ who is the Wisdom of God!

-By Ron Christian-



THE "JOY OF BECOMING" MORE CHRISTLIKE IS THE GREATEST JOY THERE IS IN HUMAN EXISTENCE!

Divine transformation, not mere human reformation! Human reformation cannot transform the human heart (that is, human reformation cannot change the inner 'carnal nature')! Only God, through His unlimited power, can change a person from the 'inside out'.

Change originates in the human heart! It is the human heart (inner motivations) that God 'changes' (transforms), and when that miracle takes place, then the outward behavior changes (suddenly or gradually)!

If any person be in Christ Jesus, that person is a new creation! Old things are passed away, and, behold, all things (goals and motivations and projects) are become new!

That change, which begins at the point of conversion, continues daily, for the rest of one's life. If a believer yields (obediently) to the Holy Spirit, he/she can expect to experience some kind of 'change' to happen regularly (sometimes even 'daily')!

The 'joy of becoming' is the greatest joy that there is! Becoming (little by little, and more and more) like the Person whom we (as believers) worship!

-By Ron Christian-



HAVE YOU YET BECOME A TRUE “CHRIST-FOLLOWER”?

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

STEPS IN COMING TO KNOW GOD

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

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 with fright into my office to blurt out his guilt. He confessed that he was afraid he was responsible for causing his girlfriend 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!

-By Ron Christian-



MAKING THE DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST!

(Joshua 24:11-15)

A woman called a pastor and, without preliminaries, said, “I’m a lost person and I’ve run smack into God. I want to talk with you,” (E.S. Jones; *Conversion*; pg. 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 unnoticeable 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.” (Billy Graham, *World Aflame*, pg. 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!

-By Ron Christian-



IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST

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

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 own and the only thing you 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." (E. S. Jones, *Conversion*, pg. 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!

-By Ron Christian-



WHY IS MY FREEDOM TO CHOOSE SO VERY FRIGHTENING?

Love could not be tested without the presence of a standard by which to determine obedience or disobedience.

God's commandment forbidding Man to eat from the tree was the standard by which either to praise Man for his obedience or to condemn Man for his disobedience.

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Only as man could freely choose to obey and serve God, could man's love for God be proved and developed.

A slave is forced to obey and serve his master even against his will. The attitude of the slave's resentment for his master is vastly different from the attitude of love with which a son willingly performs duties for his father.

Only the son, who has the power of choice, can prove his love for the father.

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“Loving God, thank You for my freedom to choose between moral alternatives. My freedom of choice allows me to ascend to the highest heights of moral development (if I wisely choose to love and to obey You, my God), or to descend to the lowest depths of moral degeneracy (if I tragically choose to live by the impulses of my ‘carnal desires’). Help me always, my all-wise God, to discern between ‘good and evil’, and to choose the ‘good’. Obedience to your commandments gives glory to my God, gives blessings to my fellowmen, and gives health and wholeness to myself.”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember that you alone, of all God's creatures, have the capacity to exercise ‘free will’. It is both frightening and fantastic to be a ‘creature of freedom’! Always exercise this awesome freedom responsibly!

-By Ron Christian-



“CALVINISM” OR “ARMINIANISM” - WHICH IS BIBLICAL?

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

DOES GOD HAVE ONE ‘WILL’ OR TWO ‘WILLS’?

The opposing view of reality (as it relates to God’s attitude towards ‘human suffering’) is the ‘Arminian view’ of life. This view embraces God’s sovereignty – that God is ultimately ‘in charge of life’ – but this view believes that God has allowed humans to exercise ‘genuine human freedom’. Much (certainly not all) of the ‘human suffering’ is the consequence of wrong moral choice by humans. Those persons who accept the Arminian viewpoint regarding God’s way of working with humans, believe that God has ‘two wills’.

God has a ‘perfect will’ for mankind (the way of righteousness and holy living), but God also has a ‘permissive will’ – based on the reality of God’s creation of humans with a ‘free will’. In other words, God allows man to choose evil rather than to choose good, to choose to kill babies rather than to let them live, to choose to eliminate Jews in a ‘gas oven’ rather than to honor this race of people!

God permits a person to choose to climb a dangerous mountain and to have an accident, rather than to use ‘common sense’ and to decide to stay home on a wintry day! God permits a person to choose to refrain from drinking alcohol while driving rather than to become drunk while behind ‘the wheel’ and hit an innocent bystander along the road! God permits a person to choose to live near the ocean where hurricanes frequently hit, and consequently to have his house washed away by the tidal waves! God permits a person to choose to refuse the wise advice of parents, and instead to choose to marry a ‘loser’ and end up with a tragic divorce.

Every human being is created with the ability to choose between moral alternatives – to choose the ‘right’ and to refuse the ‘wrong’, to choose the ‘way of wisdom’ and to reject the ‘way of folly’! Human beings are not ‘robots’, controlled by a sovereign ‘God’ who uses them as ‘mere tools’ to carry out some kind of mysterious divine purpose!

Rather, human beings are created in the ‘image of God’, with an inner desire to serve their Creator, but, nevertheless, (because of the ‘inward bent to sin’) humans also experience an inner desire to become autonomous (self-directed) rather than to become God-directed. Each person experiences an ‘inner conflict’, an inner ‘pull’ towards the God who created him, and also, at the same time, an inner ‘pull’ (because of his ‘fallen nature’) to ‘move away from God’ and to live an independent life!

How a person resolves this ‘terrible inner struggle’ (listening to the voice of God or listening to the voice of one’s self) will determine the ‘outcome’ of a person’s life! There is the voice of the Spirit (convicting and drawing a person to Christ), and there is also the voice of selfishness that draws a person away from God and that seeks (deceptively)

to lull and to entice a person to ‘taste the carnal fruit of the world’ (satisfaction of fleshly appetites)!

Both God (the Holy Spirit) and the sinful world seek the allegiance of the soul of a person. These are the two opposite ‘pulls’ – the pull of the Spirit (prevenient grace – or the ‘grace that goes before’ to make it possible for a sinner to be saved), and the pull of the world (which seeks to exploit the fallen and lustful nature of the unconverted person).

This description of the struggle which every human experiences (as he is in the ‘valley of decision’) describes the reality of the human ‘free will’! God will, through the Spirit, seek to persuade the sinner (without coercion) to ‘come over on the side of righteousness and holiness’ – through man’s repentance and through the Spirit’s transforming power – but, in the ‘final analysis’, each person must exercise his own power of ‘free will choice’!

The Holy Spirit offers the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to every person (this twofold gift is called ‘prevenient grace’), but every person (sinner) must either accept or reject this twofold gift of the Spirit.

To reject God’s prevenient grace is to ‘shut the door of invitation’ to God’s ‘saving grace’ (the grace that converts one from sin to salvation). There is no ‘movement’ towards God without the initiating overtures (prevenient grace) of God.

All of salvation is the work of God – the grace that initially draws a sinner to God (prevenient grace), the grace that saves a sinner (saving grace), the grace that cleanses a believer (sanctifying grace), the grace that sustains a believer throughout his ‘faith journey’ (keeping grace), the grace that restores a wandering believer (restoring grace), the grace that empowers a believer when he comes to the end of his life (dying grace)!

Neither Satan (nor the evil world) nor God (through the Spirit) can ‘force’ a human being to ‘make up his mind’ (to make a choice) – for ‘good’ or for ‘evil’! The influence from both the ‘evil side’ and the ‘good side’ may be strong, but, ultimately, each man must choose whom he will serve – the true God or the Baal (pagan gods)!

And then, with the moral choice, each person must live with the consequences of his choice! The ‘consequences’ of a person’s choice come with the kind of choice that he makes. The original choice God has finally left to each person, but the consequences (good or bad) are ‘attached’ to the original choice. The consequences are part of the ‘package’, tied with the original choice!

As an example, you are free to regularly partake of a ‘hard drug’, but you do not have the freedom to choose the devastating consequences when you partake of the ‘hard drug’. I had a good friend who, even though he became a Christian, chose not to give up smoking. He continued to smoke for ten years after he became a Christian. Just before he died (of cancer, probably caused by smoking) he told me that he wished that he had stopped smoking many years earlier! He was fairly young when he died – a wonderful Christian man, but a man whose body was, nevertheless, devastated by the effects of cigarettes!

Whereas Calvinism thinks that the so-called exercise of human ‘free will’ is simply a mechanism (extension) of the divine (hidden) will of Almighty God (and, therefore, rather insignificant, because ‘free will’ is not an independent feature of humans), those Christians of the Arminian persuasion believe (like the New Testament) that ‘human free will’ is a sacred and a serious feature (characteristic) of what it means to be human!

In other words, Arminians believe that ‘free will’ was given by God to the human race, at the time of God’s creation of Adam and Eve (and that this property is an integral characteristic of every human being!). Arminians believe (like the Bible teaches) that human free will (while not outside of God’s ultimate control) is a gracious ‘gift’ given by the Creator. The exercise of the free will of humans (while definitely influenced by the loving God) has the power to bring a person to Christ, or it has the power to take a person away from Christ!

WRONG MORAL CHOICES HAVE TRAGIC MORAL CONSEQUENCES!

Against the advice of the Bible and against the wise counsel of godly leaders and against one’s own ‘better sense’, people (even believers) exercise their ‘will’ negatively, and God (because He honors the sanctity of the human will) permits persons to ‘make their foolish choice’ (oftentimes with sad and painful consequences). Because God did not create ‘robots’, but, instead, He created persons who possess the wonderful, but the frightening capacity to ‘choose between moral alternatives’, a lot of ‘human suffering’ happens!

A lot of suffering in our world today is the result of ‘free will agents’ making ‘wrong moral choices’! When persons are ‘wallowing in the ditch of suffering’, with no one to blame but themselves, does Jesus care for these persons?

I will refer to myself, as an example: When I was ‘existing’ (not really ‘living’) in the ‘dark tunnel of painful depression’ (1992-1994) – suffering as a consequence of my ‘wrong attitudes’ of resentment and anger and bitterness and worry – did God have a ‘right’ to condemn me to continuing perpetual suffering and agony and loneliness and

sterile living?

Because of my own wrong ‘moral decisions’ (i.e., because I broke God’s laws of love and forgiveness), I deserved God’s condemnation, I deserved to feel the pain of God’s judgment! God gave me what I needed, namely, chastisement and correction and the pain that brought me to needed ‘humility’ and greater trust in God! But God did not give me what I deserved, namely, harsh justice and judgment.

During my many failures and my sins, this sadly brought me into a long period of 30 months of ‘depression’, accompanied with intense pain and suffering (nearly to the ‘breaking point’ of my endurance). God was with me each moment of each long day.

Admittedly, I often did not ‘feel’ His presence, but, nevertheless, He never left me to myself, to endure the pain – the suffering that I had largely brought upon myself. The ‘unseen’ and the ‘unfelt’ presence of my merciful Savior and my conquering Lord was with me, during the ‘dark’ traversing of that ‘long and dark tunnel’.

This most difficult (agonizing) period of my life was a time that brought much confusion to my mind, and it brought a crushing to my spirit and it brought a trembling to my heart, and it brought a weakness to my body. My words are inadequate to describe the soul-wrenching pain I experienced for so very long! A nightmare!

There may be some trials that are more difficult than the trial of ‘depression’, but, from my personal experience, I think ‘depression’ has to be ‘near the top’ of a list of ‘hard trials’. The suffering that is the result of depression is a suffering that encompasses one’s entire being – body, soul, spirit, heart, and mind! I, frankly, wanted to die, and I made that my prayer for months!

In surveying the various kinds of suffering, I think it is accurate to state that many sufferings which we humans experience are due to the consequences of our own ‘wrong moral choices’. Probably much of the suffering in our world today could have been prevented, if right choices would have been made. I made some wrong moral choices – with painful consequences! The darkest months of my life (at least 30 months!) Eventually, God brought total healing to my total being!

-By Ron Christian-



**ACCEPTING GOD’S KIND OFFER LEADS TO “REPENTANCE”, BUT
REJECTION LEADS TO GOD’S JUST WRATH AND JUDGMENT!**

Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God's generosity and patient mercy toward you as weakness on his part? Don't you realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Or are you by your obstinate refusal to repent simply storing up for yourself an experience of the wrath of God in the day when, in his holy anger against evil, he shows his hand in righteous judgment?

There is no doubt at all that he will "render to every man according to his works," and that means eternal life to those who, in patiently doing good, aim at the unseen (but real) glory and honor of the eternal world. It also means anger and wrath for those who rebel against God's plan of life, and refuse to obey his rules, and who, in so doing, make themselves the very servants of evil. Yes, it means bitter pain and a fearful undoing for every human soul who works on the side of evil, for the Jew first and then the Greek. But, let me repeat, there is glory and honor and peace for every worker on the side of good, for the Jew first and then the Greek. For there is no preferential treatment with God. (Portions of Romans, Chapter 2; Phillip's Translation)



YOU ARE A CHILD AND A MEMBER OF A VERY LARGE FAMILY!"

"Pray along these lines. 'Our Father in heaven, we honor your holy name.'"
Matthew 6:9

To Call God 'Father' Gives Us A Right Relationship With The Unseen World. Jesus came to tell us that this universe is essentially a friendly universe. Jesus showed us that God is love. What Jesus is, God has always been. That means that God has always been a God of Love.

Christ came to show us what God is and always has been – a God of Love. Christ showed man how great God's love is. Christ showed man that God's love is so great that He can be called 'Father'. That means that God is not far removed and unconcerned for man. Because God's heart is a Father's heart, you can approach Him in confidence and love.

How different is the Christian's God from the myriad of heathen gods. The God of the Christians is trustworthy, beneficent, and loving. The heathen gods are pitiless, grudging, and hateful. It is oftentimes a great relief for a pagan worshipper to learn that there is only one true God who is not wrathful and grudging, but who is loving and caring. Jesus came to show us that the unseen world which is controlled by God is not against us but that it is for us.

To Call God 'Father' Gives Us A Right Relationship With The Seen World! Not only has Jesus shown us that we are living in a friendly universe, but Jesus has shown us that the Christian is living in a friendly world. How is this possible? It is because Jesus has shown us that all circumstances can be used for God's glory and man's good.

Realizing that God is love will enable one to meet the circumstances of life – even those that are unexplainable – with confidence and optimism. Such faith in a Heavenly Father will save one from cynicism, and despair. It is a great comfort to know that God is Father, and a loving father will never cause his child a needless tear.

When we pray, 'Our Father', we are reminded that we are members of a family and that we have brothers and sisters to love. We are reminded that life consists in serving others and not in being served. It is true that a Christian can never advocate solitary religion. No Christian desires to go to heaven without taking others with him. We cannot be interested in God without being interested in our fellowmen. We cannot love the invisible God without truly loving our visible brothers. *"It is this command that we have from Him, that he who loves God loves his brother also."* (1 John 4:21) In fact, we actually find God through doing service to others.

Sorrow can be good, since it can draw us nearer to God. One who has experienced sorrow is better equipped truly to sympathize with his fellowmen. After one man told how his mother had lost her dearest son, he says, "That is where my mother got her soft eyes and why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child." (Barclay's *Corinthians*, pg.191)

Someone once asked Dr. Karl Menninger what he would advise a person to do if he felt a nervous breakdown coming on. His answer was surprising to some, but very sound: "If you feel a nervous breakdown coming on, lock up your house, go across the railway tracks and find someone in need and do something for him." (Dr. Karl Menninger, *Prayer and Life's Highest*, pg. 55) Involvement in other people's problems oftentimes offers a therapeutic cure to one's own needs.

When Kagawa was young, he was told that he would die, but the doctors were wrong. He lived past seventy, and the explanation for his extended life lies in his involvement in other people's problems. Says Kagawa, "When I suffered from tuberculosis I thought I was dying so I decided to do some good before I died. That is the reason I entered the slums. I thought if I went to heaven and confessed that I was lazy on the earth, God would say to me, 'No place for you.'... In the slums, I had no door. I had the 'open-air cure'. And it cured me of tuberculosis. It is interesting that because I lived in the slums I was cured of my sickness. I had improvement of health and I am here tonight. This way

of cure I always recommend to my friends in Japan who are suffering from tuberculosis.” (Trout, *Kagawa, Japanese Prophet*, pp. 51, 52) Healing sometimes comes through involvement. To pray ‘Our Father’ should remind us that we are our brothers’ keeper. To render service to others enables us to find God and enables us to find ourselves. To pray ‘Our Father’ means that we are acknowledging God’s love and also acknowledging God’s family. This reminds us of God’s Fatherhood and reminds us of man’s brotherhood.

Because God is ‘Father’ His children can be confident that they live in a friendly universe and also in a friendly world. The Beneficent Father wills only good for His children, even if that good is found in circumstances that appear to be unexplainable.

Membership in God’s family assumes responsibility and involvement in the needs of one’s fellow brothers and sisters. We find God and we find ourselves through involvement and service to others.

-By Ron Christian-



There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice
Which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord.

By Frederick W. Faber (1814-1863)

MANKIND'S ULTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY!
EITHER
REWARDS FOR A GODLY LIFE
OR
JUDGMENT FOR A WICKED LIFE

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

HAVE YOU GLADLY ACCEPTED (IN FAITH) CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS FOR YOUR SINS, OR ARE YOU FACING GOD'S JUDGMENT HEREAFTER?

I. INTRODUCTION:

God has the final word and his judgment will be just, for the standard of his judgment will be Jesus Christ.

II. PROPOSITION:

Every man will be judged and wrong will be punished and right will be rewarded.

A. SATAN'S SEEMING SUCCESS BUT ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

1. Satan's Seeming Success
2. Satan's Ultimate Destruction

B. MANKIND'S TEMPORARY TESTING BUT ULTIMATE JUDGMENT

1. Mankind's Temporary Testing
2. Mankind's Ultimate Judgment
 - a. Fact of Judgment
 - b. Standard of Judgment
 - c. Execution of Judgment

III. CONCLUSION:

The most important question for each person to ask himself is this: "Do I know that my name is written in the Book of Life?"



I. INTRODUCTION:

Whatever else is true, there is one thing that is true – the world is not what it was meant to be. Something has gone wrong, and the Biblical explanation for the world's confusion and conflict is sin. Sin is a perversion of God's will. It was God's will that man only know peace and fellowship, but instead man oftentimes only knows turmoil and war.

When right oftentimes goes unrewarded and wrong oftentimes goes unpunished, is there reason to believe that there is nothing beyond the grave? The Bible's answer is clear. "It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment." God has the final word and his judgment will be just, for the standard of his judgment will be Jesus Christ.

II. PROPOSITION:

It is to communicate the reality of the coming judgment which is the Holy Spirit's ministry to unregenerate men. Although it seems at times that Satan has won the spiritual battle, this is only an apparent observation. It seems that Satan has succeeded, but God has already pronounced his ultimate destruction. Although it seems that the unregenerate prosper and wrong goes unpunished, this is only an apparent observation, every man will be judged and wrong will be punished and right will be rewarded.

A. SATAN'S SEEMING SUCCESS BUT ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

1. Satan's Seeming Success

It is believed that Satan is a fallen angel who led many other angels in rebellion against God and, as a result, he and his followers were thus cast out of heaven. The story of Satan's workings on earth might, on the surface, appear to be a story of satanic victory and human defeat. There is no doubt that Satan has produced widespread devastation on earth.

The story of the opening pages of the Bible is a devastating story of satanic victory. Man's sin from the very beginning of his history was doubt and disobedience. Man doubted God's Word and listened to Satan's subtle suggestion. Satan implanted the seeds of doubt in Eve's heart. Appealing to the gratification of man's desires, Satan succeeded in getting man to overstep his God-imposed limitation, and thus to challenge God's sovereignty.

The result of man's fall is soon seen in the murder of Abel. The intensity of man's sin is vividly expressed in the early pages of Genesis: *"And God 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."* (Genesis 6:5) The flood which destroyed almost all mankind, did not destroy the perversity of man's heart. To divert the presumption and pride of mankind, God stopped the building of the 'tower into heaven' by confusing man's languages.

Throughout history sin continued to abound, until there were entire nations which had succumbed to pagan darkness. Rejection of God is the leading cause of paganism, says Paul. *"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened."* (Romans 1:21)

The darkness and ignorance which for centuries permeated the world seemed to be evidence of Satan's triumph and mankind's doom. But, although God's plan was frustrated, it was not defeated, for in the fullness of time, God sent forth His son into the world. But lo! It seemed that as the Son of God was condemned and nailed to the Cross, that mankind's final hope was destroyed and Satan's final victory won. It seemed that heaven and earth were bowing to the power of sin and hell, and that mankind would forever be a slave of Satan. Christ's death on the Cross seemed to Satan to spell his final victory over God and humanity.

2. Satan's Ultimate Destruction

What appeared, however to be Satan's final victory, was really the seal of Satan's ultimate destruction. When Satan crucified the sinless Son of God, he signed his own death warrant and 'cut his own throat', as it were.

To understand this strange paradox of how Christ's death could bring life and salvation, and how it could result in Satan's destruction, we must better understand the purpose of Christ's life and death.

Jesus was not merely a man. He was God come to earth in the form of a man. Jesus showed that he was God by his assumption of authority. Who other than Jesus could give orders to men to follow him? Who else would dare to identically identify his work with God's work, or who but Jesus would dare to substitute his law for Moses' law? Jesus' authoritative voice is the voice of God.

Consider Jesus' miracles. What was the purpose of these miracles? Jesus' miracles are foretastes and shadows of his unlimited power to deliver man from sin and death. The miracles are not merely acts of compassion, but more than this, these miracles are Messianic acts, which are demonstrations of Christ's power to deliver from the bondage of Satan. "In this connection, the casting out of demons has a very special place in the Gospels, for the beginning of God's reign means the end of the demonic reign." (Suzanne Dietrich, *God's Unfolding Purpose*, pg. 172)

Jesus' authoritative words and His miraculous works are mere demonstrations of His power, and are predictions of His ultimate triumphant victory over Satan.

Christ's death actually accomplished the ultimate destruction of Satan and his works. Satan's apparent victory really became the cause of his ultimate defeat. Suzanne Dietrich well describes Satan's seeming success but what really became Satan's ultimate destruction: "Let it be granted that Satan gathers all the powers of this world together against the Lord's Anointed. (Acts 4:26-27) Let it be granted

that when these hostile forces are mobilized the leaders of Israel, the inheritors of all God's promises, will be in the front ranks. Let it be granted, once again, that Roman law and order will become the cowardly and obliging accomplices of Jewish intrigue. And let it be granted, finally, that Satan will persuade the frightened disciples to renounce their Master or else will reduce them to silence, and that one of the Twelve will turn traitor. Let all that be granted. Nevertheless, in the midst of all these apparent victories, won by the prince of this world, his ultimate defeat is hidden. He is merely the instrument of a higher purpose. For in this single Son whom he crushes with his might, Israel in all of its faithfulness is incarnate. Satan has all men in his power save this one. He will subject him to the torture of suffering on a cross – in vain. He will inflict all the rages of hatred on him – in vain. He will make mankind forsake him – but all in vain. For Jesus will remain obedient unto death, even death on a cross. The only prize that the prince of demons really wants will escape him, for he will be unable to capture God's well-beloved Son. 'The ruler of this world' as Jesus points out, 'has no power over me'. (John 14:30) And the victory of this single person will become victory for every person." (Suzanne Dietrich, *God's Unfolding Purpose*, pg. 184)

How is it possible that the victory of the Crucified can become the victory for every man? It is because Christ's death is substitutionary. "*For Christ once died for sinners, the just on behalf of the unjust, so that He might lead us up to God, put to death as He was physically but made alive spiritually.*" (I Peter 3:18) Through His death, Christ now has the power to destroy the very one who had the power of death – Satan. And thus Christ delivers all who were previously in bondage because of the fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14, 15) The works of Satan are sin and death. Christ's substitutionary death resulted in the destruction of Satan's works (I John 3:8). Because Christ died, no man needs to die for his own sins. Christ took man's penalty on the Cross.

How is it possible that the victory of the Crucified can become the victory for every man? It is because Christ arose from the dead, thus potentially putting an end to death for every man. Christ conclusively demonstrated His power over death by the Resurrection. Because of Christ's resurrection, "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" No longer does death have its sting; no longer does the grave have its victory." (I Corinthians 15)

B. MANKIND'S TEMPORARY TESTING BUT ULTIMATE JUDGMENT

1. Mankind's Temporary Testing

If Satan has been judged and condemned through the victorious resurrection of

Christ, what is the reason for the delay of Satan's full execution and destruction? Says Hogue, "The full execution of the sentence is delayed that God may carry out His purposes of grace toward the children of men who are involved in this judgment. Christ is reconstructing God's government over this world, and offers an amnesty to all who have rebelled, provided they will renounce their allegiance to the prince who has led them in their rebellion against God, confess their guilt, and accept Him who was crucified for the world's redemption as their King and Savior. Christ, by His death, has made their reconciliation to God possible. By His resurrection from the dead He has proven His ability to save and His right to reign." (*The Holy Spirit a Study*, pg. 190)

What is the purpose of Christ's coming to earth? Thus far, we have seen that Christ came to defeat Satan and destroy his works – sin and death. The second reason for which Christ came to earth (and the reason which naturally follows the first reason) was to save man from his predicament. As John said, "*For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.*"

Christ's coming to the earth was redemptive and not condemnatory. Let this be simply illustrated. Suppose a person is invited to go through an art museum for the purpose of receiving aesthetic joy and of cultivating greater artistic appreciation. The purpose of going through the art museum is to become a greater person, with deeper understanding of art. But suppose that after a person went through the museum that he declared to the guide, "I think your old art pieces were not worth viewing. The tour was boring." How would the art museum guide be apt to answer the critical viewer?" The guide could well say, "I'm sorry, sir, but these art masterpieces have already been judged. They have stood the test of time, and have proved to be great and worthy masterpieces." In this illustration, it is not the masterpieces that are judged. They are only meant to give viewers enjoyment and lend greatness to their lives. It is the critical viewer who is judged. Nothing is said about the paintings. They are still great. But much is said about the viewer. The viewer's statement says that the viewer has no real artistic appreciation or mature sense of beauty.

Now consider Christ's redemptive work on Calvary and His glorious resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection were meant to save man. They are meant to give victory over sin to man and to make man's life great. The death and resurrection is the solution to man's predicament. God's will is to save all men. It is not Christ who condemns at all. It is Christ who came to save all mankind. However, when man ignores and rejects the solution to his problem, man condemns himself. Man's rejection of God's provision does not destroy God's saving purpose. Man's

rejection of God's provision for life merely results in man condemning himself as a chief of fools. It is not Christ that condemns man. It is man that condemns himself.

2. MANKIND'S ULTIMATE JUDGMENT

a. Fact of Judgment

When asked what to him the most important English word was, Webster one time said that that word was 'accountability'. The Scripture says that *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27) In his discourse on Mar's Hill, Paul declared to the Athenian philosophers that *"God ... now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained."* (Acts 17:30, 31) Man's denial of the judgment does not make the fact of judgment any less real. It is not all of life to live nor all of death to die, but after death each man has a personal appointment with God.

b. Standard of Judgment

Christ is the standard of all judgment. One's response to Christ will determine one's destiny. *"The day will surely come when at God's command Jesus Christ will judge the secret lives of everyone, their inmost thoughts and motives. (Romans 2:16; Living Letters) "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son!"*

It is not man's external respectability or his high profession or his abundant deeds that alone will be the basis for favorable judgment. These qualities are desirable, but it is one's inner responses to Christ that will only give one entrance to heaven.

Hogue so well illustrates this truth from God's Word: "He shows men that when Christ preferred the publican to the Pharisee, the widow's mites to the abundant offerings of the wealthy, the wretchedness of Lazarus to the affluence of Dives, the tears of 'a woman which was a sinner' to the vain works and professions of Simon the Pharisee, He was only revealing and illustrating the principles which will enter into the administration of judgment in the last great day of assize. In that day a cup of cold water having been given in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise fail of its reward; while the man who has bestowed all his goods to feed the poor, and

who has given his body to be burned, if he shall be found to have done these things without the love of Christ as the constraining motive, shall have no profit from all his sacrifice. Then the King will say to those who, prompted by His Spirit, have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, comforted the sorrowing, and relieved the distressed, ‘Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it to Me. And these shall go away into life eternal.’” (Hogue, *The Holy Spirit*, pg. 197)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we seek you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

c. Execution of Judgment

When Satan was judged, everything which he stood for (worldly lusts) and everyone who served him (God-rejecters) and all unsaved received the same judgment which Satan received. “Since the prince of this world is judged, those who submit to his dominion and are controlled by the

principles of his government are also judged as God's enemies, and are involved in the same fearful condemnation as the prince under whose dominion they are serving." (*Ibid.* p.94) The final execution of Satan's judgment is ultimate and certain. Whether or not man's judgment will be executed, depends upon man's acceptance or rejection of Christ. The final execution of man's judgment will be removed and canceled and the sinner will be acquitted if he accepts Christ's provision of life.

The man who has received forgiveness of sins has no reason to fear judgment. God's love will give the Christian boldness in the day of judgment. (I John 4:17) To the Christian God will say, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" (*Matthew 25:34*)

The man who has rejected God's provision of life, has every reason to fear judgment. To the sinner, there is "a certain, fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries". (*Hebrews 10:27*) The sinner, who persists in his rejection of God, shall receive the same destiny that Satan himself will finally receive. Meditate upon the vivid description of the destiny of the wicked:

"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (*Revelations 20:10-15*)

III. CONCLUSION:

Asks Barclay, "What confronts a man with the certainty of judgment? Why should a man not do what he likes? What makes him feel certain that judgment lies ahead? That is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the inner and unshakable conviction that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God."

(Barclay's *John*; vol. 12; pg. 226)

The most important question for each person to ask himself is this: "Do I know that my name is written in the Book of Life?" If one's name is not written in that Book of Life, what must one do to have it written there? Simply accept God's provision of life. To accept God's provision of life, all one needs to do is to confess his sins to God and to believe in Christ's power to save. If one has confessed his sins and believed in Christ, he can have confidence that God will accept him in to the Divine Family. Such a person then becomes a child of God. He escapes eternal punishment and inherits eternal life. What is your choice today? **Accept Christ!**

-By Ron Christian-



HOW IS GOD'S LOVE BEST DEMONSTRATED TO YOU?

"O God, because (unlike all the so-called gods of the world) You are a God of righteousness, justice, integrity, and holiness, You cannot look lightly upon sin! Sin must be punished, and the just punishment for sin is death. If sin were not punished, You, O God, would no longer be a just God, and the moral order of the Universe would be destroyed. There would then no longer be a reliable, 'honest' universe, but instead a 'dishonest' universe (not worthy of being lived in)! Only through the exercise of the dying love of the sinless Son, can God remain just in His character and, at the same time, I, as sinner, become justified in my standing before You, O my Maker! The only way I (the sinner) can be saved is through the Cross of Christ! The Cross of Christ is lifted high for the entire world to see and to accept and to experience as the means of God's transforming power. O God, I today 'cling to the old rugged cross'! Greater love hath no man than this, that He laid down His life for a race of fallen creatures including me! Hallelujah! The way of God's love is the way of the Cross, and the way of the Cross leads home (to heaven)!"

-By Ron Christian-



WHEN I ACCEPTED CHRIST, MY LIFE DRASTICALLY CHANGED!

I have a long way to go in the 'Christian life' (in terms of becoming more 'Christ like' in my character), but I must (briefly) state a fact: When I prayed (as a child) "God, save my soul!" my life was drastically changed.

I wanted (almost immediately) to start reading my Bible, and to start memorizing a lot of verses from the Bible, and to start praying consistently in a private place, and to start telling others about the love of Jesus at my school. Also following my conversion to Christ, I found it ‘easy’ during my teen years to obey my parents.

A few months after my conversion, I became eager to learn about my ‘Faith’ from my loving pastor (in whose home I spent much time, being trained). During my high school years, I began to explore the possibility of becoming a pastor. I never ‘dreamed’ at the time I prayed that simple prayer (to be ‘saved’), that my life would so greatly ‘change’!

Great changes came to my life, as a result of my repentance and my faith in Christ. God genuinely ‘saved my soul’. I was not then, and I have not been since that time, ‘perfect’, but the direction of my life decisively changed on that historic day, and I have been gradually changing ever since the day of my conversion. Admittedly, I have not always ‘walked’ as I should have walked, close to my blessed Savior.

I have never deliberately ‘walked away from my Savior’, but sometimes I have not kept in ‘close step’ with my Savior. Through my ‘tears of repentance’ (at times when I spiritually ‘drifted’), God, in mercy, restored me.

I want to have a ‘closer walk’ with my Lord, for the remainder of my passing life! The famous song “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” appeals to me. That song expresses the ‘desire of my heart’! But I must acknowledge that I have shed many (internal and external) ‘tears’ – tears of repentance – during my long spiritual ‘journey’!

Of course, since that initial commitment (to be ‘saved’), I have had to shed a lot of ‘tears’ – including ‘tears’ of repentance. But, nevertheless, I know that the ‘power of Christ’ ‘saved’ me on March 12, 1956 (when I was 11 years old). It was a wonderful, divinely-wrought transformation of my entire life! There is no ‘power’ (for transformation) like the power of Christ!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, what can wash away my sins? My sins have broken not only your Holy Laws, but also your Holy Heart! Unless You, before whom I have grievously sinned, speak pardon for my sins, I cannot be forgiven.

“What can wash away my sins? “Nothing but the ‘Blood of Jesus’”! But I ask – ‘Why can Jesus’ sacrifice for me avail for my forgiveness?’ Because Jesus’ Blood was ‘sinless blood’! How can I know this about Jesus – that He was sinless rather than sinful, like

every other human being? Because a once-in-history event took place, a few days after Jesus died! God raised Jesus from the dead to show the world that truth, justice, and godliness are stronger than the opposites of all these realities! Why then can I, dear God, be assured that You will forgive all my sins? Because You have told me to place my faith (trust) in One who's Atoning Blood, (the only sinless blood) is powerful enough to wash away all my sins! The blood, the blood, O hallelujah it cleanses me!

No more condemnation for violations against God's Holy Laws. Thank You, dear God, for Your Son who has taken my just penalty for my sins, and has resolved all my guilt and has given me assurance of eternal life! Amen!"

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Remember, the most beautiful word in all human language is 'forgiveness', but all talk of forgiveness is an illusion without the resurrection of Jesus! Because Jesus vanquished death, your sins are vanquished! Glory!

-By Ron Christian-



WHY WAS CHRIST'S DEATH NECESSARY FOR YOUR SALVATION?

"O God, your Word teaches me that, without the shedding of the blood of Jesus, I can have no salvation – no forgiveness and no peace with You! Christ's death was substitutionary – the Innocent One dying for the Guilty Ones (including me, as a member of a 'fallen race')! Life is in the blood! When Jesus' blood was shed, His very life was poured out for me! There is nothing more sacred in all the Universe, than the precious blood of Jesus Christ! I will forever cherish the saving and the healing blood of my mighty Savior, for I have no acceptance with God in time or in eternity, without that pure blood (sacrificed for me)! To reject that sacrifice of Christ is to remain unforgiven, and to invite the wrath of God upon myself. Christ's blood alone is without defilement, and therefore no other person or institution or god can save me! Throughout my short life, and at the moment of my death, I will find my salvation only in the 'precious blood' of Jesus! Amen."

-By Ron Christian-



BECOMING LIKE A CHILD!

“About that time the disciples came to Jesus to ask which of them would be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus called a small child over to Him and set the little fellow down among them, and said, ‘Unless you turn to God from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore anyone who humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. And any of you who welcomes a little child like this because you are mine is welcoming me and caring for me.’” (Matthew 18:1-5)

Jesus made it very clear that there is only one way to enter the Kingdom of God, and that way is the way of childlike simplicity. Those qualities, which are found in a child, are the same qualities that must be found in every person who enters the Kingdom. Jesus is not commending childishness but childlikeness. There is a difference. No man is asked to revert to childish actions. Paul said, *“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things.” (I Corinthians 13:11)* What then did Jesus mean when He said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”?

Jesus said that, just as a small child is humble, so a person must be humble if he is to enter the kingdom. This was an important lesson to the disciples of Jesus, for they were anything but humble. Their concern was not humility but greatness. “Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” In this question can be seen the true motives and desires of the disciples. They were not concerned who could serve the most, but who could be served the most. They were not concerned in honoring each other, but in being honored. Their desire was prestige, honor, and power; not humble and self-forgetful service. In their question can be seen the ugly materialism, vain striving, tough competitiveness bitter jealousy, and gross selfishness – all of which Jesus so dramatically condemned.

“Jesus called a little child and made him stand in the middle of them, and said, ‘This is the truth I tell you – unless you turn and become as children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven’.” These were hard words for the disciples to hear, but healing words if heeded.

What attitude found in a child must we also practice in our life? Whoever humbles himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Humility is found in a small child. A small child doesn't seek prominence but is satisfied to be in obscurity. A member of the Kingdom must not seek for prominence but rather he satisfied to serve in obscurity.

“...the same way, you who are younger, submit yourself to your elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” (I Peter 5:5); “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” (Romans 12:3); “Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips.” (Proverbs 27:2)

Jesus told His disciples that they must become as children. What is a child like? A child has a total dependence upon his mother and father. So it is with a person who would become a member of the Kingdom. He must rely completely upon God. This quality of inherent trust, which is found in a child, must also be found in the person who seeks entrance into the Kingdom.

Blessed is the man who trusts in God he will surely enter the Kingdom. *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)*

Trust in God for salvation. Man dare not trust in his own righteousness to gain God’s approval. *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags, we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” (Isaiah 64:6); “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23); “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:” (Luke 18:9); “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Trust in God for provisions – material and spiritual. A child assumes that his parents are going to take care of him, so he doesn’t worry and fret. It was Jesus’ knowledge of this common and inherent trust of a child that caused Jesus to liken the relationship between a believer and God to the relationship between a child and a father. *“So don’t worry and don’t keep saying, ‘What shall we eat, what shall we drink, or what shall we wear?’ That is what pagans are always looking for; your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your heart on His Kingdom and His goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course. Don’t worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself! One day’s trouble is enough for one day.” (Matthew 6:31-40)*

If God is concerned about our physical needs, how much more is he concerned about our spiritual needs, needs such as assurance, cleansing, peace, joy, power, and keeping. *“My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)* That includes everything.

God has promised assurance for the future: *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (I John 5:13)*

God promises constant cleansing in our lives: *“But if we (really) are living and walking in the Light as He (Himself) is the Light, we have (true, unbroken) fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses (removes) us from all sin and guilt – keeps us cleansed from sin in all its forms and manifestation” (I John 1:7)*

God promises peace to the trusting heart: *“Peace I leave with you, my (own) peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid – stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful, intimidated, cowardly, and unsettled.” (John 14:27)*

God promises fullness of joy to the trusting heart: *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11)*

God promises power to live effectively, even in critical times: *“Men will arrest you and persecute you, handing you over to synagogue or prison, or bring you before kings and governors, and for my names sake. This will be your chance to witness for me. So make up your minds not to think out your defense beforehand. I will give you such eloquence and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict it.” (Luke 1:12-15)*

God promises to keep the believer from falling into sin and apostasy: *“Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24, 25)*

Childlikeness means humility and simple trust. This is the way into the Kingdom. What Jesus said to His disciples, He says to all of us today, *“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)*

-By Ron Christian-



ARE YOU EMPTY-HANDED AS YOU STAND BEFORE THE CROSS?

“Yes, all-holy God, I am ‘empty-handed’ as I stand before the ‘Cross of Christ’. There is nothing that I could do to save myself! “In my hands no price I bring; simply to Thy Cross I cling.” No amount of money could purchase my salvation! I cannot earn, purchase, or deserve your new life which has been purchased by the costly blood of the dying Savior! My own carnal pride – sense of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness – lies buried in the dust! How blasphemous of me to think that I (a wretched sinner) could make myself ‘acceptable’ to You, most Holy God! When mankind was most powerless to save itself through morality, philosophy, and culture, O God, You sent your Son into this broken world to die for mankind, and all of this, to rescue mankind – including an obscure person like me! Thank You, my blessed Savior! As an ‘empty-handed’ sinner before the Cross, I ask You just now to make me a child of God. Let me receive the fullness of your love! Then my ‘hands’ shall be involved in many ‘love projects’ for my Living Lord! Amen!”

-By Ron Christian-



**GOD'S TRANSFORMING POWER IS LIMITLESS IN ITS BREADTH
AND DEPTH TO CHANGE SINNERS INTO SAINTS!**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

I PRAISE GOD FOR THE AMAZING CHANGES THAT HUMANS CAN EXPERIENCE!

Someone said that the greatest evidence of the validity of Christianity is that Christianity can make a ‘bad’ man ‘good’. The transformation of a human character is the greatest evidence – practically speaking – that Christianity has a power beyond any human power. Christianity, based on a relationship with the Living Christ, teaches that any human being can change ‘for the better’!

Christianity teaches that, because of the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, ‘old things’ can pass away – sin – and ‘new things’ can become a reality – right and holy living! The New Testament is ‘packed’ with the teaching that describes, in one way or another, divinely-wrought ‘transformation’ of human character. Based on God’s grace, not based on human effort, the New Testament teaches that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven, and no sinner that cannot be made into a beautiful and loving believer!

There are many teachers and ministers and evangelists (both past and present) who could give a hearty ‘Amen’ to the above-stated affirmations! Some of the above-mentioned Christian leaders have been the personal ‘witness’ to the conversion of literally thousands of sinners! I am personally thankful that God allowed me, a pastor of a small church, over a period of about 20 years, to witness the conversion of many scores of sinners (almost all of these conversions, around the dining room table of their home)!

I was privileged to be God’s ‘tool’ (channel or ‘mouthpiece’), when I presented the ‘plan of salvation’ to many precious folks! After these persons sincerely met the ‘conditions’ for salvation, they began to grow dynamically in their newfound ‘faith’. After I led them to Christ, I, of course, sought to help these new believers to develop and to progress in the ‘fleshing out’ of their newfound faith (in many different ways). I stood back in observation of the life of these new believers, and I was thrilled and I was amazed at their growth!

As is true of all of us (believers), these new Christians had a lot to learn. They, like all of us, experienced some ‘advances’ and some ‘retreats’ in the living of the Christian life, but the majority of these precious new believers became responsible and loving servants of our God! Some, eventually, even assumed leadership positions within the local church!

Today, many years since their conversion, there are those one-time-baby Christians who

are now strong and stalwart leaders in the work of God (including the local church)! God is a transforming God – a God who loves to change every one of us, a God who wants us to be strong in the things of God, a God who wants us to reach out in love to everyone around us!

There are many and varied ways in which God's change in the heart and life of a person can be described. One of the most meaningful ways to describe divinely-wrought 'change' in the human life is to make 'contrasts'. This is what I was 'before' I was converted (or before I made a fuller surrender of my life to God), and (in contrast) this is what I have become since I yielded my life to the transforming God! Even though the contrasting list is rather detailed, I encourage you to thoughtfully envision what the miracle-performing God truly accomplishes!

God has power to turn a 'stumbling block' into a 'stepping stone', to turn a mess into a message to turn a hard adversity into a tender empathy, to turn a hope into a reality, to turn a tear-stained face into a radiant face, to turn a tragedy into a triumph, to turn a sorrow into a comfort, to turn a broken heart into a healed heart, to turn confusion into understanding, to turn loneliness into companionship, to turn a loss into a gain, to turn humiliation into dignity.

God has the power to turn failure into success, to turn retreat into advancement, to turn depravity into purity, to turn a life of transgression into a life of obedience, to turn moral weakness into moral strength, to turn an evil habit into a righteous habit, to turn moral chaos into moral order, to turn a slave of sin into a slave of righteousness, to turn an irrational mind into a rational mind, to deliver one from a false religion and introduce him to the true religion, to turn one from self-centeredness to a life of Christ-centeredness!

God has power to truly transform any and all human beings! The mission of Christ is to turn each of us around – to make a 180 degree turn in the life of each and every one of us! The call of God is the 'call of repentance' – the call to leave our 'old way of life' and to embrace the 'new way of life' – the life of righteousness, the life of integrity, the life of justice, the life of holiness, the life of peace, the life of holy love! Our call is the call to become a 'new creature' – a person who is 'centered in Christ's person', rather than a person who is centered in himself.

God has power to change every one of us – to change us initially at the time of 'conversion', and to change us progressively through God's call to pursue and to realize (imperfectly) the holy life, patterned after the holiness of Christ Himself!

Of course, we (believers) are not totally 'changed' (morally and spiritually and

intellectually and socially) during the time that we are alive on this terrestrial ball! The Christian life is a life of ‘constant growth’, becoming more and more like the Christ of the Ages, but, of course, never attaining the ‘full stature’ of Christ.

We (as sincere, growing) believers know that often we ‘come short’ of being the persons we could be and that we ought to be (in terms of developing Christ-like character), but, nevertheless, we (believers) keep trying (in spite of our moral failures), and we (believers) keep praying (sometimes intensely and sometimes sparsely), and we (believers) keep reading our Bible (sometimes intently and sometimes lazily)!

We (believers) keep attending our local church services (sometimes we listen attentively and sometimes we fall asleep when the preacher is fervently declaring the ‘truth’ from the Bible), and we (believers) keep giving money to the church and to charities (sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes reluctantly), and we (believers) keep resisting the devil (sometimes zealously and sometimes negligently)!

We (believers) keep trying to witness to non-believers (sometimes boldly and sometimes timidly), and we (believers) know that we are to return good for evil to those who spitefully use us (and sometimes we have the strength wholeheartedly to forgive our enemies, and sometimes we forgive our enemies very slowly and sometimes very reluctantly)!

We (believers) are called ‘believers’ because we honestly believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we honestly believe that Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life (the only One through whom our sins are forgiven, and the only One by whom we can gain ‘entrance’ into heaven, after we die!).

We want to be the ‘true blue’ – the authentic person, the true follower of Christ, the One to whom we give our sole allegiance and loyalty. It is our desire, amidst the hardships we experience and the temptations that befall us, to be ‘true and faithful’ to Christ, throughout our life, until we breathe our very last breath!

We honestly desire that God’s progressive sanctification (the impartation of divine love in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit’s empowerment) – that this progressive perfecting of our lives will continually be at ‘work’ in the heart and in the mind of each one of us! But, as briefly described above, we (believers) must admit that sometimes we come ‘short’ of God’s expectations for us believers!

We (believers) are becoming aware (in light of our many shortcomings) that ‘repentance’ is not a once-and-for-all experience, which takes place at the time of our conversion! We (believers) now acknowledge that ‘repentance’ is an ongoing ‘attitude’ that must endure

throughout our entire ‘faith walk’ (till death releases us from our human body)!

Every day we (believers) need to ‘confess’ our failures and our shortcomings and our ‘sins’ (even the unintentional ‘sins’) to a loving and a forgiving God! We (believers) recognize that, as wonderful as the initial ‘change’ is at the time of our conversion (John 3), all of the Christian life is subject to ongoing and greatly needed ‘changes’!

We (believers) humbly acknowledge that, if we are serious about following a ‘Transforming God’, we must be subject to the ‘transformations’ (changes) which God desires to bring about in our life (as believers)!

Think further of the wonderful changes which God is able to bring in the life of a human being!

God is able to turn revengeful bitterness into loving forgiveness, to turn overly-sensitive reactions into properly-sensitive responses, to turn introspective grief into socially-building projects!

God is able to turn cold isolation into warm fellowship, to turn hurtful deprivation into healthful prosperity, to turn negative criticism into positive affirmation, to turn dark depression into joyous health, to turn boredom into engrossing work, to turn religious dogmatism into tolerant acceptance!

God is able to turn a worldly-minded person into a biblically-minded person, to turn a foolish person into a wise person, to turn a disappointed person into a gladsome person, to turn a duplicitous person into a transparent person, to change a deceptive person into a guileless person, to change a slanderous person into a charitable person!

God is able to change a double-minded person into a single-minded person, to change a lazy person into an industrious person, to change a half-hearted person into a whole-hearted person, to change a dishonest person into an honest person, to change a trouble-maker into a peace-maker, to change a drunk person into a sober person, to change a self-centered person into an others-oriented person, to change a self-pitying person into a self-giving person!

Transformation! That is what Christianity is all about! God is able to take a ‘bad man’ and turn him into a ‘good man’! “I once was lost, but now I am found. I once was blind, but now I can see!”

Change, change, wonderful change! The power of the cross and the power of the resurrection – the wonder-working means by which God alone can change a sinner into

a saint!

The kind of change which is demonstrated in the amazing creation of the beautiful butterfly! From an ugly cocoon (the ugliness of the sinful life) to the emergence of the exquisite butterfly (the wonder of divine transformation).

Divine transformation, not mere human reformation! Human reformation cannot transform the human heart (that is, human reformation cannot change the inner ‘carnal nature’)! Only God, through His unlimited power can change a person from the ‘inside out’.

Change originates in the human heart! It is the human heart (inner motivations) that God ‘changes’ (transforms), and when that miracle takes place, then the outward behavior changes (suddenly or gradually)!

If any person be in Christ Jesus, that person is a new creation! Old things are passed away, and, behold, all things (goals and motivations and projects) are become new!

That change, which begins at the point of conversion, continues daily, for the rest of one’s life. If a believer yields (obediently) to the Holy Spirit, he/she can expect to experience some kind of ‘change’ to happen regularly (sometimes even ‘daily’)!

The ‘joy of becoming’ is the greatest joy that there is! Becoming (little by little, and more and more) like the Person whom we (as believers) worship!

We (believers), in our honest thoughts, know that we are not everything that we desire to be! We admit that there is always a ‘gap’ (small or large) between what we ‘profess’ and what we ‘possess’ (in terms of practical, every day, living of the Christian life)!

We try, with God’s help, to be the kind of person (privately and in public) that God desires us to be. But, we often fail to live the kind of life that we desire to live, and that God desires us to live. So, what do we do, as we face this dilemma?

We exercise more personal discipline (in terms of the development of ‘holy habits’). We pray more honestly and diligently. We make ourselves subject to the counsel of other believers. We make deeper surrenders of our heart to the Holy Spirit., We saturate our minds with biblical truths. We wait in silence daily for the Spirit to work in our surrendered heart and will. We confess any known sin in our life, and we refuse to go on a ‘guilt trip’ because of our failures. We learn to accept God’s forgiveness, and we learn to forgive our self to our failures.

We keep on keeping on, in our forward movement for God. We learn anew the meaning of God's grace. We affirm the glorious fact that God loves us unconditionally! We are not 'easy' on our self, when we fail, but, on the other hand, we accept God's forgiveness! We recognize that it is vitally important that we keep our self away from the obvious traps of temptation! We march forward in joy and in peace!

We know that in time and in eternity, Christ will be the perfect 'standard' by which we will measure our personal progress in our spiritual life. We (believers), in spite of our desires and our earnest efforts, know that when we come to the 'end of the road' on this earth, we will have to confess that the development of our character (towards the standard of Christlikeness), is still incomplete.

But, we will take comfort (as we are dying) that we are saved by grace, not by our own moral and spiritual accomplishments (no matter how worthy). We will further take comfort in the fact, that, where we 'left off' (in terms of our personal development) when we die, we will continue with that same spiritual development when we enter the portals of heaven!

Because there is so much to learn in heaven (that we never learned when we lived on earth), it is almost certain that there will be eternal growth (development in character) in that place where expansion of our personality is limitless!

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"O God, I thank You for your 'progressive revelation' of yourself, and of your purposes, and your will, and your ways! I thank You for the final (complete) revelation of yourself, through the coming of your Own Son to this earth! Jesus, who volunteered to leave heaven to come to a sin-cursed earth, lived a perfect life, performed remarkable miracles, taught with greatest of insights the truths of the Father, died an agonizing death as a sacrifice for the sins of all the world, gloriously arose from the dead to win total victory over sin and death and hell and Satan. Jesus did everything his Father sent Him to earth to accomplish! His mission was redemptive, and He alone paved the 'road to heaven' for every human being! 'What more could He do, than what He has done?' No one accomplished more than Jesus Christ did! Yes, Jesus died for sinners! Every sin that anyone has ever sinned (envy, hatred, lust, etc.) helped crucify the Son of God!

"The entire human race (each person) is responsible for Jesus' crucifixion! 'None is righteous, no not one'! All are lost, and all would be lost eternally! But all who accept Jesus will go to heaven! No doubt about it! Based on Jesus' Promise! And those whose hearts are right will be there too! Amen!"

-By Ron Christian-

FATHER, I STRETCH MY HANDS TO THEE

Father, I stretch my hands to thee;
No other help I know;
If thou withdraw thyself from me,
Ah! whither shall I go?

What did thine only Son endure,
Before I drew my breath!
What pain, what labor, to secure
My soul from endless death!

O Jesus, could I this believe
I now should feel thy pow'r,
And all my wants thou wouldst relieve,
In this accepted hour.

Author of faith! To thee
I lift my weary longing eyes:
O let me now receive that gift;
My soul without it dies.

Surely thou canst not let me die,
O speak, and I shall live;
And here will I unwearied lie,
Till thou thy Spirit give.

How would my fainting soul rejoice,
Could I but see thy face?
Now let me hear thy quickening voice,
And taste thy pardoning grace.

-Charles Wesley-



THE REPENTANT SINNER (MORALLY-BANKRUPT) OPENS HIS “HANDS” (LIFE) TO RECEIVE GOD’S FORGIVENESS (JUSTIFICATION)!

“There are people who do not flaunt their achievements before God. They do not stride into God’s presence as if they were partners able to engage with him on an equal footing; they do not lay claim to a reward for what they have done. These are people who know that their poverty also has an interior dimension; they are lovers who simply want to let God bestow his gifts upon them and thereby to live in inner harmony with God’s nature and word. The saying of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux about one day standing before God with empty hands, and holding them open to him, describes the spirit of these poor ones of God: They come with empty hands; not with hands that grasp and clutch, but with hands that open and give and thus are ready to receive from God’s bountiful goodness.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pg. 76)



“AVOID BEING (USELESS) CHAFF WHICH THE WIND WILL DRIVE AWAY!” (THE ANCIENT WAY OF GETTING RID OF USELESS CHAFF!)

Perhaps you have heard the familiar (thoughtful) saying: “Only one life, it will soon be passed; only what is done for Christ will last!” Someone said, “Uselessness invites disaster!” To not to use your gifts and abilities on earth spells disaster – for time and eternity! Gifts (abilities) tend to ‘shrivel up’ (dissipate) if they are not used. A muscle that is not exercised will become weak, perhaps even atrophied. God gave us only one short life – to become useful and helpful, both to God and to our fellowman! To bury ones talent is tragic indeed, for the world (who needs the benefit from our talent) is a ‘loser’ – and God is angry. Remember what God said to the ‘unprofitable’ (one-talented) steward? “*Cast him out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!*”

A terrifying picture of an angry God who will receive no excuses at the end of time, from a selfish and slothful and useless and unenterprising servant (to whom God gave time and meaningful talents)! Not to turn one’s potentials into actualities (of service in God’s Kingdom), results in the provoking of God’s just anger, and the destruction of the useless ‘chaff’ of his selfish life!

Notes William Barclay (New Testament Scholar): “The chaff (recorded in Psalms 1) gives us the picture of the character and destiny of the evil man. The chaff is empty and and worthless, good for nothing. The chaff is impermanent and unstable. The chaff is doomed to separation. The wicked like the chaff are doomed to destruction.”

The wicked (described as chaff, which the wind will drive away) – these have no sense of right and wrong, and they have no sense of ultimate accountability before God. They take the way of pleasure and selfish conduct!

Indulgence! They care nothing about others, and they are oblivious to God and to His authority. Irresponsible Conduct!

The wicked have no desire to live pure and holy lives, but they, instead, live lives filled with lust and evil passions. They live by the evil advice they give to others! “If it feels good, do it!”

To follow the wicked, is to take the road that leads to death – ‘death’ to sound thinking and ‘death’ to sound conduct! Among the many ‘philosophies of the wicked’ are the following:

1. Hedonism – Worship of pleasure, “Eat drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.”
2. Sensualism – Worship of Sex.
3. Materialism – Worship of money.
4. Humanism – Worship of man, and man’s ‘inherent’ abilities to solve problems.
5. Scientism – Worship of Science, with belief that Science is the final answer.
6. Secularism – Living life with No Belief in God. (Practical Atheism)
7. Relativism – Belief that there is no ‘objective moral standards’ in life.
8. Militarism – The rewards ‘go to the strongest’: ‘Might makes Right!’

One of the most ‘distressing’ word pictures of the life and destiny of the ‘wicked’ is that picture of ‘chaff which the wind blows away’. Remember: “Uselessness invites Disaster”! Don’t allow yourself to become ‘CHAFF’!

-By Ron Christian-



**“THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD”, FOR THERE IS
“PLEASURE IN SIN FOR ONLY A SEASON” (A SHORT SEASON)!**

“But false teachers are fools – no better than animals. They do whatever they feel like; born only to be caught and killed, they laugh at the terrifying powers of the underworld which they know so little about; and they will be destroyed along with all the demons

and powers of hell.

That is the pay these teachers will have for their sin. For they live in evil pleasures day after day. They are a disgrace and a stain among you, deceiving you by living in foul sin on the side while they join your love feasts as though they were honest men. No woman can escape their sinful stare, and of adultery they never have enough. They make a game of luring unstable women. They train themselves to be greedy; and are doomed and cursed. They have gone off the road and become lost like Balaam, the son of Beor, who fell in love with the money he could make by doing wrong; but Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey spoke to him with a human voice, scolding and rebuking him.

These men are as useless as dried-up springs of water, promising much and delivering nothing; they are as unstable as clouds driven by the storm winds. They are doomed to the eternal pits of darkness. They proudly boast about their sins and conquests, and using lust as their bait, they lure back into sin those who have just escaped from such wicked living.

“You aren’t saved by being good,” they say, “so you might as well be bad. Do what you like, be free.”

But these very teachers who offer this “freedom” from law are themselves slaves to sin and destruction. For a man is a slave to whatever controls him. And when a person has escaped from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then gets tangled up with sin and becomes its slave again, he is worse off than he was before. It would be better if he had never known about Christ at all than to learn of him and then afterwards turn his back on the holy commandments that were given to him. There is an old saying that “A dog comes back to what he has vomited, and a pig is washed only to come back and wallow in the mud again.” That is the way it is with those who turn again to their sin.

(2 Peter 2:12-22 Life Application Bible)

(Commentary by William Barclay)

Here Peter launches out into a long passage of magnificent invective. It is a passage through which there glows the fiery heat of flaming moral indignation.

The evil men are like brute beasts; they are the slaves of the instincts which they share with the beasts. But a beast is born for capture and death, says Peter; it has no other end, and no other destiny. Even so, there is something self-destroying in fleshly pleasure. To make such pleasure the be-all and the end-all of life is in the end a suicidal policy. Such pleasure is corrupt and has in it the seeds of corruption and destruction. The aim of the man who gives himself to such fleshly things is pleasure; and his tragedy is that in the end he loses even the pleasure. The point which Peter is making is this, and it is an eternally valid one – if a man dedicates himself to these fleshly pleasures, if he makes

them his only joy, in the end he so ruins himself in bodily health and in spiritual and mental character, that he cannot even enjoy them. To put it quite simply and bluntly, the glutton destroys his appetite in the end; the drunkard ruins his health; the sensualist destroys his own body; the self-indulgent ruins his own character and his own peace of mind. The man who dedicated himself to these things is seeking for pleasure; for a while he may enjoy what he calls pleasure, but in the end he ruins his health, wrecks his constitution, destroys his mind and character, and begins his experience of hell when he is still upon earth.

These men regard daylight debauchery, dissipated reveling, abandoned carousing as pleasure. They are blots on the Christian fellowship; they are like the blemishes on an animal, which make it unfit to be offered to God. Once again we must note that what Peter is saying is not only religious truth; it is also sound common sense. The pleasures of the body, the pleasures of luxurious feasting and drunken revelry, and the pleasures of the libertine are demonstrably subject to the law of diminishing returns. In themselves they lose their thrill, so that as time goes on it takes more and more of them to satisfy. The luxury must become ever more luxurious; the wine must flow ever more freely; everything must be done to make the thrill sharper and more intense. Further, a man becomes less and less able to enjoy them. His physical capacity and his physical ability to enjoy such things in the nature of things declines. He has given himself literally to a life that has no future, and to pleasure which ends in pain.

So Peter goes on. In verse 14 he uses an extraordinary phrase which will not translate into English at all. We have translated it: “They have eyes which are full of adultery.” The phrase in Greek literally is: “They have eyes which are full of an adulteress.” Most probably, as has been suggested, the meaning is they see a possible adulteress in every woman. They regard every woman with the eye of lustful calculation, wondering if and how she can be persuaded to agree to gratify their lusts. “The hand and the eye,” said the Jewish teachers, “are the brokers of sin.” As Jesus said, such people look in order to lust (Matthew 5:28). They have to come to such a stage that they cannot look on anyone without lust’s calculation.

As Peter speaks of this, there is a terrible deliberateness about it. They have hearts trained in unbridled ambition for the things they have no right to have. We have taken a whole phrase to translate the one word *pleonexia*; *pleonexia* means the desire to have more of the things which a man has no right even to desire, let alone to have. The picture is a terrible one. The word which is used for *trained* is the word which is used for an athlete, exercising and training himself for the games. These people have actually trained and equipped and taught their minds and hearts to concentrate on nothing but the forbidden desire. They have deliberately fought with conscience until they have destroyed it; they have deliberately wrestled with God until they have thrown God out of

life; they have deliberately struggled with their finer feelings until they have strangled them; they have deliberately trained themselves to concentrate on the forbidden things. Their lives have been a dreadful battle to destroy virtue and to train themselves in the techniques of sin.

There remains in this passage still one further charge. It would be bad if these people deluded only themselves; it is worse that they delude others. They entrap souls which are not firmly founded in the faith. The word used for to *entrap* is *deleazein*, which means to *catch with a bait*. A man becomes really a bad man when he sets out to make others as bad as himself. The hymn has it:

All the mischief we have wrought,
All forbidden things we've sought,
All the sin to others taught:
Forgive, O Lord, for Jesus' sake.

Every man must bear the responsibility for his own sins, but to add to that the responsibility for the sins of others, is an intolerable burden.

(William Barclay, *Letter of Peter*, pp. 391-393) (Emphasis added.)



JESUS IS THE WAY!

“I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE!”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Jesus is totally adequate for every need which man has. He strengthens the Will, He answers the questions of the Mind; He speaks assurance to the Heart.

I AM THE WAY (Gives Power to the Will) Jesus Saves From Life Of Sin. Man cannot convert himself, as much as he needs or desires conversion. But what man is unable to do because of a weak or corrupted will, The Mighty Christ Can Do!

Jesus Breaks Harmful Habits. Only Christ can empower the weakened will of man, to enable man to break harmful habits. The fact that God can make bad men good, is evidence of the power of Christianity.

Jesus Empowers For Service. Jesus can strengthen the will of the Christians to enable them to accomplish great tasks for the Master. Said Paul, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)* *“For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what He wants.” (Philippians 2:13)*

Wrote Paul, *“This is my work, and I can do it only because Christ’s mighty energy is at work within me.” (Colossians 1:29)* Jesus gives the daily renewal and physical and spiritual vitality to continue to follow Him throughout an entire lifetime. Jesus is the Way to a lifetime of fruitful, faithful service.

I Am The Truth (Gives Answers To The Mind). John 14:17, 26 speaks of The Spirit of truth. *“The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you”; “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

Jesus Answers Man’s Questions Regarding Life and Death. Jesus does not want our hearts to be troubled about the hereafter. The solution is to believe in Jesus who gives us inside knowledge of God. Jesus is the Son, so everything Jesus was, God has always been. Jesus is preparing Heaven for man’s dwelling place forever. In Jesus, you are safe in life and in death.

Jesus Answers Man’s Questions Regarding Salvation and Acceptance by God. No man can come to the Father except through the Son. To see and to know Jesus is to see and to know God the Father. The truth concealed became the Truth Revealed. Jesus is the Truth Personified, who stepped out of the very bosom of God to reveal the truth about reality. He who accepts Jesus accepts Truth and accepts God. It is in the Incarnate Son that man finds salvation and acceptance by God. *“No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” (John 14:6b)*

Jesus, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, comforts and assures the human heart. *“And I will pray to the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever...I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.” (John 14:16, 18)*

Jesus Gives Assurance During Man’s Fears. There is fear regarding the unknown future. We see the future as if we were looking through a glass darkly, but Jesus assures us of His continuing companionship, and His future promises. *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be*

troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:3, 4, 27)

There is fear regarding death. Jesus’ reassuring words are these: *“Because I live, ye shall live also”*. (John 14:19) There is an angel who will lead the faithful gently home.

Jesus Gives Assurance During Man’s Loneliness. Because the Christian is never alone, he needs never feel forsaken. The intimate companionship and indwelling of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is the guarantee against loneliness.

“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my words. And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and we will make our abode with him.” (John 14:20, 21, 23)

Do you need new strength? Jesus is the Way to strength and power! Do you need the answers to life’s mysteries? Jesus is the Truth who has come directly from God’s bosom to reveal reality! Do you need assurance in the face of Life’s Fears and life’s loneliness? Jesus is the Life, and He will bring comfort to your troubled heart!

COME TO JESUS!

-By Ron Christian-



THE POWER OF GOD’S GRACE MIGHTILY TRANSFORMS ALL SINNERS (EVEN ‘DOWN-AND-OUT’ SINNERS) – INCLUDING YOU!

“To you, who were so spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world’s ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you, Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past, and followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else. But even though we were dead in our sins, God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ – it is, remember by grace and not by achievement that you are saved – and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ Jesus in the Heavens. Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed toward us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve – it was God’s gift of grace which saved you. No one can pride himself upon

earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:1-10 Phillips’ Translation)

“For we ourselves have known what it is to be ignorant, disobedient and deceived, the slaves of various desires and pleasant feelings, while our lives were spent in malice and jealousy – we were hateful and we hated one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love toward man appeared, he saved us in his mercy – not by virtue of any moral achievements of ours, but by the cleansing power of a new birth and the moral renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he gave us so generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. The result is that we are acquitted by his grace, and can look forward to inheriting life for evermore. This is solid truth: I want you to speak about these matters with absolute certainty, so that those who have believed in God may concentrate upon a life of goodness.” (Portions of Titus chapter 3; Phillips’ Translation)

“I am deeply grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord (to whom I owe all that I have accomplished) for trusting me enough to appoint me his minister, despite the fact that I had previously blasphemed his name, persecuted his Church and insulted him. I believe he was merciful to me because what I did was done in the ignorance of a man without faith, Our Lord poured out his grace upon me, giving me tremendous faith in, and love for, himself. This statement is completely reliable and should be universally accepted: - Christ Jesus entered the world to rescue sinners. I realize that I was the worst of them all, and that because of this very fact God was particularly merciful to me. It was a kind of demonstration of the extent of Christ’s patience toward the worst of men, to serve as an example to all who in the future should trust him for eternal life. So to the king of all the ages, the immortal, invisible, and only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, amen!” (I Timothy 1:12-17; Phillips’ Translation)



CAN I BE RECONCILED TO GOD?

What more can God do than what He has done to save humankind from the penalty of sin – eternal death? God sent His Son to earth to live a sacrificial life, to die a substitutionary 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!

Because of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and kingly reign, God is prepared to save all humanity. God’s plan for humanity’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: *"When we were utterly helpless, with no way of escape, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners who had no use for him. Even if we were good, we really wouldn't expect anyone to die for us, though, of course, that might be barely possible. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."* (Romans 5:6-8)

Exercising faith in the living Christ results in Christ's reconciliation of sinful man with the sinless God. *"And since by his blood he did all this for us as 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."* (Romans 5:9)

The New Testament uses the word 'Reconciliation' to describe the changed relations between God and humanity, which are the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's historic death, sin's penalty for all humanity 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 the entire 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!"

The deep wounds of suffering revealed in the open hands of the Crucified Savior are for the healing of my deep wounds of sin!

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Are you one among the multitude of humanity who believes that one (or more) of the following human activities is powerful enough to produce reconciliation between you and Almighty God? Morality, Religion, Baptism, Church Membership, Culture, Patriotism, Natural Birth, Charitable Deeds, Mere Sincerity.

The Bible has an unflattering (FRANK) estimate of human nature: *"We humans are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousness as filthy rags and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* (Isaiah 64:6)

TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“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! O God, my own good works are not good enough to save me. But the good work of Christ on the Cross of Calvary 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! Thank You that I, the alienated one, can become the reconciled one – to enjoy fellowship with the Triune God in time and in eternity. Glory! Amen!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

You cannot earn God’s favor. Rather, you humbly and gratefully must simply accept God’s favor. God, because of the work of Christ on the Cross and because of His Resurrection has become reconciled to the entire human race. God now waits for you to accept that objective reconciliation, and thus to become personally reconciled to God!

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO GET RID OF ALL YOUR SINS!

O Lord, You are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help. - Psalm 86:5 (NLT)

I am standing in the second oldest house in New York State, watching a small group of people from the historical society reenact a typical funeral from the seventeenth century. Candles dimly light us, the pretend-mourners in the main room.

As we stand around a shrouded mannequin with a bouquet of fresh flowers nearby, the sin-eater comes through the narrow door. The sin-eater, a narrator explains, was a very poor person, often an outcast with a drinking problem or mental illness, who was paid a small fee to consume the deceased’s sin along with some stale bread and flat beer and then was beaten out of town.

For the rest of the mock-funeral my mind is stuck on the sin-eater, burdened by the weight of another’s transgressions. Questions fill my head: *Did they have a drinking problem before they took on this job or after? Did they really believe they were taking on the sins of the dead or were they scam artists? Why would they do it?*

Sin. The word itself gives me a bad feeling. Sin is anything that separates us from God, and I think I feel that distance even in the word. I can barely handle my own wrongdoings; I can't imagine consuming someone else's.

As I drive home, I think about my faith and the beauty in knowing that Jesus is the ultimate sin-eater. He sacrificed His life for our sins and offers us the priceless gift of forgiveness.

*Lord, when my heart is burdened with regret and I turn to You, You cleanse me of guilt
and make me feel pure again.*

-Sabra Ciancanelli

Digging Deeper: Matthew 6:14-15, Luke 7:47

(Taken From "Daily Guideposts" Publication)



IF CHRIST CAN "SAVE THE CHIEFEST OF SINNERS", HE CAN "SAVE" ANY OTHER SINNER – ANY TIME AND ANYWHERE!

I am deeply grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord (to whom I owe all that I have accomplished) for trusting me enough to appoint me his minister, despite the fact that I had previously blasphemed his name, persecuted his Church and insulted him. I believe he was merciful to me because what I did was done in the ignorance of a man without faith. Our Lord poured out his grace upon me, giving me tremendous faith in, and love for, himself. This statement is completely reliable and should be universally accepted: - "Christ Jesus entered the world to rescue sinners." I realize that I was the worst of them all, and that because of this very fact God was particularly merciful to me. It was a kind of demonstration of the extent of Christ's patience toward the worst of men, to serve as an example to all who in the future should trust him for eternal life.

So to the king of all the ages, the immortal, invisible, and only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, amen! (I Timothy 1:12-17 Phillips' Translation)

(The testimony of the Apostle Paul, saved from great sin to become the greatest Christian leader/writer of all time! Thirteen of the Books of the New Testament were written by him!)



ARE YOU ON THE “RIGHT TRACK” THAT LEADS TO HEAVEN, OR ON THE “WRONG TRACK” THAT LEADS TO HELL?

Those who exercise their human will to follow God (as best as they understand Him), will certainly enjoy the glories of heaven, when they leave this earthly life, with their limited understanding of God and of God’s Son that they had while on earth. In heaven, many largely ignorant persons will be enlightened as to the glories of Christ – the center of heaven’s glory – for all eternity! Growth in knowledge, love, and service forever in heaven! If they served God on earth (having a positive will in worship of God, as best that they knew on earth), they will also serve Him in heaven, but with the glorious personal knowledge of God’s Son – Jesus Christ!

On earth, there are people who belong to Christ without their even knowing it! Why? Because God Almighty – the All-Knowing God – looks not only at the ‘head’ of a person (i.e., the partial and inaccurate knowledge), but God “focuses” on what determines the spiritual condition of a person – namely, his HEART and his WILL!

C.S. Lewis (the greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century) saw this truth clearly: “There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ, but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ’s birth may have been in this position.”

Yes, those who have been fortunate enough to hear and to receive the Gospel message of Christ’s “Finished Work” - these persons are among earth’s most privileged persons, and the earth’s most responsible persons! “To whom much is given, much is required.” He/she, who enjoys the message and the benefits of the message of Christ, is he/she who is most responsible to share the Good News with those who “lie in darkness”!

But, after all the “unanswered questions” are laid aside, what is it that determines whether or not a person is on the “right track” that leads to heaven, or on the “wrong track” that leads to hell? Jesus gave us the answer in the Gospels, and the apostles emphasized the same message! Jesus, Paul, and the other early writers all said the same thing – it all boils down to the condition of a person’s HEART (WILL)! Not how smart

one is! Now how religious one is! Not how well to do one is! Not what race one belongs to! Not one's nationality! Not one's tradition, background, status, or orthodoxy! These are not to be despised, but none of these can bring salvation (the forgiveness of sins) and a personal and intimate relationship with God!

What is in a man's heart (will) determines the spiritual condition of a man! That is what Jesus (and the apostles) repeatedly taught!

"People often see you as you are outside; But Jesus really sees you as you are inside."
(Words of a song, which I sang many years ago when I was a college student, on a "Gospel Team Trip")

So God – the Holy Spirit – challenges the "Free Will" of every human being, for unless the will of man (sinner) is surrendered to the Triune God (Creator of man), the human will continues to be wild and willful and hurtful to one's own self and to everyone who "gets in his way" - and eventually that self-centered volition will bring havoc to himself – partially on earth and totally in eternity!

Many years ago, the great leader Joshua confronted Israel with the all-important choice: *"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve! As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!"* (Joshua 24:15)

Every person must make a choice – for time and for eternity – whom he will serve! God or Satan? Life or Death? Self or Others? Everyone must choose, for Jesus said there is no moral neutrality!

As someone once said, *"There is no razor edge of neutrality upon which we may balance precariously!"*

Notes C.S. Lewis, "Their free will is trembling inside them like the needle of a compass. But this is a needle that can choose. It can point to its true North; but it need not. Will the needle swing round, and settle, and point to God? He can help it to do so. He cannot force it. He cannot, so to speak, put out His own hand and pull it into the right position, for then it would not be free will anymore. Will it point North? That is the question on which all hangs."

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS IS THE 'BREAD OF LIFE' FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD!

Jesus – the Bread of Life – offers life to those who are dead in their trespasses!

Someone asked a group of students one time: “Is Christianity an offer or a demand?” Only after considerable thought could the group agree that Christianity is primarily an offer.

So it is with too many today. So many see Christianity as a demand – obligations to do or not to do, ethical creeds to live by, standards to uphold, a philosophy to understand or a way of life to strive for. Christianity has demands. Christianity has ethics. Christianity has standards. Christianity has philosophical ideas. But Christianity is not morality, ethics, philosophy. Christianity is not even primarily a religion. Christianity is a relationship – a vital, dynamic love relationship with a Person! The very Person of Christ!

This means that Christianity is an offer – an offer of life and love and power and beauty! Strength for the powerless, purity for the defiled, companionship for the lonely, respect for the despised, comfort for the sorrowing, hope for the despairing, strength for the weak, forgiveness for the guilty!

Said Jesus, *“I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10) *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”* (John 1:4) *“He that believeth in him hath everlasting life.”* (John 4:14) *“He that heareth my word...is passed from death unto life.”* (John 5:24) *“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”* (John 8:12) *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* (John 11:25) *“I am the way the truth, and the life,”* (John 14:6)

Life – with all its pulsating, exciting, dynamic, personal qualities – is the theme of John’s Gospel. Jesus is the Life. He offers life – real life, eternal life – to all people! That is the most exciting revelation, this side of Heaven! Christianity is primarily an offer, not primarily a demand! Christianity is a Gift to be received by willing hearts!

The essential offer of the Gospel of Christ is newness of life. Not bitterness! A new quality, not a greater quantity! God’s own strength, not merely man’s improved strength!

Christianity is able to make valid its claim to make bad men good, and to make weak Christians strong. Jesus said, *“I am the living bread which came down from Heaven! If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* (John 6:51)

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is the essential, without which life could not go on. Real

life is based on a relationship with God, and that relationship is only made possible through Christ. “The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ and through Him know God. The restless soul is at rest, the hungry heart is satisfied.” (Barclay’s *John*; pg. 217)

Just as food is assimilated into the body to become a part of the very life of the body, so Christ must be taken into the very inner soul of man to form new life in man. Partaking of the flesh and blood represents symbolically the appropriation of the benefits of the death of Jesus. (The Lord’s Supper)

What benefits are derived through the death of Jesus?

1. Atonement. Jesus’ blood cleanses the sinner from all unrighteousness.
2. Reconciliation. Jesus destroys the enmity between God and man, and makes possible a new unity and friendship.
3. Peace: No longer does man have fear of a revengeful God, for God’s wrath has been appeased and God’s justice honored, while, at the same time, man’s acceptance by God made possible.
4. Hope. Jesus’ death on the cross demonstrated God’s love and mercy for man and makes possible the fulfillment of God’s promise of eternal life for mankind. The future for man is as bright as the promises of God.
5. Hungers for significance, belonging, and security are satisfied! Christ the Bread gives man significance, self-respect, and a sense of worthiness. Christ the Bread gives man a sense of belonging and acceptance and fellowship. Christ, the Bread, gives man a sense of security, peace, and dependability.

Therefore, we see some of the great benefits of the death of Jesus – Atonement, Reconciliation, Peace, Hope, Satisfaction of man’s basic needs. When we assimilate Christ into the very soul of our being, we feed on the Bread of Life.

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS, THOU JOY OF LOVING HEARTS

Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those who on thee call;
To them that seek thee, thou art good,
To them that find thee, all in all.

We taste thee, O thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon thee still;
We drink of thee the Fountain-head,
And thirst, our souls from thee to fill.

Our restless spirits yearn for thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast;
Glad, when thy gracious smile we see,
Blest, when our faith can hold thee fast.

O Jesus, ever with us stay;
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away;
Shed o'er the world thy holy light.

Bernard of Clairvaux; 1090-1153



BEING ALTOGETHER A CHRISTIAN

The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:5 NASB

It is not enough to shun evil and do good at all opportunities, nor to seriously use all the means of grace with a sincere design and desire to please God.

The great question remains for each of us: Is the love of God poured out in my heart? Does my heart cry that He is my all? Am I happy in God? Is He my delight? And is it written in my heart that those who love God love their neighbor also?

Go further: Do I believe that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me? Do I have faith in His blood? Do I believe that the Lamb of God has taken away my sins and cast them as a stone into the depth of the sea, giving me redemption through His blood, even the remission of my sins? Does His Spirit testify with my spirit that I am a child of God?

Let no one persuade you to rest short of this prize of your high calling. Cry day and night unto Him who, “while we were without strength, died for the ungodly”; until you know Him in whom you have believed and know that you are indeed *altogether a Christian*.

Then, being justified freely by His grace by the redemption that is in Jesus, you will experience that blessed peace with God through Jesus Christ and know the love of God poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit given unto you!

-By John Wesley-



“BARRIERS” THAT KEEP SINNERS FROM FINDING THEIR PATHWAY TO HEAVEN!

“HOW WIDE IS GOD’S MERCY?” Objectively speaking, God’s mercy is all-inclusive, universally offered to every human being! However, subjectively speaking, God’s mercy is given only to those persons who sense their deep need for God’s mercy! The proud, self-sufficient, and unrepentant ones do not sense any need for God’s mercy! Such persons do not realize the seriousness of sins (and many such ‘Sinners’ do not even acknowledge the reality of sins in their own lives). As long as persons deny the reality of sins; or as long as persons ‘Scapegoat’ their sins (moral responsibilities) upon others; or as long as persons ‘rationalize’ their sins (i.e., give excuses for their ‘moral weaknesses’

and minimize the serious nature of their ‘mistakes’); as long as persons seek to forget their past ‘misdeeds’ and simply declare that ‘bygones are bygones’ in their distant past; as long as persons ‘fight’ and ‘resist’ the convicting ‘work’ of the Holy Spirit, and thus ‘close their minds to truth’ and ‘harden’ their hearts to the tender ‘wooing’ of the Holy Spirit; as long as people succumb to the strong ‘peer pressure’ of ungodly (wicked and worldly) persons (out of fear of being rejected by their sin-loving associates); as long as people remain infatuated by the pleasures of the world – yes, as long as! As long as these various conditions exist – the various excuses of worldly – thinking people who have chosen not to humble themselves at the ‘foot of the Cross’, I say, as long as these various conditions exist, there is no enjoyment of God’s wonderful, life-transforming MERCY!

However, when sinners realize that the things of this world do not have the ability to ‘quench the thirst’ and ‘satisfy the hunger’ of their never-dying soul, then these sinners are invited to turn to the Living God! Only the humble person can receive God’s Mercy!

-By Ron Christian-



CHRIST OFFERS “RIVERS OF LIVING WATER” TO SATISFY YOUR DESPERATE THIRST!

SADHU SUNDAR SINGH (1829-1929), was delivered from the world’s illusions, to find wonderful satisfaction in a personal relationship with Christ! He was delivered from the ‘unreal illusions’ of the sinful world, and he received a soul-satisfying relationship with the True God. He embraced the Gift of God (i.e., Christ and Christ’s exhaustless resources). He discovered the ‘Inherent Value’ of the Living God! The following is his expression of the joy and the peace (etc.) that he found in Christ alone.

“Christ is my Saviour. He is my life. He is everything to me in heaven and earth. Once while traveling in a sandy region I was tired and thirsty. Standing on the top of a mound, I looked for water. The sight of a lake at a distance brought joy to me, for now I hoped to quench my thirst. I walked toward it for a long time, but I could never reach it. Afterwards I found out that it was a mirage, only a mere appearance of water caused by the refracted rays of the sun. In reality, there was none. In like manner, I was moving about the world in search of the water of life. The things of this world – wealth, position, honor, and luxury – looked like a lake. By drinking of those waters, I hoped to quench my spiritual thirst. But I could never find a drop of water to quench the thirst of my heart. I was dying of thirst. When my spiritual eyes were opened, I saw the rivers of living water flowing from His pierced side. I drank of it and was satisfied. Thirst was no

more. Ever since I have always drunk of that water of life, and have never been athirst in the sandy desert of this world. My heart is full of praise.”
(Esther Carls Dodgen, *Glimpses of God through the Ages*, pg.279)

There is ‘Wideness’ in God’s Mercy! How Wide Do You Think It Is?



DEPTH OF MERCY! CAN THERE BE

Depth of mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withstood his grace;
Long provoked him to his face;
Would not hearken to his calls;
Grieved him by a thousand falls.

Now incline me to repent;
Let me now my sins lament;
Now my foul revolt deplore,
Weep, believe, and sin no more.

Kindled his relents are;
Me he now delights to spare;
Cries, “How shall I give thee up?”
Let the lifted thunder drop.

There for me the Savior stands;
Shows his wounds and spreads his hands:
God is love! I know, I feel;
Jesus weeps and loves me still.

-Charles Wesley



THE ‘OLD WAY OF LIFE’ IS EXCHANGED FOR THE ‘NEW WAY OF LIFE’!

There are many and varied ways in which God’s change in the heart and life of a person can be described. One of the most meaningful ways to describe divinely-wrought ‘change’ in the human life is to make ‘contrasts’. This is what I was ‘before’ I was converted (or before I made a fuller surrender of my life to God), and (in contrast) this is what I have become since I yielded my life to the transforming God! Even though the contrasting list is rather detailed, I encourage you thoughtfully to envision what the miracle-performing God truly accomplishes!

God has power to turn a ‘stumbling block’ into a ‘stepping stone’, to turn a mess into a message, to turn a hard adversity into a tender empathy, to turn a hope into a reality, to turn a tear-stained face into a radiant face, to turn a tragedy into a triumph, to turn a sorrow into a comfort, to turn a broken heart into a healed heart, to turn confusion into understanding, to turn loneliness into companionship, to turn a loss into a gain, to turn humiliation into dignity.

God has the power to turn failure into success, to turn retreat into advancement, to turn depravity into purity, to turn a life of transgression into a life of obedience, to turn moral weakness into moral strength, to turn an evil habit into a righteous habit, to turn moral chaos into moral order, to turn a slave of sin into a slave of righteousness, to turn an irrational mind into a rational mind, to deliver one from a false religion and introduce him to the true religion, to turn one from self-centeredness to a life of Christ-centeredness!

God has power to truly transform any and all human beings! The mission of Christ is to turn each of us around – to make a 180 degree turn in the life of each and every one of us! The call of God is the ‘call of repentance’ – the call to leave our ‘old way of life’ and to embrace the ‘new way of life’ – the life of righteousness, the life of integrity, the life of justice, the life of holiness, the life of peace, the life of holy love! Our call is the call to become a ‘new creature’ – a person who is ‘centered in Christ’s person’, rather than a person who is centered in himself.

-By Ron Christian-



**GOD, WHO IS INHERENTLY LOVE, OFFERS HIS GIFT OF LOVE
(SALVATION) TO ALL PERSONS – TO BE ACCEPTED OR REJECTED!**

There is no greater (and more thrilling) revelation in “reality” than the reality that is clearly given in I John 4 (and many other similar Scriptures) – namely, that the true and only and living God is a “God of Love”. God inherently and intrinsically, is “Love”. He is, by nature, “Love”. This is to say that God can do nothing, or be nothing, that is contrary or contradictory to His “Holy Love”. This is to say that every characteristic, trait, and manifestation of God’s character is consistent with “Holy Love”. When God is angry, such anger is a “Holy Anger” - a proper manifestation of “Holy Love”. There is no vindictiveness, arbitrariness, injustice, or favoritism in the expression of His “Holy Anger”! He does everything, which is totally consistent with justice fairness, equity, and integrity. No “hidden motives” or “selfish plans” can be found in the heart of the living God! He loves everyone with an everlasting love! God in human form (Jesus) provided the only way by which all persons could be forgiven and reconciled to the Creator (and this plan of His love was extremely costly). God in love provides “prevenient grace” (i.e., “the grace that goes before”) to every person, making it possible for every person to call upon the Lord for personal salvation. God in love has given the blessed Holy Spirit to the world of human need, in order that the Spirit may convict men of sin, and may strongly influence all sinners to repent of their sins and to humbly turn to Christ for spiritual healing and restoration and regeneration. God, while strongly “drawing all men” to Christ because of His intention to save all persons, nevertheless – in the name of love and because of the very inherent nature of love – refuses to “force” or to “compel” any person to become a believer and follower of Jesus Christ (i.e., to become a true Christian).

A young man who wishes to become married to a young woman, whom he deeply loves, knows that he has only limited “power” in relating to his “beloved”. He, of course, can use the “power of influence”, the gentle “power of persuasion”, the “power of words”, the “power of subtle appeal”, the “power of loving actions”, and even (if he is a Christian) the “power of prayer”. However, because of the inherent nature of love, he cannot make her say “Yes” to his proposal to marry him! He can plead with her, beg her, and even wait for her, but he cannot “control her will”, manipulate her, threaten her, or ultimately force her to say “Yes” to his proposal. She has her own independent “will” - the God-given (frightening, but wonderful) capacity to make her own decision, and largely determine her own destiny! Marriage (based on the commitment of mutual love) depends upon the exercise of “positive volition” on the part of two “free will agents” (man and woman who freely give themselves to each other, initially at the “marriage altar” and, of course, throughout the couple’s entire married life). This human reality (of the marriage relationship) is an imperfect, but reflection of the divine-human relationship, which is based on God’s nature – the nature of eternal love.

-By Ron Christian-

**A “CHRISTIAN” IS A “RADICALLY NEW” PERSON – ONE WHO
EXPERIENCES “CHANGE” IN HIS TOTAL “BEING”!**

“In order to become a Christian, a human being must change, not merely in one place or another, but unconditionally, down to the very bottom of his being.” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI)

“When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!” (II Corinthians 5:17 Life Application Bible)

“For you have a new life. It was not passed onto you from your parents, for the life they gave you will fade away. This new one will last forever, for it comes from Christ, God’s ever-living Message to men.” (I Peter 1:23 Life Application Bible)

“Then it will be as though I had sprinkled clean water on you, for you will be clean – your filthiness will be washed away, your idol worship gone. And I will give you a new heart – I will give you new and right desires – and put a new spirit within you. I will take out your stony hearts of sin and give you new hearts of love. And I will put my Spirit within you so that you will obey my laws and do whatever I command. (Ezekiel 36:25-27 Life Application Bible)

“But when the time came for the kindness and love of God our Savior to appear, 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 whom he poured out upon us with wonderful fullness – and all because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did so that he could declare us good in God’s eyes – all because of his great kindness; and now we can share in the wealth of the eternal life he gives us, and we are eagerly looking forward to receiving it. (Titus 3:4-7 Life Application Bible)



**GOD SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE
(THE HUMAN RACE) FROM THEIR SINS!**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: “OUR GOD IS ABLE” - TO FORGIVE ALL SINS!
SCRIPTURE: Psalms 32:1-6
TEXT: “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and
you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5b)

INTRODUCTION:

The sweetest word in the English language is Forgiveness! Some would give anything if they knew their sins were forgiven!

PROPOSITION:

There is only one who is able to forgive your sins. His name is Jesus. “*The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*” (Mark 2:10)

EVERY PERSON NEEDS FORGIVENESS
COST OF FORGIVENESS
MEANS OF FORGIVENESS
RESULTS OF FORGIVENESS

CONCLUSION:

Do you feel guilt? Confess it to God! He will forgive all your sins, the sins you remember and the sins you don’t remember!

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you forgive the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5b)

INTRODUCTION:

The sweetest word in the English language is Forgiveness! Some would give anything if they knew their sins were forgiven! There are too many today who are trying desperately, but futilely, to forgive their own sins. Martin Luther had an acute sense of his own sinfulness, and he tried desperately to atone for his own sins, through his own religious efforts and human works.

PROPOSITION:

There is only one who is able to forgive your sins. His name is Jesus. “*The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*” (Mark 2:10)

I. EVERY PERSON NEEDS FORGIVENESS

The Bible says, “*There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*” (Romans 3:10-12)

“*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*” (Romans 3:23)

“*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.*” (Isaiah 53:6)

“*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*” (Isaiah 64:6)

“*The entire human race is lost, dead in transgressions and sins, following the ways of the world, gratifying the cravings of the sinful nature, objects of God’s wrath.*” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Sinners by nature and sinners by choice, the human race is helpless and hopeless without God, and in desperate need of mercy and forgiveness.

There are many guilty people who claim innocence in regards to sin. Some rationalize sin, and say “I am as good as many church folks!” True, but irrelevant! What does this statement prove? God is our standard, not other people! Hypocrites will keep many people out of heaven!

Some project the blame of their sins onto someone else – that is, they scapegoat their sins. “It is easy enough to find all kinds of defenses behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition.” (Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, 1 John*, pg. 39)

“We ascribe the responsibility to a group, we offer up scapegoat sacrifices; we perform or partake in dumb-show rituals of penitence and atonement.” (Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin*, pg. 17)

“At three I had feelings of
Ambivalence towards my brothers
And so it follows naturally
I poisoned all my lovers.
But now I’m happy; I have learned
The lesson this has taught;
That everything I do that’s wrong
Is someone else’s fault.”

Have you heard people try to escape personal moral responsibility by saying, “The devil made me do it!”? It is bad enough to rationalize sin. It is perhaps worse to blame others for our actions of moral irresponsibility. Worse yet, is to be callously indifferent to sin and sin’s consequences. Notes Barclay, “At first a man regards some wrong thing with horror; the second stage comes when he is tempted into doing it, but even as he does it, he is still unhappy and ill at ease and very conscious that it is wrong; the third stage is when he has done the thing so often that he does it without a qualm.” (Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, Ephesians*, pg. 114)

There are those who “claim that sin has no effect upon them, who say that they can sin and take no harm; who insist that they can take their pleasures, and, if need be, make their mistakes and emerge none the worse for them.” (Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, 1 John*, pg. 39) In other words, there are those who feel that they can sow ‘wild oats’ and yet never have to ‘reap wild oats’. They do not see the ‘cause and effect’ of sin. Paul wrote, “*Don’t be misled; remember that you*

can't ignore God and get away with it; a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life which the Holy Spirit gives him.” (Galatians 6:7, 8; Living Bible)

Some rationalize sin. Some project the blame onto others. There are some who are callously indifferent to sin and to sin's consequences. And there are still others who openly deny the very existence of sin. They deny the reality of guilt and declare that what one feels is not real guilt, but only guilt feelings or guilt impulses. Some psychiatrists have gone so far as to say that guilt feelings or anxiety feelings are caused because a person secretly wants to commit certain acts but dares not because of parental or societal restrictions. Thus, according to their theory, society's restrictions are mainly to blame for people's 'guilty feeling'. Some belittle the idea of an objective Moral Law such as the Ten Commandments.

Comments Barclay, “The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind, and who is beyond hope and help. Only the man who realizes his own weakness can become strong. Only the man who realizes his own blindness can learn to see. Only the man who realizes his own sin can be forgiven.” (Barclay; *Study Bible; John*; vol. 2; pg. 58)

II. COST OF FORGIVENESS

What man needs most, namely, forgiveness, God is most willing to give. But, God's gift of forgiveness is costly indeed. It cost God the blood of His well-beloved Son!

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!” (Romans 5:8-9) God is a just God and cannot look lightly upon sin. Sin not only breaks God's laws, but sin breaks God's heart. The penalty of sin is death. *“The soul that sinneth shall die!” (Ezekiel 18:20)* The guilty deserve to die. There is no way that man can atone for his own sins. Man cannot outbalance his bad works with his good works. In the sight of God, all of our own good works are like *“filthy rags”*. (Isaiah 64:6)

“Can the labors of my hands fulfill Thy Law's demands?” No, for to be justified

in God's eyes, one would have to keep God's Laws perfectly! None is good enough or strong enough to merit God's favor!

Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus *"...gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."* Ephesians 5:2 says that *"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

Titus 2:14 says that Christ *"gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."*

Paul noted in Romans 5:6, *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."* *"In Jesus Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."* (Ephesians 1:7)

Notes Billy Graham about the high cost of forgiveness: "In Christ's atonement for sin, He stood in the guilty sinner's place. If God had forgiven sin by a divine decree without atonement, which involved the personal shame, agony, suffering, and death of Christ, then man could assume that God overlooked, winked at, or was indifferent to sin. Thus man would go on sinning, and earth would have become a living hell. But in the suffering of Jesus we have the participation of God in the act of atonement. Sin pierced the very heart of God. God felt every piercing nail and spear thrust. God felt the burning sun. God felt the mocking derision and the body blows. Here in the cross is the suffering love of God bearing the guilt of man's sin, which alone is able to melt the sinner's heart and bring him to repentance for salvation." *'For he hath made him to be sin for us.'* (II Corinthians 5:21)

"Thousands of people suffer from guilt complexes. Almost everyone senses that somehow they are wrong, like the little boy who said: 'I guess I was just born wrong.' God said from the cross: 'I love you.' He was also saying: 'I can forgive you.' The most glorious and thrilling word in any language is "forgiveness". God in Christ had a basis for forgiveness. Because Christ died, God can justify the sinner and still be just.

"Christ's atonement is sufficient because God said it is. I know that I am a sinner. I know that I have broken God's laws. I know that I have offended God countless times. My heart, mind, and conscience have been troubled. However, when by faith I look at the cross, there is peace and joy because I know that God was satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. My sin was committed against God. If God

is content with what Christ has done on my behalf and is willing to pardon me, then I have nothing more to worry about. I am redeemed, I am reconciled, I am forgiven, I am assured of heaven – not because of any goodness or good works of my own. It is only because of the love and mercy of God in Christ on the cross that I have any claim on heaven at all. It was God who permitted Christ to die as my substitute. It was God who accepted His sacrifice when He died.” (Billy Graham; *World Aflame*; pp. 118-120)

III. MEANS OF FORGIVENESS

In light of what God has done for you, namely, giving His Son Jesus to die for you, what must you do to respond appropriately to God’s loving initiative?

In order to enjoy God’s offer of forgiveness, you must first repent of your sins. What is repentance? “Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, and 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.” (C.S. Lewis; *Mere Christianity*; pg. 59)

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 are not only spiritual death, but also eternal death, which is separation from God forever. To have a true spirit of repentance is to acknowledge one’s 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.

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." "It is 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." (John Murray; *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*; pg. 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 people of Hollywood at high fees, "All these patients of mine need is a mourner's bench."

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 Savior. The moment one forsakes sin, he must turn to the Savior, for sin can only loose its grip on one's life when one surrenders himself to the stronger hold of the Savior! One is saved by faith. Faith is a transfer of trust from one's self to one's Savior. Saving faith is always accompanied by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin. Faith is a change of attitude toward the Savior, 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, pg. 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.*" (*Barclay's James 2:19*) The devil knows that Jesus is the Son of God, and even trembles because 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, pg. 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.

IV. RESULTS OF FORGIVENESS

To forgive mankind's sins, God gave up His Son to die a substitutionary death for mankind. To receive God's offer of forgiveness, a sinner must repent deeply and surrender completely to Christ.

The benefits of receiving God's forgiveness are great! There is an immediate release from the burden of guilt. *"What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record!" (Psalms 32:1-2; Living Bible)*

One of the most famous passages in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the passage where John Bunyan tells how Christian lost his burden: "Now I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the burden on his back. He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulcher. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulcher, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."

Notes Billy Graham, "A beautiful young society leader came to visit my wife and me. She had been converted to Christ in one of our crusades, and she was absolutely radiant in her transformation. Already, she had learned scores of Scripture verses by heart and was so full of Christ that we sat for two hours listening to her give her moving testimony. Over and over she said: 'I cannot understand how God could forgive me. I have been such a wicked sinner. I just cannot understand the love of God.'" (Billy Graham; *World Aflame*; pp. 122-123)

"One of the most fascinating and powerful witnesses to streak across God's landscape in recent years is the story of Lee Atwater, the deceased former chairman of the Republican National Committee. He spent the last year of his young life fighting for his physical life while gaining a new life 'in Christ', bidding others to follow his example of genuine repentance that flows from salvation. Lee majored in Jesus' admonition to 'love your enemies'. How amazing for one who was noted in the media and by his opponents as the 'pit bull of American politics.' Some of the media still have not been able to understand the radical change, but the best evidence is there: old enemies were converted into friends. Even the Democratic National Committee lowered its flag to half-staff on the morning of March 29, 1991, when Lee, as the Salvation Army would say, was 'promoted to Glory.'

Soon after a brain tumor had felled him while attending a fund-raiser for the Republican Party, Lee exclaimed: 'I looked into that dark abyss and it scared the hell out of me! I have found Jesus Christ. It's that simple. He's made a difference, and I'm glad I've found Him while there's still time.'"

This news story was written by a Christian reporter named Lee Bandy and was headlined in newspapers all around the world on November 2, 1990. The Chicago Tribune headline on page one read like this: "GOP Bad-boy: I have found Jesus Christ!" (Article from "*Table Talk*", Oct. 1991, pp. 12, 13)

CONCLUSION:

Always Remember - "Our God Is Able To Forgive All Sins!" There is no sin stain so deep but what Jesus' blood goes deeper! He is able to forgive the "chiefest of sinners"! He is able to remove your sins "as far as the East is from the West." "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The New Covenant of Grace, prophesied by Jeremiah 31:33, was fulfilled in Jesus Christ: "*This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.*" (Hebrews 10:16-17)

Do you feel guilt? Confess it to God! He will forgive all your sins, the sins you remember and the sins you don't remember!

"Tis the grandest theme, let the tidings roll,
To the guilty heart, to the sinful soul;
Look to God in faith, He will make thee whole.
'Our God is able to deliver thee.'
Tho' by sin opprest, Go to Him for rest;
'Our God is able to deliver thee'"

"Come, and He will give you rest;
Trust Him, for His word is plain;
He will take the sinfulest;
Christ receiveth sinful men.

"Christ receiveth sinful men,
Even me with all my sin;
Purged from every spot and stain,
Heaven with Him I enter in.

“Sing it o’er and o’er again;
Christ receiveth sinful men;
Make the message clear and plain:
Christ receiveth sinful men.”



THE FAITH THAT “SAVES A SOUL” IS THE FAITH THAT TRUSTS ALONE IN THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST!

Very much that passes for faith is only the faith of devils. It is of precisely the same quality as the faith which devils have. There is not a truth of the gospel but that the devils believe. They have no doubts about the divinity of Christ, or that God answers prayer. Unless our faith is something more than an assent of the understanding to the truth of the Bible, it will not save us. The faith that saves goes beyond the intellect. It takes a firm hold of the affections and the will, *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10)*. Saving faith is a voluntary reliance of the soul on Christ. The element of trust enters largely into it. We may believe in an individual and yet, for various reasons, not choose to trust him.

This telling people that they are converted because they believe that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” only tends to deceive them to their eternal undoing. It is assuming a terrible responsibility.

Beloveds, you need, in order to be saved, to place such reliance in Christ that you depend on him alone for salvation. You must sacrifice to him, standing, and property, and reputation; and look to him for all you need for time and for eternity. *“So whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33)*

(B.T. Roberts, *Living Truth*, No. 74; Edited and Compiled by E. D. Riggs)



AS LONG AS THERE IS ‘BREATH’ THERE IS HOPE OF SALVATION!

HOW WIDE IS GOD’S MERCY? Wide Enough To Encompass Every Human Being and Every Lost Person! God respects the vast variety of individual personalities (and backgrounds), and God lovingly ‘works’ differently in the life of each person, with the one purpose of bringing each person to the ‘level ground’ of Christ’s Cross where forgiveness and deliverance and reconciliation are found! Some persons early in life are

‘saved’, and some other persons (like the thief on the Cross) are ‘saved’ very late in life (just before they die). The ‘sooner the better’, but God continues to ‘call in love’ to everyone, even to the last moments of physical life! As long as there is ‘breath’, there is hope! “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance!” There probably are many “death bed repentances”! The ‘life of such a person is ‘lost’ (because of a fruitless, useless life of sinning), but at least (and wonderfully) the ‘Soul’ of such a late-time repentant one is ‘saved for heaven’. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise!” Verily ‘saved’, but truly ‘saved’ for heaven!

HOW WIDE IS GOD’S MERCY? Wide Enough To Save Anyone Who Will Truly Repent Of Sin, and Who Will (Like the thief) Look To Jesus Alone For Salvation! LEO TOLSTOI (1828-1910), the famous Russian author and philosopher, testifies to the fact of a dramatic, drastic, and totally life-transforming experience in his life! The difference between night and day, between a self-centered and a Christ-centered life! He became a new person – new purpose and direction! “How wide and deep is Christ’s mercy?”

“Five years ago I came to believe in Christ’s teaching, and my life suddenly changed; I ceased to desire what I had previously desired, and began to desire what I formerly did not want. What had previously seemed to me good seemed evil, and what had seemed evil seemed good. It happened to me as it happens to a man who goes out on some business then suddenly decides that the business is unnecessary and returns home. All that was on his right is now on his left, and all that was on his left is now on his right; his former wish to get as far as possible from home has changed into a wish to be near as possible to it. The directions of my life and my desires became different and good and evil changed places.

“I, like that thief on the cross, have believed Christ’s teaching and been saved. And this is no far-fetched comparison, but the closest expression of the condition of spiritual despair and horror at the problem of life and death in which I lived formerly, and of the condition of peace and happiness in which I am now. I, like the thief, knew that I had lived and was living badly. I, like the thief, knew that I was unhappy and suffering. Like the thief on the cross I was nailed by some force, to a life of suffering and evil. After the meaningless sufferings and evils of life, the thief awaited the terrible darkness of death, so did I await the same thing.

“In all this, I was exactly like the thief, but the difference was that the thief was already dying, while I was still living. The thief might believe that his salvation lay there beyond the grave, but I could not be satisfied with that, because besides a life beyond the grave life still awaited me here. But I did not understand that life. It seemed to be terrible. And suddenly I heard the words of Christ and understood them, and life and death ceased to

seem to me evil, and instead of despair I experienced happiness and the joy of life undisturbed by death.” (Esther Carls Dodgen; *Glimpses of God through the Ages*; pp. 170-171)

“WHOEVER SHALL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED” - AND THAT INCLUDES YOU AND YOU AND YOU!

“You need not say in your heart, ‘Who could go up to Heaven to bring Christ down to us, or who could descend into the depths to bring him up from the dead?’ For the secret is very near you, in your own heart, in your own mouth!” It is the secret of faith, which is the burden of our preaching, and it says, in effect, “If you openly admit by your own mouth that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and if you believe in your own heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” For it is believing in the heart that makes a man righteous before God, and it is stating his belief by his own mouth that confirms his salvation. And the scripture says: “Whosoever believes in him shall not be disappointed.” And that “whosoever” means anyone, without distinction between Jew or Greek. For all have the same Lord, whose boundless resources are available to all who turn to him in faith. For:

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

(Romans 10:6-13 Phillip’s Translation)



**HOW CAN A “SINNER” BE DECLARED “RIGHTEOUS” IN THE
SIGHT OF AN “ALL-HOLY GOD”?**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

JUSTIFICATION – ‘JUST AS IF I HAD NEVER SINNED!’

II Corinthians 5:17-21

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.” (Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pg. 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 judgment 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!



GOD CAN DECLARE MAN RIGHTEOUS!

Romans 3:24-28, 4:5

We are trying to understand the four facets 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.” (Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pg. 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, having given 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." (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, Romans*, pp. 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!



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

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

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." (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, Peter*, pg. 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 minister 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 Savior!



**THE BEAUTY OF THE REGENERATED LIFE- THROUGH THE
SAVING CHRIST!**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

REGENERATION – A SENSE OF NEWNESS

Romans 8:8-17

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 judgment 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." (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 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 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!



THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A COMPLETELY NEW LIFE!

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

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 anyone 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, 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!



“I FELT CLEAN INSIDE”

Titus 3:3-8

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 psychiatric 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’.” (E. S. Jones,

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.” (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, John*; vol. 1, pg.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 troubles, 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!



“I AM EASIER TO LIVE WITH”

Acts 26:1-20

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 Savior.” (Billy Graham, *World Aflame*, pp. 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, jealousy, anger, complaints, criticism, 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.’” (E.S. Jones, *Abundant Living*, pg.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!



“I AM HAPPY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE”

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

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.” (E.S. Jones, *Abundant Living*, pg. 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 by Billy Graham, *World Aflame*, pg. 139)

Once when I was traveling 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!” (Paul Rees, *Prayer and Life’s Highest*, pg.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.” (Mary Alice Tenney, *Living In Two Worlds*, pg. 72)

“O God, your holiness is my happiness, your presence is my power, and 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.”



**HAVE YOU PERSONALLY ACCEPTED CHRIST'S "OBJECTIVE
ACCOMPLISHMENT" - RECONCILIATION OF SINFUL MAN TO
THE HOLY GOD?**

-BY RON CHRISTIAN-

UNIVERSAL BUT NOT AUTOMATIC RECONCILIATION

II Corinthians 5:11-21, Romans 5:6-11

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 substitutionary 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.

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 Savior are for the healing of my deep wounds of sin!



MAN MAY KNOW THE WARMTH OF GOD’S LOVE!

Colossians 1:21-23, John 19:30

We are looking at Reconciliation as a past objective accomplishment. Says Leon Morris, “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, pg. 4)

In his book *‘The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross’*, Leon Morris 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.” (pp. 225-226) In a footnote in his book, Morris 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.” (pg. 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.*, pg. 247) Leon Morris 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.*, pg. 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!



TIME DOES NOT ERASE SIN!

Hebrews 9:11-14, 23-28

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 acceptance, 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 sacrificed 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 be 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 elapsed 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!



RECONCILIATION IN THE PRESENT TENSE!

Hebrews 4:1-11

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 savable relationship with God. Man’s reconciliation with God is impossible without the Cross.

However, with the Cross each man must respond 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!



"MUCH MORE THEN"

Romans 5:9-11, II Thessalonians 1:5-12

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 judgment.”

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 Judgment 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 judgment 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!



SWEET PEACE – THE GIFT OF GOD’S LOVE!

Romans 5:10-11, John 14:27, 15:13-17, 16:33

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, Lord, 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!



HAVE YOU PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED THE MIRACLE OF THE “NEW BIRTH” – DIVINELY-WROUGHT TRANSFORMATION?

The coming of the Holy Spirit within means life. Jesus in that memorable hour with Nicodemus said, *“Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.... Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above. The Spirit breatheth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).* The figure that Jesus here uses of the Spirit breathing over the chaos of the human heart and bringing to it new life and symmetry and order is the figure used of the first creation: *“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters.”* Here was a condition akin to that of the human heart before the Spirit brings to it the touch of life. Do not some of us know what it is to have a condition within that corresponds to that – the inner life without form, and void, and darkness upon the face of the deep? Without form! An inner life that is chaotic, no central purpose running through it, a clash of elemental forces in the dark. And void! A sense of meaningless futile striving, the hell of getting nowhere, the utter purposelessness of life. And darkness upon the face of the deep! We feel that there are deeps within us unsounded, but darkness broods over the deep with no sense of certainty anywhere. And then the Spirit, as gently as the coming of the dawn, broods over the chaos of our inner life, and the miracle, the astounding miracle of spiritual birth takes place. How it is done we do not know, but we do know that there is no longer that sense of purposelessness in life, the void is gone, and darkness has given place to dawn. Just as the Spirit brooded over matter and brought out of the chaos a cosmos, a world under the direction of living forces within, moving on to richer unfolding of life, so over the chaos of our poor lives he broods, and out of it

comes the sense of being taken hold of by life, by purpose, by power that makes for harmony, beauty love. A stark miracle has taken place. We are born anew! It is futile to argue against it. Can the unborn argue against the born? The born know – they live, they move, and they have their being now in an entirely new world – God.

“You talk about the living Christ within, and knowing God, and freedom from the old life, and of being immediately in fellowship with the living God. It all gets on my nerves. I don’t like it. I go through my religious duties and perform them with care and regularity and yet I know nothing of what you talk about,” said a very High Churchman to me one day. And then he added, “And there is Father _____, who is a High Churchman and yet he talks the same language that you do. You are a very Low Churchman and he is very High, and yet you seem to talk the same language. You are both enigmas to me.” Immediately afterward we went into the High Church service, and as we walked away after it was over he clutched my arm – I thought a little vigorously – and said he wanted to talk with me again. There was a glow in his face as he said: “I know it. It has happened. I am a new man.” He was! The miracle of the new birth had taken place.
(E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount*, pp. 259-261)



CHRIST THE PRIZE

Jesus, our thoughts of Thee are sweet;
They make our hearts with joy to beat;
But sweeter ‘tis that evermore
Thy presence here we may adore.

No softer music doth entrance,
No words so our delight enhance,
No sweeter thought hath love so won
Than that of Jesus, God’s dear Son.

O hope of those who pardon need,
How merciful to those who plead!
To those who seek Thee Thou art kind,
But, what art Thou to those who find?

No tongue is able to express,
No words can tell, the blissfulness
He only who hath tried can know
What joys, from loving Jesus flow.

Be Thou, O Jesus, our great bliss;
Be Thou the prize we shall not miss;
In Thee may we Thy glory share
In endless joy beyond compare.

O Jesus, Thee we praise as King!
Thee, Winner of our souls, we sing!
The sweetness words cannot express
Of Thine unblemished loveliness.

When Thou dost come within the heart,
Thy truth doth then clear light impart;
The world's vain things lose their appeal,
Thy love's pure glow within we feel.

(Bernard of Clairvaux; 1090-1153)



WHEN YOU ENTER INTO GOD'S FAMILY (BY FAITH), YOU WILL MIRACULOUSLY BE FILLED WITH A LOVE FOR ALL PERSONS!

The first step for those desiring to enter God's family is the obvious one of recognizing that an act of entry is necessary; they are currently not members of it. And none can enter the family of God under the pretense that they have a right to be there. All enter, if they enter at all, *Dei gratia*, by the graciousness of the head of the family, God the Father. There are no exceptions to this rule. So a deep humbling is a prerequisite for entry. But to enter is to enter into life, for those who enter find at last what it is to be loved and to be filled with love – not with sentiment, but love – for all people, regardless of whether they too are members of God's family or not. Love, like other attitudes and virtues, cannot be taught. It can only be caught. You can teach people that they *ought* to love, but not *to love*. But when people enter the family of God, they are in a position to catch the divine diseases of love, patience, gentleness, and so on.

And once people are inside this family, they can see a lot of things they never saw before. They are likely to find that they spent a great deal of time running away from certain unpleasant facts about themselves, above all from the fact that it was altogether absurd for them to crave and demand that others love them. Other things they discover are that many of their disappointments and trials were for their own good and that other disappointments were due to their own blundering about.

**TO LIVE ONLY FOR TIME AND SPACE AND MATTER IS EVENTUALLY TO
EXPERIENCE GOD'S JUST WRATH AND JUDGMENT!**

In the name of the God of heaven, I charge you, remember the lives that you have led! Remember what you have been doing in the world! Remember how you have spent your time! And whether, indeed, it is God that you have been serving, and heaven that you have been seeking, and holiness and righteousness that you have been practicing in the world till now! Are your sins so small, so venial, so few, that you can find no employment on them for your memories? Or is the offending of the Eternal God so slight and safe a thing as not to need your consideration? God forbid you should have such atheistic conceits! Surely God made not his laws for nought; nor doth he make such a stir by his word, and messengers, and providences, against a harmless thing; nor doth he threaten hell to men for small, indifferent matters; nor did Christ need to have died, and done all that he hath done, to cure a small and safe disease. Surely that which the God of heaven is pleased to threaten with everlasting punishment, the greatest fear and soberness to remember.

It is a pitiful thing, that with men, with gentlemen, with professed Christians, God's matters, and their own matters, their greatest matters, should seem unworthy to be thought on; when they have thoughts for their honors, and their lands, and friends; and thoughts for their children, their servants, and provision; and thoughts for their horses, and their dogs, and sports. Is God and heaven less worthy than these? Are death and judgment matters of less moment? Gentlemen, you would take it ill to have your wisdom undervalued, and your reason questioned; for your honor's sake do not make it contemptible yourselves in the eyes of all that are truly wise. It is the nobleness of objects that most ennoble your faculties, and the baseness of objects doth abase them. If brutish objects be your employment and delight, do I need to tell you what you make yourselves? If you would be noble indeed, let God and everlasting glory be the object of your faculties; if you would be great, then dwell on greatest things: if you would be high, then seek the things that are above, and not the sordid things of earth (Col. 3:1-3), and if you would be safe, look after the enemies of your peace; and, as you had thoughts of sin that led you to commit it, entertain the thoughts that would lead you to abhor it. O that I might have but the grant of this reasonable request from you, that, among all your thoughts, you would bestow now and then an hour in the serious thoughts of your misdoings, and soberly, in your retirement between God and your souls, remember the paths that you have trod; and whether you have lived for the work for which you were

created One sober hour of such employment might be the happiest hour that ever you spent, and give you more comfort at your final hour than all the former hours of your life; and might lead you into that new and holy life, which you may review with everlasting comfort.

(Richard Baxter; 1615-1691; taken from a sermon entitled ‘*A Sermon of Repentance*’)



THROUGH JESUS’ DEATH ON THE CROSS, HE DESTROYED YOUR THREE “ENEMIES” - SIN, SUFFERING, DEATH!

He came that men might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. But three things kept men from knowing life; three things shadowed and shattered life – sin, suffering, death. All his teaching, all his living, all his miracles, all his tragedy at Calvary were to get rid of those three things. He hated sin. He hated suffering. He hated death. When he performed miracles of healing upon suffering men it was not, as some have thought, to attest his claims to divinity. He healed them because he hated suffering. He simply could not bear to see men suffer. But he knew that he could not rid the world of suffering by individual healing, so he went deeper, went to the utmost limit and at the cross became suffering that men might be saved from suffering; became sin that sin might be ended; became death that death might be banished. He took it upon himself.

(E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of Every Road*, pp. 77, 78)



THE ESSENCE OF “SIN” - DETHRONING GOD AND ENTHRONING ONE’S “SELF” AS THE PRIMARY OBJECT OF LIFE’S MEANING!

At the heart of all temptations as we see here, is the act of pushing God aside because we perceive him as secondary, if not actually superfluous and annoying, in comparison with all the apparently far more urgent matters that fill our lives. Constructing a world by our own lights, without reference to God, building on our own foundation; refusing to acknowledge the reality of anything beyond the political and material, while setting God aside as an illusion – that is the temptation that threatens us in many varied forms.

Moral posturing is part and parcel of temptation. It does not invite us directly to do evil – no, that would be far too blatant. It pretends to show us a better way, where we finally abandon our illusions and throw ourselves into the work of actually making the world a better place. It claims, moreover, to speak for true realism: What’s real is what is right

there in front of us – power and bread. By comparison, the things of God fade into unreality, into a secondary world that no one really needs.

God is the issue: Is he real, reality itself, or isn't he? Is he good, or do we have to invent the good ourselves? The God question is the fundamental question, and it sets us down right at the crossroads of human existence.

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 28-29)



**THE “FREE WILL” OF EVERY “HUMAN BEING”
BOTH
“FANTASTIC AND FRIGHTENING!”**

BY RON CHRISTIAN

MAN (FALLEN AS HE IS) HAS THE WONDERFUL, YET FRIGHTENING CAPACITY TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MORAL ALTERNATIVES – RIGHT OR WRONG!

The Bible (God's Word) declares many times that God is almighty, that His power is manifested in both the creation of the universe with its countless stars, and in the sustenance (maintenance, support, and continuance) of the universe. God is all-powerful – with one important and serious exception! God created humans with the frightening and yet wonderful capacity to choose! God (THE ALL-POWERFUL ONE) deliberately limited Himself, by allowing the 'crown of His creation' – the human being – to exercise the will to choose between moral alternatives. The Holy Spirit would strongly influence the human conscience to choose the 'right' and to 'reject' the wrong, but the Spirit would not 'force' the divine will upon any human being. The 'mystery of the human will' cannot be truly understood, i.e., why some persons choose rightly and other persons choose wrongly.

When God created humans, He did not want 'robots' that simply did what the Creator forced or willed upon the creatures. Neither did God create man as simply a higher animal form, no different from any other animal except in complexity biologically, an animal like all animals, who lives by instinct (a stimulus-response mechanism). No, God created man "in His own image". As God is a Being who thinks and feels and chooses, so each human would have the capacity to think, to feel, and to choose (decide between options).

So, God is known as a God of Power, because God manifested His power (legitimately) in countless ways in Nature (our own world and more expansively in the spectacular universe which He made for His own glory). However, even though God's infinite power is faintly (but genuinely) manifested in the "works of His Hands" (Nature), it is true that God's power is greater than the human mind can conceive or discover.

But God chose, when He created human beings, to put a certain limit on His own divine power! Hard to imagine that God would do this, but the fact of the matter is (both from Scripture and from universal human experience) He did just that! He chose not to exercise His unlimited divine and eternal power, when He created humans, in that He allowed persons to say "Yes" or "No" to God's revealed will for humanity. Of course, our first parents, created with that frightening capacity of 'free will', tragically made the wrong choice – plunging the entire human race into a morally perverted (rebellious) state.

Only through accepting the atoning blood of Christ can a fallen person be forgiven of his

gross sins, and be restored to a right relationship with God (justification), and be gradually brought into fuller harmony with the will and ways and power of God (sanctification).

If God is all-powerful, why does He not exercise that power to force every human being to become a Christian, so that every human being can ultimately die in righteousness and go to the place of eternal bliss (heaven)? Again, the answer can be found in the fact that the Almighty One limits the use of His power, because He deeply respects the God-created ‘divine image’ in every person. That ‘divine image’ is especially marked by the capacity of ‘free choice’ - the ‘will to decide personal destiny.’

God’s power over inanimate nature (the world’s orbit, and the movements of the multiplied stars in the Universe) is total and complete. But, because God by nature and personality is total love, and love means relationship, the triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) chose at a moment in time to create a creature like God in a most significant way – namely, a creature that, like God, had the capacity to love. Love is the greatest reality of God, for “God is love.” Love means centering on another being, so God’s love was centered on humankind. As God was free to love, so man was created with the capacity to love. But love by nature involves the exercise of ‘free will’. Man was created with the frightening, yet wonderful, capacity to choose right or wrong. To choose rightly is to choose to love his Creator, and to demonstrate that love for the Creator, by obeying the wishes and the will of the Creator. To choose wrongly is to choose to reject the love of the Creator for the creature, issuing forth in disobedience to the will of the Creator, becoming a sinful rebel, running from the blessed presence of the Creator. Tragically, our first parents chose wrongly, in the beginning of God’s “Human Experiment”! They were objects of God’s great creation, subjects of God’s great love, partners in God’s great plan for the world, recipients of God’s great gifts of life, health and happiness and yet, in spite of God’s overtures of love and unspeakably great gifts of life, Adam and Eve ‘blew it all’! They doubted God’s integrity, and disobeyed God’s explicit commands, and, as a result, lost their special status in God’s beautiful Garden, and consequently were driven from that original Garden, eventually to die under sin’s curse! God could have created ‘robots’ - creatures with no personal ability to choose between moral alternatives, under the total and inflexible will of the Master Creator! But God instead chose to make ‘free moral agents’, with the capacity to genuinely choose between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, and with the capacity to ‘love the Lord God’, or to ‘disobey and rebel against the Lord God.’ God took a ‘great risk’ in creating a different kind of animal, an animal like many other animals biologically, but an animal altogether different from all other animals. A biological being with a mind able to think similarly to the Creator’s mind, and a being with a heart able to feel similarity to the Creator’s heart of compassion, and a being with a will able to choose similarly to the Creator’s will of righteousness and justice!

Very imperfectly, but genuinely, humans have the capacity (as creatures made “in God’s image”) to ‘think some of God’s thoughts’, to ‘feel some of God’s compassion’, to ‘choose some of God’s righteous and just plans and purposes’!

As stated before, God is all-powerful, but the fact that humans have the capacity to choose wrongly (tragically making decisions against God’s will) demonstrates vividly that God has limited the full exercise of His omnipotence (i.e., His infinite power). God values the creation and expression of ‘human will’ (free will, ability genuinely to choose between moral alternatives) so very much, that He was willing to ‘take the risk’ in creating such a unique creature (who, God knew before creation, would have the ability either to walk obediently and in love with the Creator, or to walk away from the Creator in disobedience and rebellion). God, of course, created humans with the expectation that persons (made in God’s image) would choose gladly to love and to obey the Creator, thus enjoying sweet communion and peace and human-divine fellowship forever. But, in case mankind would wrongly choose (which, I think, was ‘unthinkable’ to the God of Love who loved the ‘crown of His creation’ so very much), God, ‘before the foundation of the world,’ had a ‘back-up plan’ by which, at great cost to God, He could rescue a fallen human race! Of course, when man dreadfully exercised his ‘free will’ wrongly (through Satanic temptation), God put that ‘back-up plan’ into operation. That plan (gradually revealed) was consummated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This Divine Power has an important characteristic, namely, God’s Power has a certain ‘self-imposed restraint’. God restrained Himself in the full exercise of His Almighty Power, when He chose to create a being in the Universe that has the frightening capacity to say “Yes” or “No” to its Creator! Nothing else and no one else (that we know of) has that ability, in the Universe!

Humans who dwell on this tiny planet, have the unbelievable ability to tragically harden their hearts, and close their minds, and ‘put a fist’ in the face of their Creator!

The Bible teaches through countless examples, and human experience confirms, that God (who created humankind, and who restrained the exercise of His power in the process of creation of humans), has two Wills. By this, I mean that God has a “Perfect Will” and a “Permissive Will”.

Highly respected theologian, Robert Shank, makes this distinction very clearly. He notes:

“All that occurs in the universe is within the permissive will of God. Neither men

nor angels nor devils can go beyond the limits of God's permissive will. But it is by no means true that all that occurs is in accord with the perfect will of God.

“One many argue that, since the world is filled with greed, lust, violence, debauchery, hatred, and impenitence, God evidently wishes it to be so and is well pleased. But the Scriptures declare otherwise. Although God allows these things to exist in the world, He has revealed His displeasure and wrath with respect to all such things and has commanded all men to repent. Thus, it is evident that there are two aspects of the will of God with respect to sin: his permissive will allows it; but His perfect will forbids it and will bring all sin into judgment.

“There are two aspects of the will of God for men with respect to salvation. Numerous Scriptures reveal God's perfect will to *‘have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’* (I Timothy 2:4); but the fact that not all men are saved reflects God's permissive will. If a man is saved, it is in accordance with God's perfect will that all men should be saved; if a man is lost, it is in accordance with God's permissive will that men, being free moral agents rather than mere puppets, may refuse to obey Him. The latitude between God's perfect will and His permissive will is the area within which men function with freedom as responsible moral intelligences, accountable before God in solemn judgment. God is at work in humanity *‘bringing many sons unto glory’* (Hebrews 2:10) through the redemptive process rooted in His grace and wrought in Christ. But as moral intelligences created in His image, men must of their own free will concur in God's redemptive process if they are to share His everlasting glory as His sons. The fact that men are responsible, as free moral agents, is a corollary of the fact that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one.

The fact that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one, is fully apparent in numerous passages of Scripture. Consider the following: *‘If any man wills to do His will, he shall know... .’* (John 7:17) *‘Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father...’* (Matthew 7:21) *‘But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel (boulē, purpose) of God for them, being not baptized of John’* (Luke 7:30). According to the Scriptures, men may choose to do God's will, or not to do His will. Since everything that happens is *contrary* to the will of God, it is evident that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one.”

Because God chose to create humans with the capacity to choose wrongly, one must conclude that God will not force the wrongdoer back on the ‘path of righteousness’. In other words, even though God will try hard to get the wrongdoer to turn from his ‘evil ways’ (through the conscience of the wrongdoer, through the clear warnings of

Scripture, and through the counsel and influence of faithful followers of Christ), God will 'permit' the wrongdoer to continue on his 'road towards ultimate destruction.' God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and God wills that none should perish but that all persons come to repentance, but because God created humans with a 'free will' (a genuine ability to choose either to follow God or to run away from God), not even God who is 'all-powerful' can force anyone to repent and to be saved and to choose eternal life! God has a 'perfect will' (or desire for all humankind) – the salvation of every person. But, because each person has a 'free will' (as an inherent quality of his unique creation), God has to exercise what can properly be called a 'permissive will.' In other words, even though God is the God of infinite power, God has to allow (permit) 'free moral agents' (humans) to choose wrongly – and to suffer the consequences of death!

In the exercise of man's 'free will' (i.e., making moral choices because of clear moral options), does God know 'ahead of time' what choice a man will make? Many, if not most, Christians believe that, based on the belief in God's omniscience (perfect knowledge), God must know all things – even knowledge 'ahead of time' regarding an individual's moral decision.

But, just as God restrains himself in the expression of God's power (to allow the genuine exercise of man's God-given 'free will'), could it also be true to say that God limits the expression of His image? If so, God would have to allow man's distinctive quality – that is, his 'free will' - to be 'tested', in order to demonstrate man's love for and loyalty to his Creator. Even though the 'all-knowing' God knows everything that is possible to know concerning all issues surrounding all persons' moral decisions, God nevertheless (out of profound respect for the 'crown of His creation') must Himself wait to discover the actual outcome of every moral decision. Again, "Scripture teaches us that God literally finds out HOW people will choose WHEN they choose."

While maintaining a profound respect for the omnipotence (power) and the omniscience (knowledge) of God, it is important to affirm the fact that God is so powerful and so loving that He created a being (personality) who, like none other creature, can exercise a spiritual quality – the 'power' to make moral decisions which can result in living a moral and godly life on this planet, and eventually to enjoy an indescribably beautiful and blissful life hereafter! To make all this possible (for humankind), God, in love, created a creature who could love in much the same way his Creator loves! But loving (in the human realm) intrinsically involves the exercise of 'free will' - so God limited Himself in the expression of His Power, in order to allow His creatures 'freely to love' (to become like God, who is perfect love).

If there is anything that is most clear in Scriptures and illustrated vividly, not only in the

Bible, but also throughout the general history of humankind, it is the fact that much of what has happened among humankind has not been in the past and is not presently pleasing to God. That is, the evil that exists on every hand deeply grieves a broken-hearted God of holy love, and provokes holy anger in His heart because of what sin and Satan have done to millions of precious souls! All of this 'sad reality' testifies to the fact that, while God has a 'perfect will' (the salvation of every person), God also has a 'permissive will.' God 'permits' humans to misuse the greatest gift they have ('free moral agency'), to choose evil and to reject goodness and righteousness and holiness and health and ultimate happiness in heaven. The creature God made with the capacity to choose love (fulfilling his God-given and God-ordained destiny), can, sadly, choose self-centeredness (which brings alienation from humans on earth, and from God ultimately and finally in hell). The person, who chooses God as the true 'center' of his life, is the person who eventually and wonderfully learns to love God supremely, to love his fellowmen sincerely, and to love himself subordinately as a servant to God and to others. He, who loses himself, in worship of God and in service to his fellowmen, is he who finds the true meaning of his earthly existence!

He who chooses to live a God-centered, love-filled life is a 'double winner'! He who practices love here on earth, experiences the very purpose of his God-given creation – to be like the God of Creation who is 'Perfect Love'! A love-filled person is a God-centered person – a true person! God is love, and therefore, the person who pursues a 'life of love' is a God-like person! That person is a winner in time and in eternity, for God created humans with the wonderful capacity to 'choose' love as a way of life, and the reward for living a life of love on earth is a 'heaven full of love' after the love-filled person dies! Glory! Glory! What is the purpose for which God created humans? To love God supremely (for "God is love"), and to love fellow human beings sincerely and unselfishly (for God created humanity to be a 'Community of love'). *When a person loves, it is evidence that he has expressed his 'free will' properly – responding to God's grace initiatives and to God's Holy Spirit, who has the power to 'shed abroad God's love into the human heart.'* (Romans 5:5) What is the purpose for which God created humankind? "To love and to be loved" (the essence of human existence, and the true purpose of the divine-human relationship)! And this love relationship (between humans and God) is possible only because God created humankind with genuine 'free moral agency.'

The Scriptures clearly indicate that God has a plan for the entire human race, namely, that every human creature should repent of his/her sins, and thus be forgiven of all sin, resulting in abundant life here on earth and eternal life in heaven. This is God's saving plan for every single human being – without exception. God has a 'perfect will' - that all persons should truly repent (that is, make a 'moral U-turn'), and turn to God in total faith for spiritual healing and salvation. God is NOT willing that any person should

perish (be lost from God eternally), but that all should repent and be saved for time and eternity. (Note 2 Peter 3:9) God “*desires (wills) all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:4)

The ‘perfect will’ of God and the ‘perfect saving actions’ of God are clearly revealed in the Scriptures. The God who supposedly ‘predestines some individuals to be saved eternally and other individuals to be lost eternally’ is NOT the ‘loving God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Jesus, more than anyone or anything, best reveals the ‘eternal heart of God’ and the ‘heart of God’ that Jesus reveals is a ‘heart of compassion, mercy, grace, forgiveness, love and salvation.’ God’s ‘perfect will’ is that all persons should repent and be saved eternally! He does NOT ‘will’ or ‘desire’ that any should perish! What kind of God would we have, who rules this world, who likewise chooses to save some persons and to damn some other persons eternally? Certainly not a fair, just, loving and compassionate God, but a God who was arbitrary, unpredictable, vengeful, cruel, unjust, fearful, horrifying (the opposite of a loving Heavenly Father who wishes to take everyone to His heavenly house)!

The Scriptures state certain indisputable facts relating to the salvation of humankind:

1. God loves all persons and desires (wills) the salvation of every person. God is NOT willing that any person should perish (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4) His ‘perfect will’ (desire) is the salvation of all persons – through repentance and trust (faith).
2. God calls every person to repentance, through His Holy Spirit who convicts all persons of their sins and who draws all persons to the source of healing (the triune God, who manifested Himself in Christ Jesus).
3. While no person is automatically saved (because all are sinners), nevertheless all persons are ‘savable’ (i.e., all persons are able to respond to the Spirit’s call to repentance, because of the ‘initiating grace’ of God that makes it possible for all sinners to repent and to turn to God in true faith).
4. All persons (because of ‘free will’) have the capacity (tragically) to resist the convicting power of the Spirit, thus refusing to repent and to be saved. Many in Jesus’ time (and during Paul’s ministry in Acts) refused to yield to the call to repentance. Thus, God ‘permits’ all persons to choose evil rather than good, hell rather than heaven.
5. At the ‘heart’ of God’s saving (eternal) plan for man’s salvation is Jesus Christ, whose atoning death provides the offer of forgiveness to every

human being. Christ's atonement was unlimited, that is, no person was excluded. The blood He shed is sufficient to wash away the sins of all persons, of all times, under all conditions.

6. God has a 'perfect will' (salvation for all persons), but God also has a 'permissive will' (i.e., God, out of profound respect for the human person who possesses 'free moral agency', will not 'force his divine will' for salvation upon any person). God's loving 'saving grace' can tragically be 'resisted', and a rebel (whom God desperately willed and desired to be saved), can continue, throughout his entire earthly life, to resist the Holy Spirit of grace. Therefore he can ultimately be lost in hell! God is not willing that anyone should perish, but some will finally perish in hell, because they refused to repent of sin and refused to submit to the God of love! God never willed that any human be in hell! Nevertheless, He permits any person to choose death rather than life! God respects the choice of every person! He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. It was never His 'perfect will' that anyone should perish, but God has a 'permissive will' – because He respects the exercise of the 'human will'!

There is no greater (and more thrilling) revelation in 'reality' than the reality that is clearly given in I John 4 (and many other similar Scriptures) – namely, that the true and only and living God is a 'God of Love.' God inherently and intrinsically, is 'Love.' He is, by nature, 'Love.' This is to say that God can do nothing, or be nothing, that is contrary or contradictory to His 'Holy Love.' This is to say that every characteristic, trait, and manifestation of God's character is consistent with 'Holy Love.' When God is angry, such anger is a 'Holy Anger' - a proper manifestation of 'Holy Love'. There is no vindictiveness, arbitrariness, injustice, or favoritism in the expression of His 'Holy Anger'! He does everything, which is totally consistent with justice, fairness, equity, and integrity. No 'hidden motives' or 'selfish plans' can be found in the heart of the living God! He loves everyone with an everlasting love! God in human form (Jesus) provided the only way by which all persons could be forgiven and reconciled to the Creator (and this plan of His love was extremely costly). God in love has given the blessed Holy Spirit to the world of human need, in order that the Spirit may convict men of sin, and may strongly influence all sinners to repent of their sins and to humbly turn to Christ for spiritual healing and restoration and regeneration. God, while strongly 'drawing all men' to Christ because of His intention to save all persons, nevertheless – in the name of love and because of the very inherent nature of love – refuses to 'force' or to 'compel' any person to become a believer and follower of Jesus Christ (i.e., to become a true Christian).

A young man who wishes to become married to a young woman, whom he deeply loves,

knows that he has only limited ‘power’ in relating to his ‘beloved’ He, of course, can use the ‘power of influence’, the gentle ‘power of persuasion’, the ‘power of words’, the ‘power of subtle appeal’, the ‘power of loving actions’, and even (if he is a Christian) the ‘power of prayer’. However, because of the inherent nature of love, he cannot use the ‘power of coercion’. He cannot ‘force his will on her will’. He cannot make her say “Yes” to his proposal to marry him! He can plead with her, beg her, and even wait for her, but he cannot ‘control her will’, manipulate her, threaten her, or ultimately force her to say “Yes” to his proposal. She has her own independent ‘will’ - the God-given (frightening, but wonderful) capacity to make her own decision, and largely to determine her own destiny! Marriage (based on the commitment of mutual love) depends upon the exercise of ‘positive volition’ on the part of two ‘free will agents’ (man and woman who freely give themselves to each other, initially at the ‘marriage altar’ and of course, throughout the couple’s entire married life).

This human reality (of the marriage relationship) is an imperfect, but genuine, reflection of the divine-human relationship, which is based on God’s nature – the nature of eternal love.



THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SIN HAS BEEN REPLACED WITH THE WORLD’S CONCEPTS (RELATIVISTIC) OF “MERE MISTAKES AND WEAKNESSES”

The silent apostasy of which Saint John Paul II spoke has turned into a militant apostasy. In our relativistic societies, no one acknowledges any more that he is a sinner. Sin and repentance have become traumatizing states of soul from which one must be liberated so as to be able to enjoy good spiritual health. We consider ourselves victims of our heredity, of our environment, or of circumstances. Men no longer want to see themselves as anything but fragile, wounded persons. The impression is given that sin no longer exists; adultery, divorce, cohabitation are no longer to be considered serious sins. They are failures or stages along the way to a distant ideal. Who worries about the invasion of hedonism and moral laxity, of barbaric disdain for women, who are exploited as sex objects by pornography and prostitution? Nevertheless, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10).* Why is the post-humanist world no longer willing to acknowledge sin? Sin is not an abstract reality or a stain on a garment. It is the rejection of God’s law, opposition to God. Sin is a breach of an alliance, the deterioration of our personal relationship with God. Sin is self-destructive, comparable to a person who ruins himself by drug abuse or taking poison. Nevertheless, God does not want us to destroy something important in

ourselves or in others; sin displeases him and painfully offends him. God calls us to conversion and to a radical rejection of sin. If we experience a genuine conversion of heart, after the example of Saint Paul and Saint Augustine, we will really be able to touch the silent presence of God in our life. In the *Confessions*, Saint Augustine calls this Presence the Life of his life: “When once I shall be united to Thee with all my being, there shall be no more grief and toil, and my life will be alive, filled wholly with Thee.”

How could we live without God? His Presence in us is terrifying, unsettling, but life-giving, sweet, and calming at the same time. It is distant, because of our sins, and close because of God’s infinite mercy. It is frightening, because it burns and consumes us like a charring fire, but it embraces us tenderly like a Father.

(Robert Cardinal Sarah, *The Power of Silence*, pp. 207-208)

**SOBERLY AWAKENED TO THE REALITY OF THE SHALLOWNESS OF
YOUR SINFUL LIFESTYLE, WITH ITS IMPENDING ETERNAL
PUNISHMENT!**

Let conscience speak as before the Lord that sees your hearts, and will shortly judge you: have you had such a sight of your natural and actual sin and misery, of your neglect of God, your contempt of heaven, your loss of precious, hasty time, your worldly, fleshly, sensual lives, and your omission of the great and holy works which you were made for? Have you had such a sight and sense of these as hath filled your souls with shame and sorrow, and caused you, in tears of hearty grief, to lament your sinful, careless lives, before the Lord? Do you loathe yourselves for all this, as being vile in your own eyes, and each man say, “What a wretch was I! What an unreasonable, self-hating wretch, to do all this against myself! What an unnatural wretch! What a monster of rebellion and ingratitude, to do all this against the Lord of love and mercy! What a deceived, foolish wretch, to prefer the pleasing of my lusts and senses, a pleasure that perisheth in the fruition and is past as soon as it is received, before the manly pleasures of the saints, and before the soul’s delight in God, and before the unspeakable, everlasting pleasures! Was there any comparison between the brutish pleasures of the flesh, and the spiritual delights of a believing soul, in looking to the endless pleasure which we shall have with all the saints and angels in the glorious presence of the Lord? Was God and glory worth no more than to be cast aside for satiating of an unsatisfiable flesh and fancy, and to be sold for a harlot, for a forbidden cup, for a little air of popular applause, or for a burdensome load of wealth and power, for so short a time? Where is now the gain and pleasure of all my former sins? What have they left but a sting behind

them? How near is the time when my departing soul must look back on all the pleasures and profits that ever I enjoyed, as a dream when one awaketh; as delusory vanities, that have done all for me that ever they will do, and all is but to bring my flesh unto corruption (Gal. 6:8), and my soul to this distressing grief and fear! And then I must sing and laugh no more! I must brave it out in pride no more! I must know the pleasures of the flesh no more! But be leveled with the poorest, and my body laid in loathsome darkness, and my soul appear before that God whom I so willfully refused to obey and honor.

“O wretch that I am! Where was my understanding, when I played so boldly with the flames of hell, the wrath of God, the poison of sin! When God stood by, and yet I sinned! When conscience did rebuke me, and yet I sinned! When heaven or hell were hard at hand, and yet I sinned! When, to please my God and save my soul, I would not forbear a filthy lust, or forbidden vanity of no worth! When I would not be persuaded to a holy, heavenly, watchful life, though all my hopes of heaven lay on it! I am ashamed of myself; I am confounded in the remembrance of my willful, self-destroying folly! I loathe myself for all my abominations! O that I had lived in beggary and rags when I lived in sin! And O that I had lived with God in a prison, or in a wilderness, when I refused a holy, heavenly life, for the love of a deceitful world! Will the Lord pardon what is past, I am resolved through his grace to do so no more, but to loathe that filth that I took for pleasure, and to abhor that sin that I made my sport, and to die to the glory and riches of the world, which I made my idol; and to live entirely to that God that I did so long ago and so unworthily neglect; and to seek that treasure, that kingdom, that delight, that will fully satisfy my expectation, and answer all my care and labor, with such infinite advantage. Holiness or nothing shall be my work and life, and heaven or nothing shall be my portion and felicity.”

(Richard Baxter; 1615-1691; taken from a sermon entitled ‘*A Sermon of Repentance*’)



**“MAN IS RESTLESS (AND BURDENED) UNTIL HE FINDS REST ALONE IN
CONSECRATION TO GOD!”**

Extremes meet. The poor struggle to get a living; the rich struggle to live. The poor go about to get work; the rich go abroad to get away from care and work and worry. They leave a finely furnished home for a crowded hotel at some watering-place or seaside resort, in the hope of enjoying better health. They try the city and they try the country; they try the mountain and they try the valley; they try magnetic springs and they try hot springs; but nothing seems to fully agree with them. Thus, with them as with the poor, life is a continued battle for existence. The better way is to present our bodies a living

sacrifice to God, and care for them and use them as he directs. He only is always safe who “seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Freedom from consuming care is found only as we cast all our cares on God. Days illuminated with the steady sunshine of God’s favor, and filled up with deeds of kindness, cease to be burdensome, but are a joy and a delight.

(B.T. Roberts; *Living Truths* No.40; Edited and compiled by E. D. Riggs)



HAVE YOU YET EXPERIENCED A “CONVERSION” TO CHRIST, EITHER “SUDDENLY” OR “GRADUALLY”?

Conversion is the change of the master-sentiment. That change may come gradually, or suddenly. After making inquiries of many people in many parts of the world, I find that about forty per cent of those who have undergone a real change belong to the group of the “sudden”, while about sixty per cent belong to the “gradual.” The worthwhile-ness of this change cannot be judged by whether the change was gradual or sudden. Not the phenomena that surround it, but the facts that issue from it – this is the important thing. Whether gradual or sudden, it gives a man something outside himself to love. No, not something to love – *Someone* to love.

This necessity of finding Someone to love outside of oneself is deeply embedded in human nature. It is being increasingly discovered that only as we have an affection which lifts us out of our pettiness, our selfishness, our fears and passions, do we find ourselves again. A rogue elephant is one that has been driven from the herd by the younger elephants, and, lacking the fellowship of the herd, he is unhappy, ill-tempered, and tears up gardens wrecks the huts of the people and tramples them to death when opportunity arises. Why? Is he inherently “a rogue”? No, he has nothing to love, so he turns destructive. In the fellowship of the herd he would be different. When the human heart has no central love, it turns destructive, both to itself and others. Conversion gives it something to love supremely. But that something must not be itself. For to love oneself supremely is to lose oneself; and that not merely spiritually, but physically as well.

(E. Stanley Jones, *Is The Kingdom of God Realism?*, pp. 177, 178)



“CHRIST’S GREAT LOVE FOR HUMANITY IS LIKE ‘SWEET-SMELLING PERFUME’ TO GOD!”

“God Looks Down Upon His Dear Son As Jesus Died For All Sinners!”

- God Asked His Son To Go To Earth To Rescue A ‘Lost Race’ Of Humans.
- Jesus Consents to Leave Heaven To Come To A Sin-Cursed Earth (Incarnation).
- Jesus Lives A Sinless Life, Dies A Substitutionary Death, Rise From The Dead.

The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) loves each other perfectly, and every action of the Son on earth (to rescue lost humans) was the action of love (words, action, sacrifice on the cross, glorious resurrection). The actions of Jesus’ Love (Perfect Love) were so beautiful in the eyes of the Eternal Father (who requested in eternity that Jesus would become incarnate), that words could never adequately express the Father’s appreciation to the Son. But one ‘word picture’ that the Bible uses to describe the Father’s appreciation for the Son’s Love (for humanity) is the word ‘Perfume’!

“Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave Himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins, And God was pleased, for Christ’s love for you was like sweet perfume to him.” (Ephesians 5:2; Living Bible)

Obviously, to all bystanders, there was the agonizing ‘stench of death’ in the air, while Jesus died the fiercest of all deaths on the Cross. No one (including His closest disciples) could see beyond the ‘horror of Jesus’ death’ (even though Jesus had earlier predicted His resurrection, following His death). But, while The Heavenly Father must have felt deep sorrow as His own beloved Son was dying, the truth of the matter is that the act of Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross (the greatest possible act of sacrificial and redemptive love) was to the Father the ‘Victory of all Victories’!

Because of the nature of Christ’s death (a substitution for the death of every human soul – sinner), the Father knew there could never be any other love (in heaven or on earth) that could be compared to Christ’s dying (Sacrificial) love for every human being!

Because of Christ’s death, no human being need die (be lost eternally) in his own sins. Christ died for all, that all may be saved (if they choose to be saved)! It is no wonder that Christ’s love for sinful humans brought such pleasure (delight) to the Father!

Christ’s Love for a Lost Race Was Like
The ‘Sweet-Smelling Perfume’ In the ‘Nostrils of God’!



**HAVE YOU REPUDIATED YOUR LIFE OF SIN (WICKEDNESS,
WILLFULNESS, WAYWARDNESS) TO BECOME ATTACHED IN FAITH TO
THE LIFE-GIVER?**

He offered Himself an offering to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God. *“He said, It is finished: and bowed His head, and gave up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom.”* It is finished: the punishment of the law is borne, the demands of the law are answered, the way is finished, the veil is rent from the top to the bottom! Not a shred of the dreadful curtain now remains to intercept us. The guiltiest, the vilest sinner of you all, has now liberty to enter in through the rent veil, under the light of Jehovah’s countenance – to dwell in the secret of His tabernacle, to behold His beauty, and to inquire in His temple.

But oh, if there be one soul that can find no peace in any self-righteous way – if there be one of you who find that you are lost in yourself – behold, Christ says to you, “I am *the* way,” as He says in another place, “I am *the* door.” It is a full, free, and open way, and it is a way for sinners. Why wait a moment longer? There was once a partition wall between you and God; but Christ hath cast it down. God was once angry; but His anger is turned away from this blessed path. In Christ He is ever well pleased.

If ever you tried to keep the commandments of God – if ever you tried to keep your eyes from unlawful desires, your tongue from words of anger or gossiping or bitterness, your heart from malice and envy and covetousness – if ever you have tried this, and I fancy most unconverted men have tried it – if ever you have tried this, did you not find it impossible? It was like raising the dead. Did you not find a struggle against yourself? Oh, how plain that you are dead – not born again!

Christ is the life of every soul that cleaves to Him. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Is your soul like a dead limb – cold, stiff, motionless, and full of corruption? Cleave you to Christ, be joined to Him by faith, and you shall be one spirit – you shall be made warm and vigorous and full of activity in God’s service.

Is your soul like a withered branch – dry, fruitless, and withered, wanting both leaves and fruit? Cleave you to Christ; be joined to Him, and you shall be one spirit. You will find it true that Christ is the life; your life will be hid with Christ in God. You will say, *“I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”*

Remember, then, my unbelieving friends, the only way for you to become holy is to become united to Christ. And remember you, my believing friends, that if ever you are relaxing in holiness, the reason is, you are relaxing your hold on Christ. Abide in me,

and I in you; so shall ye bear much fruit. Severed from me, ye can do nothing.

(Robert Murray McCheyne, 1813-1843, taken from a sermon entitled ‘*Christ The Way, The Truth, And The Life*’)



WHAT IS MEANT BY “GODLY REPENTANCE” THAT LEADS TO A DECISIVE CHANGE OF LIFE (THE CONVERSION TO CHRIST)?

Steady reformation is a more decisive test of the value of mourning than depth of grief. The susceptibility of emotion varies with individuals. Some men feel intensely, others suffer less keenly; but this is constitutional, belonging to nervous temperament, rather than moral character. This is the characteristic of the divine sorrow, that it is a repentance “not repented of”; no transient, short-lived resolutions, but sustained resolve.

And the beautiful law is, that in proportion as the repentance increases the grief diminishes. “*I rejoice*” says Paul, that “*I made you sorry, though it were **but for a time.***” Grief for a time repentance forever. It is the very beauty of the penitence which is according to God, that at last the sinner, realizing God’s forgiveness, does learn to forgive himself.

So sorrow according to God, is to see sin as God sees it. The grief of Peter was as that of Judas. He went out and wept bitterly; how bitterly none can tell but they who have learned to look on sin as God does. But in Peter’s grief there was an element of hope; and that sprung precisely from this – that he saw God in it all. Despair of self did not lead to despair of God.

This is the great, peculiar feature of this sorrow: God is there, accordingly self is less prominent. It is not a microscopic self-examination, nor a mourning in which self is ever uppermost: *my* character gone; the greatness of *my* sin; the forfeiture of *my* salvation. The thought of God absorbs all that. I believe the feeling of true penitence would express itself in such words as these: - There *is* a righteousness, though I have not attained it. There is a purity, and a love, and a beauty, though my life exhibits little of it. In that I can rejoice. Of that I can feel the surpassing loveliness. My doings? They are worthless, I cannot endure to think of them. I am not thinking of them, I have something else to think of. There, there, in that Life I see it. And so the Christian – gazing not on what he is, but on what he desires to be – dares in penitence to say, That Righteousness is mine: dares, even when the recollection of his sin is most vivid and most poignant, to say with Peter, thinking less of himself than of God, and sorrowing as it were with God -

“Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

(F.W. Robertson, 1816-1853, taken from a sermon entitled ‘*The Power of Sorrow*’)

**DOES GOD HAVE ‘FAVORITE PERSONS’,
OR DOES GOD LOVE EVERYONE EQUALLY?**

Why spend considerable time and space analyzing the teachings of Calvinism? A simple answer is this: “What a man thinks, so is he!” Whatever you think about God (His nature and His activities) determines what you think about life (what you think about yourself, what you think about other persons, what you think about Jesus Christ, what you think about the meaning and the implications of personal salvation, what you think about the Holy Spirit’s ministry, what you think about sin and repentance and restoration, what you think about personal assurance in the face of death).

Those persons who embrace the teachings of Calvinism (predestination and God’s mysterious will, and all the implications from these ‘premises’), I say, those persons who adhere to these teachings will develop a totally different ‘world viewpoint’ (mentally and socially and spiritually), than the person who is committed to the basic teachings of the New Testament! The New Testament teachings are totally contradictory to the teachings of Calvinism! The New Testament teaches not the horrible message which Calvinists possess (the frightening message of predestination), but the message of God’s universal love and God’s message of assurance of sins forgiven – the message of a God of mercy (not of wrath)!

Christianity is attractive to everyone – including the sincere humanist – because the message is the outgrowth of the nature of a ‘positive and loving God’ – a God who, because of Christ’s ‘finished work’, offers salvation to everyone! Calvinism’s message is ‘exclusive’ and ‘discriminatory’! The message of Christianity is ‘inclusive’, without discrimination and without favoritism!

The New Testament declares that God loves all, and that no one is excluded from the ‘family of God’ and from life in heaven, unless one (a sinner) freely chooses to exclude himself from such ‘gifts’, by his own willful rejection and personal rebellion! “*Whosoever will may come to the Savior of the world*”! All are included in the ‘elect family’ of God, potentially, and are actually members of that divinely-designed ‘family’ based upon meeting the reasonable ‘requirements’ for membership in God’s family!

God’s intention for each person (sinner) to enjoy membership in that family is fulfilled

when each person chooses to repent of his sin and to trust Christ to transform his life (personal conversion)! In contrast to the God of the New Testament, the God of Calvinism does not intend or desire for every human being to be a member of God's wonderful 'family'. Tragically, in that view, God intends for only a portion of mankind (perhaps a small portion of mankind) to enjoy the glories and joys of eternal life!

Calvinism has little regard for humanity (in general) and for any single person (in specific) – except, of course, for God's pampered children (God's elect children)! Like despicable 'trash', God throws away much (probably most) of humanity (millions and millions of God-created persons) into hell, all because God (for some strange and mysterious reason) decided, before the foundation of the world, NOT to elect most of humanity to be members of the 'elect group' of God's favored ones!

To make this 'devilish plot' even more horrible, God actually takes 'pleasure' in sending the 'reprobates' (God-condemned souls) into hell! It is for God's 'honor' and 'praise' that these reprobates are damned forever in a 'devil's inferno'!

This Calvinism system (with predestination as the 'premise' of the system) has the 'features' of a plan that certainly was 'conceived' by the Devil himself! Both the Devil and this Calvinistic 'God' basically hate the human race, and both the Devil and this strange Calvinistic 'God' take delight when humans are pictured as mere 'pawns' (with no ability to exercise a positive will for personal salvation)! Both the Devil and this Calvinistic 'God' take delight when humans are finally cast into the fires of hell!

It is unthinkable (astounding) that any person (namely, John Calvin) could construct a so-called 'Christian' theology that could have horrendous 'elements' (beliefs) that defame everyone that is included in his system of thought – the defaming of God (His nature and character and intentions), the defaming of Man (denying the exercise of authentic 'free will'), the defaming of Jesus Christ (denial of His universal love for lost mankind, and the denial of Jesus' unlimited atonement), the defaming of the Holy Spirit (denial of the gift of repentance and saving faith which are given to every human being, making every person capable of becoming a Christian), the defaming of the Holy Bible (denial of the Bible's teaching that God loves everyone, that God has no 'favorites', that God as a 'good shepherd' is giving an invitation to every lost person to become a member of His 'flock').

Calvinism, far from representing the 'core' of Christianity, namely 'God Is Love', instead, pictures 'God' as the 'God' of wrath and judgment and favoritism and injustice and terror and overwhelming and all-determining 'power'! The difference between the Calvinistic 'God' and the God of the New Testament is the difference between 'night' and 'day', between 'good' and 'evil', between 'health' and 'sickness'!

Calvinism, when examined, even casually and especially in depth, proves itself to be a ‘sick’ and ‘hurtful’ theology – a theology that brings great sadness, not great happiness and security, to its adherents!

IS GOD’S SELF-REVELATION MEANT TO COMFORT ME OR TO TERRORIZE ME?

The sooner this pain-producing theology is eliminated from the ‘counsels’ of human beings, the BETTER! Because of this pathetic, terror-producing theology, there have been countless (sincere) persons, through the ages, who have been terror-stricken (thrown into a virtual ‘panic’), because of the doctrine of predestination! The doctrines of Calvinism (with the basic premise of predestination, God hating a large portion of the human race) are diametrically opposed to the central tenet of Christianity (‘God Is Love’)!

We can tell the atheist or humanist that God loves him individually, that God (before the foundation of the world) chose him to be saved for time and for eternity. We can offer him (realistically) what Jesus Himself offers him – namely, an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter. We can offer the humanist hope for his despair, joy for his sadness, meaning for his purposelessness, forgiveness for his guilt, and companionship for his loneliness!

Jesus said that His ‘yoke’ was easy (i.e., it fits perfectly, custom-made for each person’s gifts, talents). The ‘yoke’ of Calvinism does not fit, that is, this manmade set of doctrines does not ‘fit’ any human being, for each human being is designed by God to experience the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of eternal life, and the confidence that he is included in the family of God on earth and in heaven! Calvinism denies all of this!

Jesus said that His ‘burden’ is light (i.e., the responsibility that God has given to each person, is the exact responsibility that is suited for the person). Knowledge of who God is (a loving and accepting God, the knowledge of what God’s mission for a person is) brings challenge, delight, and creative involvement. In contrast the burden of ‘Calvinism’ is intolerable!

DOES GOD HAVE A ‘HAND OF COMFORTING LOVE, OR OF HARSH CONDEMNATION?

The ‘burden’ of Calvinism is heavy, unbearable, oppressive – because Calvinism does not bring assurance and joy and delight, for there is a sense that God is forbidding and

restrictive and demanding and forlorn and angry and arbitrary in the selection of ‘favorites’ for His kingdom family! How can a person truly be ‘happy’ when he is ‘burdened’ with the frightening (terrorizing) teachings of Calvinism (with Predestination being the primary ‘premise’ for the entire theological system)? The ‘yoke’ is hard, and the ‘burden’ is heavy – this briefly describes Calvinism!

Why would anyone – including humanists and materialists and hedonists and atheists – desire to ‘bow the knee’ before a Calvinistically-constructed God? To know about the teachings of Calvinism is to decide to repudiate these teachings! And to turn decisively away from this manmade ‘God’! But, in contrast, to know about the God of the New Testament – to know about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – is to be strongly drawn to this loving God!

There is something strongly attractive about Jesus Christ! With His arms outstretched, He speaks in kindness: *“Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”*!

God gives to every person the ‘gift’ of repentance and the ‘gift’ of saving faith, thus, every person is ‘savable’ (that is, each person is capable of being saved). God is not willing that any person should perish (go to hell), but that every person should exercise his God-given ‘gift’ of repentance and faith, and thus to be converted (and to enjoy an abundant life here on earth and an eternal life in heaven eventually). These are the ‘foundational facts’ regarding the nature of God and the nature of God’s saving provision through Jesus Christ.

God’s love is universal. His gifts of repentance and faith are universal. God’s call to salvation is universal. God’s offer of new life in Christ is universal. God’s power to transform (change) the nature of lost sinners is universal. God’s offered gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every person is universal.

God’s promise of eternal life in heaven is universal! No wonder the Christian is ‘constitutionally’ happy. The knowledge that Jesus, through his death on the cross and because of his glorious resurrection, has won the victory over sin and over death and over hell and over the devil – knowledge of these ‘realities’ brings joy to one’s heart and a holy laughter to one’s lips.

When one carefully reads the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Christ, one can discern that Christ was not only a “man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief”, but that Christ was also a man who often expressed joy and hearty laughter. After all, Jesus enjoyed the laughter at wedding parties so much that His critics (unjustly) called him a ‘wine bibber’!

-By Ron Christian-



THE 'FINALITY OF CHRIST' IS NOT CONTRADICTORY TO THE 'WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY'

There are those Christians – especially ‘evangelical’ Christians – who believe that, according to Acts 4:12 and other similar-type Scriptures, it is impossible for a sinner to be ‘saved’ if he does not ‘place his personal faith in Jesus Christ’. However, Scripture and reason both reveal that persons (sinners) who have had little or no opportunity to know about the ‘historic Jesus’ (His life, death, and resurrection) can ‘find God’ and ‘personal salvation and eternal life’ – and all because of the ‘wideness of God’s mercy’! In other words, it is NOT contradictory for one to believe in the ‘finality of Christ’ (i.e., the ‘finished work of Christ’ – accomplished through His death and resurrection – through which alone lost human beings can find ‘entrance’ into heaven), and at the same time, for one to believe in the ‘wideness of God’s mercy’ (i.e., that God allows ‘repentant and believing sinners’ who know little or nothing about the ‘saving Christ’ to ‘enter heaven’ after they physically die).

In his massive volume entitled *The Word of Truth*, the highly respected evangelical theologian, Dale Moody (who taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), affirms both the ‘finality of Jesus Christ’ (as the ‘only person by whom God accepts sinners into heaven’) and also the ‘wideness of God’s mercy’ (i.e., that God accepts sinners, who are ignorant of the life and ‘work’ of Jesus, if they ‘place their faith alone in God’). He writes: “The apostolic message of the early church proclaimed that ‘there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). In this Name they went forth to make disciples of all nations and to baptize all in that name (Acts 2:38; 19:5) THIS DOES NOT MEAN TAHT KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN WHOM THE NAME WAS FULLY MANIFESTED WAS NECESSARY FOR THIS SALVATION TO BE FOUND. Even though God allowed past generations to walk in their own way, ‘he did not leave himself without witness’ in nature (Acts 14:17). In all history, God has been present so ‘that they should seek God, in hope that they might feel after him and FIND HIM’ (Acts 17:27). WHAT IT DOES MEAN IS THAT THE GOD WHO REVEALED HIMSELF SUPREMEY IN JESUS IS THE ONLY GOD WHO SAVES.” (pg. 309)

Earlier in this same volume of ‘systematic theology’, Dale Moody deals with this same ‘issue’. He writes: “The chief objection to the belief that before the covenant with Abraham and OUTSIDE THE SCRIPTURES AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION THERE

IS THE POSSIBILITY OF A PERSONAL RELATION WITH GOD is an appeal to certain Scriptures that are thought to rule such encounter out. The first appeal is usually to ACTS 4:12, but that must be harmonized with ACTS 14:17 and ACTS 17:27. IT IS THE NAME, THE PERSONAL REALITY OF GOD KNOWN IN PERSONAL RELATION, THAT SAVES, NOT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE HISTORICAL JESUS.” (pg. 61)

It is important that no one misunderstands certain ‘basic truths’ which have often been ‘assumed’ in this second part of the ‘paper’ regarding God’s great mercy towards the ‘unevangelized’. There is no intention whatever to ‘compromise’ the strong teachings of the Word of God regarding the ‘exclusivity of Christ’ and the ‘marvelous work of the Holy Spirit’. The ‘clarifications’ which John Sanders gives regarding these ‘central teachings of the Word of God’ are helpful. He writes: “Let me make some clarifications. First, nobody comes to God without the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the world convicting people of sin and seeking to turn their sinful hearts toward God. Whether people have creational or biblical revelation, it is the same Spirit who guides them to God, either through knowledge of the historical Jesus or through creation and providence.

“Second, it is not our own righteousness that counts but that of Christ. But the righteousness of Christ is not credited to us because we assent to some piece of knowledge. Rather, it is accounted to us on the basis of faith in God, whether that God be known as Creator or as the Incarnate One. The Holy Spirit seeks to develop faith in us regardless of the sort of revelation we have.

“Third, I am not ignoring the fact that the unevangelized are sinners who have turned away from God. It is sinners that the Holy Spirit desires to turn around – beginning with repentance. IT IS NOT BEYOND THE SPIRIT’S WISDOM OR POWER TO REAWCH SINNERS” (John Sanders, editor, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*, pg. 43)

If the Holy Spirit has the power to ‘reach sinners’, and if it is possible for sinners to be ‘saved’ without hearing of the ‘specific facts’ regarding the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then some may ask: “Why send missionaries to the ‘heathen’?” Before giving a ‘full’ answer to this important question, it is helpful to recall what was mentioned earlier in this ‘paper’ about John Woolman (early Quaker missionary). He said that he went to the American Indians, not only to evangelize them but to ‘learn from these unevangelized ones’. Woolman believed that ‘the light of God which enlightens every person who comes into the world’ (John 1:9) meant that the American Indians possessed truths from God which it was important for him ‘to learn’, to become aware of. He believed that the Holy Spirit was constantly ‘active’ in His

enlightening and convicting work, even among those who had never heard the Gospel of Christ. In the ‘spirit of humility’, Woolman believed that the ‘truth of God’ (which is the only ‘truth’ there is) could be learned from tribes and ‘people groups’ whom many Christians would consider to be in ‘total spiritual darkness’.

John Woolman’s attitudes toward the American Indians (i.e., that he could ‘learn from them’ some of the ‘truths of God’, which came from ‘general revelation’) assumes that the Holy Spirit is actively at work, long before the Christian message is proclaimed by missionaries and evangelists. Notes John Sanders: “Peter and Paul came to the realization that there were GENTILES WHO WORSHIPED THE TRUE GOD despite the fact that some of them had limited knowledge of the Old Testament while others remained completely WITHOUT SPECIAL REVELATION. In his book *Eternity in Their Hearts*, missionary anthropologist Don Richardson has documented numerous cases where God was at work redemptively with people groups prior to Christian missionaries. He calls his basic insight ‘the Melchizedek factor’. Melchizedek was a pagan priest-king to whom Abraham paid tithes and who pronounced a blessing on Abraham. It is fascinating that the Genesis narrative describes Melchizedek as a priest of ‘God Most High’ (14:18) – HE WORSHIPS THE SAME GOD AS ABRAHAM (14:19) – and this evidently without any special revelation from God. The Bible apparently is not as protective of God’s worship as some Christians are.” (John Sanders, editor, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*, pp. 43, 44)

If it is true that, before the coming of Christ to earth, it was possible for Melchizedek to worship the ‘same God’ as Abraham worshiped (even though the former person did not have as much ‘spiritual light’ as the latter person), is it possible, after the coming of Christ to earth, for Muslims and Jews to worship the ‘same God’ as Christians worship? There are those ‘earnest Christians’ today who ‘dogmatically declare’ that such is impossible, and that to suggest that Muslims and Jews could be worshiping the same God as Christians worship, is nothing less than an ‘heretical and unBiblical idea’. Peter Kreeft (writing in defense of the Catholic Faith, and the teaching of the Catholic Catechism) does not agree with this ‘narrow’ and ‘judgmental’ dogmatism! He writes: “JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIMS BELIEVE IN THE SAME GOD. God has the same attributes according to all three religions, because Christians and Muslims learned of this God from the same source: his revelation to the Jews, beginning with Abraham. The three theistic religions agree about (a) the oneness of God and about (b) the nature of this God, but they disagree about (c) the Persons in God, because they disagree about Christ. Jews and Muslims do not believe in the Trinity because they do not believe in the Incarnation; Christians believe in the Trinity because they believe in the Incarnation.” (Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*, pg. 43)

There is no doubt that Peter Kreeft (and the entire Catholic Faith which he represents, in

his writing of a commentary on the Catholic Catechism) believes strongly in the deity of Christ and in the ‘finality of Christ’ (in terms of the atoning blood of Christ as the only basis for salvation and hope of eternal life). Without in any way compromising his belief in the ‘uniqueness of Jesus Christ’ and the necessity of the Cross for the salvation of mankind, Kreeft nevertheless believes that God looks in tenderest mercy upon the masses of humanity (including all Muslims and all Jews) who have not yet learned to pray to God ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ (the second person of the holy trinity). John Wesley (of the 18th century) and Peter Kreeft (of the 21st century) both seem to be in agreement regarding the ‘spiritual condition’ of the Muslims and Jews.

As mentioned before, Wesley believed that “it is not our part to pass sentence upon them (modern-day Jews), but to leave them to their own Master.” Regarding Muslims, Wesley believed that they were very earnest seekers for God, and that the only reason they did not believe “the whole truth” is because they had not yet received the greater “light” of Christ. (*Wesley’s Works*, vol.7, pg. 197)

Christians today (and especially Christians of the ‘evangelical type’) are too quick to ‘judge’ the spiritual condition of persons (like Muslims and Jews) who have not yet acknowledged Jesus’ deity and who have not yet personally and intellectually and volitionally accepted Jesus as Savior. Wesley called those persons (like Jews and Muslims and others outside of the ‘pale of Christianity’) who were sincerely seeking the ‘true God’ (based on the ‘degree’ of spiritual revelation they had thus far received), and whose lives demonstrated the presence of the ‘fruits of godliness’ (such as just and compassionate actions) – I say, Wesley called these ‘God-seekers’ SERVANTS, who were awaiting ‘adoption as sons of God’ with the ‘full assurance of sins forgiven’ which comes as the ‘right of SONS’. Wesley insisted, however, that SERVANTS WERE ‘SAVED’, that they were NOT UNDER CONDEMNATION, AND THAT THEY WERE NOT FACING ‘HELL FIRE’!

I personally believe that there will be many Jews and Muslims, rejoicing in heaven around the throne of God, simply because they trusted God (as best they understood ‘God’) for their ‘salvation’. Both Jews and Muslims (who understood little about the ‘grace of God’ and the ‘saving benefits of the Cross of Christ’, while they lived on earth) will learn – perhaps to their ‘great and glad surprise’ – that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, God’s ‘agent and instrument of salvation’, and that they ‘made it safely to heaven’s shores’ only because of the ‘finished work of Jesus’! We (evangelical Christians) must (1) never forget that it is God (and God alone) who knows the ‘thoughts and intents and desires and motives’ of every person’s heart, and that (2) God allows persons to enter His heavenly kingdom, not because they were ‘totally correct’ in their ‘intellectual understanding’ and their ‘theological insights’ while living on earth, but because they ‘walked in all the spiritual light’ they were given and because they

made a genuine ‘heart response’ of love to ‘God’ as they best understood ‘God’.

Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.” Yes, it is not hard to discern the ‘fruits of godliness’ in the lives of many Christians (and even in the lives of many ‘God-fearing persons’ like Cornelius in Acts 10, who believed in God before he believed in Jesus). But Jesus also said: “*Judge not that ye be not judged.*” (*Matthew 7:1*) No one is wise enough or holy enough or powerful enough to judge the ‘spiritual life’ of any other human being. C.S. Lewis believed that, regardless of the outward appearances of people, no one knew for sure just where another person was in his ‘spiritual life’. Lewis believed that all persons, at all times, were either ‘getting closer to God’ or were ‘moving farther away from God’ – and that some of the ‘most religious ones’ might be the very ones who, in reality, were ‘moving away from God’ at that time! In his very popular book, *Mere Christianity*, this greatest of the Christian apologists of the 20th century, wrote: “The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name; some of them are clergymen. THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE SLOWLY BECOMING CHRISTIANS THOUGH THEY DO NOT YET CALL THEMSELVES SO. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ACCEPT THE FULL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE ABOUT CHRIST BUT WHO ARE SO STRONGLY ATTRACTED BY HIM THAT THEY ARE HIS IN A MUCH DEEPER SENSE THAN THEY THEMSELVES UNDERSTAND. THERE ARE PEOPLE IN OTHER RELIGIONS WHO ARE BEING LED BY GOD’S SECRET INFLUENCE TO CONCENTRATE ON THOSE PARTS OF THEIR RELIGION WHICH ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH CHRISTIANITY, AND WHO THUS BELONG TO CHRIST WITHOUT KNOWING IT. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ’s birth may have been in this position. And always, of course, there are a great many people who are just confused in mind and have a lot of inconsistent beliefs all jumbled up together. Consequently, it is not much use trying to make judgments about Christians and non-Christians in the mass. . . . When we are comparing Christians in general with non-Christians in general, we are usually not thinking about real people whom we know at all, but only about two vague ideas.” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, The Macmillan Company, 1952, pp.163, 164)

As we have repeated (for emphasis) several times in this ‘paper’, God judges all persons on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded (and are responding) to that light. The great Presbyterian scholar, J. Gresham Machen, said, “No one knows how little a person can believe and still be saved.” (John Sanders, editor, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*, pg. 37) Let’s leave the determination of people’s ‘eternal destiny’ ‘in the hands of the all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving, and all-

merciful God!

After we have emphasized strongly that God's mercy is 'very wide', in His dealings with all persons outside of the 'pale of Christianity' (including Muslims and Jews), we must come back to the question that was posed above, namely, "Why send missionaries to the 'heathen'?" 'Evangelizing the lost' should be a 'strong motivation' for missions (and perhaps the 'key' motivation), but there are other 'motivations' also. With 'sensitivity', John Sanders perceptively notes that there are several "very strong legs for supporting missionary motivation. First and foremost, Jesus commands us to go (Mt. 28:18-20). Second, we who have experienced the love of God in the Son through the Spirit should desire to share the blessings of the Christian life with those ignorant of it. Third, there are, of course people who are not believers in God, and they need to hear of Christ so that they may come to know the love of God. Finally, even though unevangelized believers will be given eternal life on the basis of Christ's work, God wants them to experience the fullness of life that came at Pentecost. A relationship with the risen Lord affords a much richer spiritual life than can be had through only a knowledge of the Creator. Christians possess the messianic blessings of an assurance of salvation as well as the ultimate revelation of who God is and what God desires. Moreover, Christians have the benefit of fellowship in the Christian community. These are more than sufficient reasons for wanting unevangelized believers to become Christians. The salvation Jesus provides is, after all, not simply for eternal bliss but also for the abundant life now." (John Sanders, editor, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*, pg. 54)

There may be those Christians who might suggest that the very 'thinkers' who make a 'case' that God has provided sufficient 'light' for the 'unevangelized' to be 'saved' without the 'light of special revelation', are the very same 'thinkers' who are 'weak in outreach to the unevangelized'. If anyone (who believes in the 'wideness of God's mercy') is not motivated to 'reach out to the unevangelized', it is because his understanding of God's mercy is 'inaccurate', and his heart has become hardened to God's compassionate purposes!

-By Ron Christian-



THE 'CONDITION OF ONE'S HEART' DETERMINES HIS ETERNAL DESTINY

It is important to note that there are doubtless multitudes of persons rejoicing in heaven, simply because, while on earth, they 'partook of the fruit of Christ's death' – but these

many persons did not learn about the ‘method’ by which they were saved until they arrived in heaven! By way of ‘analogy’, there are many persons (perhaps most persons) who enjoy the ‘benefits of electricity’ without understanding the ‘dynamics of electricity’. There have been many, down through the ages, who have had little (or no) knowledge of the ‘historic death’ of Jesus Christ (and the atoning benefits of His death), but who, nevertheless, have ‘sought God in faith and repentance’ (resulting in the ‘salvation of their souls’ and resulting in their ‘eternal life in heaven after physical death’). It is the ‘condition of the heart’ of a person that determines one’s eternal destiny, not the accuracy or fullness of one’s intellectual comprehension of the ‘facts of Christian orthodoxy’. No one knows for sure the amount of knowledge one needs in order to ‘be saved’, but God alone can discern the ‘condition of one’s heart’ (i.e., the degree of one’s openness to the truth of God which is revealed through both ‘general revelation’ and ‘special revelation’, and the degree of one’s genuine ‘sorrow’ regarding his ‘moral failures and sins’, as the Spirit reveals these to the seeking person). The Spirit ‘seeks to save all’ – even those who have never received the ‘light of truth as it is revealed in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ’. To whom ‘much is given’ (namely, the ‘light’ of the Incarnate Christ as revealed in the New Testament and through clear Gospel preaching and teaching), ‘much is required’. God will ‘hold’ these ‘highly enlightened’ persons ‘very accountable’ at the ‘Great Judgment’. These ‘specially-privileged’ persons will be judged by a ‘very high standard of judgment’. If one persistently ‘walks away from the bright light and opportunity of the Gospel message’, he will eventually ‘reap the severe wrath and judgment of Almighty God’! The book of Hebrews warns: *“Anyone who rejected the law of Moses, died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think 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. For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God...You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. . . .’My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”* (Hebrews 10:28-31, 36, 38-38 NIV)

Yes, the Bible makes it clear that, to whom much is given, much is required. On the other hand, it is also true that to whom ‘little is given’ (namely, the ‘lesser lights of general revelation’ – through Nature and through the Conscience and through very partial truth in non-Christian religions, etc.) ‘little is required’. Jesus said: *“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)

In the book, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*, John Sanders shares an interesting story from his life which I think effectively illustrates the difference between ‘general revelation’ and ‘special revelation’, and the ‘saving power’ that is found even in ‘general revelation’. He writes: “Once some friends and I were fishing on a large lake when a severe storm arose. We headed for shore, where we fortunately found an old cabin. Although it was locked up, we were able to wait out the storm in the shelter of its porch. THE CABIN’S PORCH SERVED US EVEN THOUGH WE DID NOT KNOW WHO BUILT THE CABIN OR WHO OWNED IT. IF THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES THE UNEVANGELIZED TO SHELTER, THEY MAY CERTAINLY BENEFIT FROM IT EVEN IF THEY HAVE TO REMAIN ON THE PORCH.” (pg. 37)

How wide is God’s mercy? Wide enough to include everyone who is suffering in the ‘storms of life’, the ‘storms of sin’! All who are experiencing the ‘death-threatening storms of life’ (and who in the ‘human race’ is not?) may find refuge – ‘salvation’ – from the ‘wind and waves of sin’s devastation’! And this is true even for the countless persons in the ‘human race’ who have no personal intellectual knowledge of or acquaintance with the ‘owner of the cabin’. One who is threatened by the ‘storms of sin’ need not have knowledge of the ‘owner of the cabin’ (i.e., doctrinal understanding of ‘the triune God of Christianity’) before he finds ‘safety and refuge’ (i.e., salvation) from the ‘death-blowing storms of sin’! Whether the ‘storm-tossed’ person (sinner) reaches only the ‘porch of the cabin’ (i.e., knowledge of God through ‘general revelation’) or enters into the cabin (i.e., knowledge of God through ‘special revelation’) where greater warmth and comfort can be found than what is found only on the ‘porch of the cabin’ – either way, the ‘death-endangered’ and ‘storm-tossed’ person (sinner) is saved from destruction! Of course, it would be ‘good’ for one who is in the ‘storm’ to be ‘acquainted with the owner of the cabin’ (i.e., have some awareness of the traits and characteristics and character of the ‘owner of the cabin’), but this is not a ‘prerequisite’ in order for one to be ‘saved from the storm’! ALL THAT IS NECESSARY IS FOR THE ‘PERISHING ONE’ IN THE ‘STORMS OF LIFE’ TO ‘DISCOVER THE PORCH OF THE CABIN’ If he has no ‘key’ (i.e., favored knowledge of ‘special revelation’) to actually enter the ‘front door of the cabin itself’, he can nevertheless still be ‘saved’ if he is merely on the ‘porch of the cabin’ (i.e., if he has minimum knowledge of ‘salvation through general revelation’)

-By Ron Christian-



IS JESUS A ‘LOVING SAVIOR’ OR A ‘CRUEL MONSTER’?

This view of life (this particular theological persuasion) has had a ‘strong foothold’ in theology throughout the last several centuries, and even today some Christians will ‘swear’ by its precepts!

This system of thinking does great harm to the ‘character of God’. It turns God into a virtual ‘monster’, because it teaches that God is One who is behind everything that happens on this earth (including suffering and evil decisions of sinful men)!

It teaches (horror of horrors) that God, the ‘all-wise’ One, ‘justly’ predestines (chooses) to bring some persons to heaven, and to send others (most?) to hell! There could be no more horrible theological doctrine than the doctrine of ‘Predestination’!

Thousands of persons (throughout the centuries) have spent their life in terror and in dread and in total insecurity, while they wondered if they were included in God’s ‘select circle’ whom He chose to go to heaven!

The sooner this unbiblical (manmade) doctrine (from St. Augustine and, more recently, from John Calvin) is expunged from the books of theology – the better, the better, the better!

This strange set of teachings, with the predestination premise, has brought confusion to the minds of many, and utter terror to the hearts of sincere souls who are taught that there is no assurance of salvation (that they must simply hope, at the time of their death, that they were a member of the ‘elect’ of God)!

Never mind that these sincere souls have prayed the sinner’s prayer, that they have prayed regularly, that they have sought to walk in the spirit of holiness, that they have reached out in love to their neighbors often, that they have saturated their mind with the study of God’s Word! Never mind that the nine-fold ‘fruit of the Spirit’ is manifest in their life to all those around them! Never mind that they have faithfully attended their local church, for many years! No assurance of their eternal salvation, after all of these disciplined efforts to follow God! No assurance of eternal life in Calvinism!

If a person is living this type of disciplined and loving life, those observing Calvinists (including Calvinist preachers) would probably be quick to declare that such a person surely would have to be among God’s ‘elect circle’ (a person chosen from the foundation of the world to be an ‘elect child’)!

Any observer would think so, but ‘rigid and rugged’ Calvinistic teaching declares that, while perseverance in the faith is likely an indication that one is in the ‘inner circle’ of

the elect ones, a professing Christian cannot be ‘absolutely assured’ that, when his death comes, he will enter heaven!

According to Calvinism, the ultimate possession of eternal rest in heaven is based on God’s ‘electing purpose’, not on the basis of one’s personal commitment to Jesus Christ (and His ‘finished work’ on the cross and through the empty tomb). The mysterious purpose of God (God’s arbitrary election in eternity, before the foundation of the world) – this is the basis for one’s entrance into heaven!

The New Testament, in contrast to the strange and bizarre teachings of Calvinism, teaches that Jesus Christ is the only means by which all human beings can be saved! ALL, not SOME human beings can be saved. God predestined the entire human race to be saved, through the instrumentality of His Son.

God favored, not a few, but God favored the entire human race – fallen as it is! God is not willing that any person should perish, but that every soul (sinner) should repent and be saved (for time and for eternity)!

God loves everyone! Jesus’ blood was shed for everyone! Everyone is savable (capable of being saved, because of the work of the Holy Spirit – drawing all to the living Christ for salvation)! The just-described statements (contrary to the beliefs of Calvinism) are strongly supported in the teachings of the New Testament!

Because of the strange Calvinistic interpretation of God’s sovereignty and of God’s mysterious purposes, there is no assurance given by God to mankind, regarding ultimate acceptance by God! On the other hand, the doctrine of personal assurance of salvation and assurance of eternal life (based on perseverance in the ‘faith’) – these teachings are so wonderfully and reassuringly taught in the New Testament!

Assurance, based on the believer’s continued obedience, but, nevertheless, wonderful assurance! In Christianity, there are always conditions to be met, as well as promises to be claimed, but the promises (of assurance) are for the purpose of giving motivation and comfort. *“Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life!”*

Calvinism believes that everything which happens on this earth is an expression of the ‘will’ of the sovereign God. God is all-powerful; therefore, everything that happens on earth is a visible extension (expression) of God’s invisible will. Even though we mere humans (fallible because we are members of a fallen race), cannot understand how evil things could be an expression of God’s holy will, we humans must not question the ‘wisdom’ and the ‘ways’ of the living and the eternal and the all-wise God. These above-stated assertions express the belief of Calvinism!

God has His own (mysterious) ways of doing things, so who are we (weak and sinful mortals) to question the inscrutable (mysterious) ways of Almighty God? Even though our human minds cannot understand the ‘ways of God’, we humans must remember that ‘God knows best’! Again, assertions of Calvinists!

Such ‘reasoning’ is riddled with falsehoods! To state that these erroneous ideas reflect God’s wisdom is to do injustice to the Biblical concept of God! The wisdom of mere man is greater than the wisdom of God (if what Calvinism says about God is true)! Mere man has a higher standard for ‘justice’ than what God does (if what Calvinism says about predestination is true)!

God, as understood by Calvinism, sends some (maybe most) human beings to hell, simply because such an action satisfies His (God’s) mysterious purposes, and is according to His (God’s) predestined ‘perfect will’! And such arbitrary actions on the part of God actually bring (strangely) a type of ‘glory’ and ‘honor’ to Almighty God! What horrifying ideas to apply to God! Thankfully, this is not at all the New Testament picture (revelation) of the true God (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ)!

What human being, in his right mind, could accept such a horrible doctrine, and who, in his right mind, would ever desire to serve such an unjust and arbitrary and cruel God?

In light of this horrible picture (of the Calvinist’s view of God and of God’s ‘ways’), I personally would have to declare that this ‘god’ is very similar to the ‘god’ whose name is the ‘Accuser of the brethren’ (the ‘god’ who hates humanity)!

Calvinism defames the name of God. Calvinism ignores the loving character of Jesus Christ, who ‘went about doing good’ to humanity. Calvinism ignores the ‘comforting role’ of the Holy Spirit who is intent on helping all human beings, and who is intent on bringing comfort to all suffering persons, and whose mission is to persuade all persons to accept the living Christ and, thus, to go to heaven!

The God of Calvinism (unbelievably) is ‘glorified’ when some persons end up in hell (according to God’s ‘electing purposes’)! In contrast to this horrifying portrait of God (as an arbitrary God who plays ‘favorites’ with mankind, and who is honored when some persons – as predestined – go to hell), the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has made provision (through Christ) for all persons to go to heaven – and He deeply desires that all repent and all follow Christ and enter heaven some glorious day!

The Calvinist God is glad that some (perhaps most) people go to hell! The Christian God (as revealed in the New Testament) has His arms wide open, and He appeals to everyone

to take the yoke of love upon him and to serve the living Christ joyfully! As one happy soul said to me (as she viewed Nature): “All of this, and heaven too!” Every soul can be a ‘double winner’, for time and for eternity!

ABUNDANT LIFE, HERE ON EARTH, AND ETERNAL LIFE SOMEDAY IN
HEAVEN. A ‘DOUBLE WINNER’!

In spite of earth’s trials, ‘the best of earth’, to be followed by God’s best prepared gift in heaven! But these statements (as wonderful as they are, because they are based on the revelation of the New Testament) cannot be made by those who bow the knee to the cruel ‘God of Calvinism’!

Calvinism believes that God is the author of all suffering (since all things that happen on the earth are an extension of the will of God). Calvinism is a great ‘deterrent’ to the ministries of healing by doctors and of other ministers of healing.

If suffering is the product of God’s will (a part of God’s inscrutable, mysterious purposes), then why should any human ‘stand against’ God’s purpose? Why should a doctor attempt to heal a sick or diseased person if God wants such a person ill?

If God wants such person healed, then it is possible (probable) that God wants to use the doctor as God’s instrument to accomplish that healing. But, if, instead, God wants someone ill, then the doctor can’t ‘fight’ against God’s mysterious will!

If God (according to Calvinism) has willed many persons (probably the majority of persons) to go to hell, it is logical to conclude that it is likely that God (whose purposes are beyond understanding) does not want most people healed (after all, most people are going to hell eventually!) These are horrifying ideas (repulsive to any one in their right mind), but these are the explicit teachings of Calvinism (with some practical implications to the doctrines).

If God wills the suffering of a cancer patient, then why would any doctor want to ‘resist’ God’s purpose which ‘wills’ the suffering of someone? How vastly different are these ‘heretical views’ of Calvinists, from the sound and wonderful and encouraging and comforting ‘views’ regarding God’s nature and regarding God’s world, which are clearly ‘spelled out’ in the Word of God (Bible)!

IS GOD’S OFFER OF FORGIVENESS FOR ALL OR FOR ONLY A FEW PERSONS?

According to the Bible, God is a God of love. He loves all persons. In spite of man’s ‘fall’ into sin, God wants every person to be ‘saved’ – to enjoy an abundant life on earth

and an eternal life hereafter. Because of mankind's 'historic fall', every person is a sinner, but God, through the coming and the sacrifice of Christ, has provided a means of salvation for every person.

Every person can enjoy the forgiveness of sin, and experience reconciliation with the Father of love. The Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus into the world, is here to uplift Christ, and to draw all persons to the Living Christ. The Spirit is the Comforter, and as such, the Comforter is in the world to 'comfort' everyone who sorrows and everyone who grieves because of great loss in his/her life!

God has a place prepared in heaven for every single person and the Spirit is seeking (with the cooperation of every person) to prepare every person for his custom-made home in heaven! These statements, in brief summary, reflect the 'teachings' of the Bible, regarding the meaning of life, and the essence of God's love for every lost soul (including every suffering person).

SHOULD GOD BE BLAMED FOR ALL HUMAN SUFFERING?

We have shared (in generous fashion) the attitude that the God of the Bible has towards human suffering. All human suffering originates from the historic 'fall' of Adam and Eve (in the Garden of Eden). God is not the author of suffering.

Disobedience against God's moral law is the cause of much human suffering. When the 'federal head' of the human race fell from fellowship with God, there was a terrible consequence – the entire human race inherited the 'seeds of sin and suffering' from that 'federal head' (Adam)! As a horrible consequence, suffering spread to the entire human race. Christ is called the 'second Adam'!

Through the 'accomplishment' of Christ – his death and resurrection – all mankind now are restored to fellowship with God and the entire human race is guaranteed a place in heaven. But, as wonderful as these 'gifts' (to humanity) are, these gifts (of new life on earth and eternal life in heaven) are not given to anyone who does not want these gifts.

It defies my reason, for instance, why any person would turn down his inheritance (in the earthly sense), and it defies my reason even more why anyone (any human being) would turn down his God-offered gift of new life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

What was lost for the human race, in the first Adam (in the Garden of Eden), is more than gained through the second Adam (Jesus Christ). We humans became sinners, as a result of the disobedience of the first Adam, but we humans (by repentance and by faith) can become 'healed and whole' because of the 'finished work' of Jesus Christ, who is

called the 'Second Adam'. Through the First Adam, the entire human race lost fellowship with God, and the human race inherited so much from our 'federal head'.

We inherited a darkened mind and a weakened body. Ever since the historic 'fall', man's body is weak and the body is subject to sickness and to suffering and finally to death. Through the Second Adam (Jesus Christ), the entire human race received the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. Even though the 'original sin' left its continuing effects on the human body (which will inevitably turn to dust), the suffering of the human body is the object of Christ's concern.

-By Ron Christian-



**CAN “UNENLIGHTENED (PAGAN) PERSONS” BE CONVERTED
TO CHRIST THROUGH “GENERAL REVELATION”?**

BY RON CHRISTIAN

“ALL TRUTH IS ONE, AND ALL TRUTH IS GOD’S TRUTH”

There have been many ‘keen thinkers’ who, like Wesley, have strongly believed that God’s ‘General Revelation’ is meant to be ‘Saving Revelation’! That is to say, it is the Spirit’s intention, when He gives “spiritual enlightenment” to persons who have never been privileged to receive the ‘special revelation’, to ‘lead these persons to the Living and Saving God’. Wesley’s conviction that Mohammedans and Jews and ‘Heathens’ can be ‘saved’ is based on his conviction that God’s light comes to all persons (past and present) in some form or another, and that this ‘partial light’ is sufficient to provide all persons, even in the ‘darkest of conditions’, opportunity to repent and to turn to the Living God (however obscure and ‘hidden’ God may be to these persons). Of course, even in these ‘less-than-favorable’ (and even ‘depressing’) circumstances, it is the ‘grace of God’ and the ‘Holy Spirit’ which make possible the ‘drawing and convicting and converting power’ of God in the lives of ‘heathen persons’.

Why is it important to believe that ‘General Revelation’ (i.e., the revelation of God to lost mankind through Nature, through Conscience, through ‘partial truth’ in World Religions other than Christianity, etc.) has the ‘power’ to bring persons to God, without the addition of ‘Special Revelation’ (centered in the Incarnation)? Because such a conviction advances the belief that the ‘convicting and convincing and converting’ Holy Spirit is active at all times and under all circumstances – both before and after the Coming of Jesus Christ to this earth! The Spirit has always been ‘drawing persons’ to the Christ, long before the appearance of the historical Jesus. Even though the ‘coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost’ (Acts 2) signaled the ‘beginning of the Church Age’, the Holy Spirit has been active in seeking lost humanity in all the ‘dispensations of human history’! To believe that God gave ‘partial light’ to all men (even to men in the ‘depths of paganism’) with the purpose of ‘seeking and saving’ these lost persons (long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem), does not in any way diminish the importance and significance of God’s ‘Special Revelation’ (through the Cross and Resurrection). Notes Alan Richardson: “Without in any way weakening the claim that we know the full measure of the saving grace of God by Christ alone, it (i.e., General Revelation) allows us to recognize a GENUINE revelation of God in non-Christian religions . . . In a word, it neither reduces the special revelation in Christ . . . nor yet underestimates the significance of the general religious consciousness of mankind . . . All our knowledge of truth of whatever kind, is the result of the gracious and revealing activity of the God of truth . . . All human knowledge is to be ascribed to the illumination of God; it is only by the shining of the Sun of Truth that the soul is enlightened to see the light . . . Such a conception of the relation of our knowledge of truth to God as the Author and Source of truth is inescapably involved in the deep Christian conviction of the sacredness of truth as such . . . Since the essence of the

Christian understanding of revelation is that ALL REVELATION COMES FROM GOD, if there is such a thing as truth or as the knowledge of God at all, it must come from the gracious and revealing activity of God Himself. ALL TRUTH IS ONE, AND ALL TRUTH IS GOD'S TRUTH, FOR GOD, IF HE EXISTS, MUST BE THE GOD OF TRUTH." (Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics*, pp. 118-121)

Why is the 'concept' of 'General Revelation' so very 'revolutionary' in our understanding of the 'ways of God'? General Revelation recognizes that there may be a knowledge of God through general religious experience, far outside the biblical and Christian frontiers. Furthermore – and this A GAIN OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST – it helps us to see that there may be A GENUINE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD that comes through all forms of art and artistic experience – music, poetry, drama, architecture, sculpture, painting. Indeed, we must claim that the obligation which the artist acknowledges, HIS INNER COMPULSION TO CREATE THAT WHICH IS BEAUTIFUL AND TO DESTROY THAT WHICH IS UGLY, IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE PRESSURE OF GOD UPON HIS LIFE, though beauty may be the only sacredness that he recognizes and though he may call himself an atheist." (Ibid., pg. 122)

If it is true that 'General Revelation' means that the Holy Spirit 'draws people to the Living Christ' (even though 'people lost in darkness' often do not even realize that it is to 'Christ' that the Spirit is 'drawing' them), what are the 'means' and 'methods' and 'channels' through which the Spirit draws these 'spiritually-darkened and ignorant persons'? The Spirit uses many 'methods' by which He 'softens hardened hearts' and 'enlightens darkened minds' and 'stimulates weakened wills'. As already noted, sometimes the Spirit 'uses' the very limited knowledge of the truth which the 'heathen' have in their 'false religions'. The Spirit has not 'bypassed' and will not 'bypass' any persons (or groups of persons, like tribes who are unexposed to the light of Christendom), in His attempts to 'bring lost ones to the saving Christ'. Sometimes, the Spirit uses the 'light of truth' which is revealed in the 'sense of beauty' which the 'heathen' keenly feel, in their desperate 'search for reality'. There is evidence that there is a 'universal appreciation for the Beautiful' among all persons, regardless of their region or culture or circumstance. From which (or from whom) comes this 'sense of appreciation' for the Beautiful in Nature (and appreciation for 'Order' and 'Power' in Nature)? It comes from the Creator God who has placed deep within the 'bosom' of every human being a 'love of beauty'! It is not hard for the Spirit of God to direct the 'sincere pagan', who delights himself in the 'beauty of nature', to the 'Giver and Source of Beauty'. Contrasting his own 'ugliness' with the 'beauty of nature', and contrasting his own 'inner chaos' with the 'neat orderliness of nature', and contrasting his own 'moral and physical impotence' with the 'power of nature', the 'sincere pagan' is 'made ready' (by God's 'prevenient grace') to open his life to the 'convincing work of the Holy

Spirit'. Thus, it is very 'conceivable' that many 'pagans' find themselves 'prostrate' in repentance and faith and trust and soul surrender before the 'God of Nature' (whose Beauty and Order and Power are very manifest to the 'sensitive pagan worshipper').

As Alan Richardson noted (in the above discussion regarding the unique way God works in the lives of musicians and poets and artists of all kinds) – the very compulsion to create that which is beautiful and to destroy that which is ugly, is nothing other than the pressure of God upon their lives! Again, the 'keen sense of the Beautiful' which these sensitive souls have, provides a 'bridgehead' for the Holy Spirit to 'draw' these artists to the 'Creator' and 'Gift-giver' of all Beauty! The Spirit has multiple ways in which He can 'work' to bring 'awareness to the mind' and 'quickenings to the spirit' of those artists who are 'hungering and thirsting for the Essence of Beauty'!

THE PHENOMENON OF THE 'GUILTY CONSCIENCE' IS UNIVERSAL

In our discussion of the 'power of General Revelation', we must also note the 'universal phenomenon of Conscience'. Writes Alan Richardson: "It remains true also that all men – men and not beasts – have a knowledge that there is a distinction between right and wrong and feel an obligation to do the right, even though they may perhaps hardly ever do it...THE PHENOMENON OF CONSCIENCE IS UNIVERSAL. By conscience here is meant simply the KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG ACTIONS. . . THE SENSE OF OBLIGATION TO DO THAT WHICH IS BELIEVED TO BE RIGHT IS IN FACT THE PRESSURE OF GOD UPON EVERY HUMAN LIFE. GOD IS MADE KNOWN TO ALL MEN, even though they may not have learned to call Him God, AS MORAL DEMAND; and obedience to the behests of conscience is the essential condition of growth in the knowledge of God, just as disobedience to the known moral law is the degrading of the knowledge of God. . . THUS, THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD WHICH COMES THROUGH MORAL EXPERIENCE IS NOT LIMITED TO CHRISTIANS; IT IS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL MEN AT ALL TIMES AND IN ALL PLACES, AND IT BELONGS TO THE SPHERE OF GENERAL REVELATION." (Ibid., pp. 124-126)

There are those theologians (like the highly-esteemed theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth) who do not believe in 'General Revelation' at all, or, if they do believe in such, they forcefully claim that there is no 'saving grace apart from Christ' (i.e., apart from the 'Special Revelation' of the Incarnation). But the 'evidence' from both 'general history' and 'Biblical narratives' does not support this 'extremism'. Writes the Christian apologist, Alan Richardson: "As we have said that all revelation is from God, so we must now add that ALL REVELATION IS SAVING REVELATION. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS ALWAYS SAVING KNOWLEDGE. We cannot for one

moment entertain the view which, in the imagined interests of the Gospel, is ready to argue that only the biblical-Christian knowledge of God, or special revelation, is redemptive, and that general revelation falls outside of the sphere of saving grace.” (Ibid., pg. 127)

Apparently, there are those ‘well-meaning Christians’ who, because they don’t want to diminish ‘Special Revelation’ (namely, the atoning death of Jesus, and the ‘exclusivity of Christ’ as the ‘only way to the Father’), dismiss the ‘power of the Spirit’ which often works through the many ‘limited channels’ of General Revelation to bring the ‘heathen’ to ‘true salvation’. It cannot be emphasized enough that ALL REVELATION IS SAVING REVELATION, ALL TRUTH IS GOD’S TRUTH!

The God who ‘enlightens every man who comes into the world’ (John 1:9) is the God of integrity and justice and fairness and compassion and mercy. He is not a God who ‘gives light through General Revelation’ to the heathen, in order to intensify their ‘guilt’ and to deepen their ‘condemnation’. God always gives the ‘light of truth’ – even in the ‘infant stages’ through Nature and through Conscience and through World Religions other than Christianity – for one ‘purpose’, namely, to ‘draw lost persons to salvation’! The Loving Father’s purpose, administered through the precious Holy Spirit, is not to condemn but to save, not to destroy but to heal, not to curse but to bless, not to alienate but to reconcile, not to ‘deepen the guilt’ but to ‘relieve the guilt’ and to give the ‘gift of eternal life’ to all!

There is a ‘universal sense of moral oughtness’ which mankind the ‘world over’ has within, and it is this ‘universal sense of right and wrong’ (the Conscience) which the Spirit ‘appeals to’ in His attempt to bring needed conviction to all persons (even to those who have never had contact with the ‘Christian Message’). “In the enlightened conscience and the high sense of moral responsibility of the humanist or communist, Jew or Mohammedan, even though with his lips he may deny Christ and the God whom He revealed, we must discern at work nothing other than THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD...It is not only the phenomenon of conscience that is universal, but the phenomenon of the guilty conscience; MAN’S UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS SIN IS GOD’S MEANS OF RECALLING THE SINNERS TO HIMSELF.” (Ibid., pp. 128, 129)

This ‘universal sense of moral oughtness’ – this inner sense that ‘some things are always right and some things are always wrong in all ages and in all generations and in all cultures’ – is one of the ‘greatest allies’ which the Holy Spirit has in His strong desire to bring all persons to repentance and to ‘true salvation’ (thus, preparing them to go ‘home’ to heaven when they die). Not only is the Conscience of Man a ‘chief ally’ for the convicting Spirit, but the Conscience (which has the ability greatly to ‘disturb’ the ‘sin-

driven' person) is evidence of God's great redemptive love! John Baillie makes this 'point' very well when he writes: "This hidden canker of an uneasy conscience is our most precious blessing, and for that we must thank God as for nothing else that has come to us. For it means that however much we try to keep to ourselves, yet He will not leave us to ourselves...It means that His is a love that has claimed us from the beginning, and that to the end refuses to let us go." (Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics*, pg. 129)

The belief that the blessed and 'ever-active' Holy Spirit is able to 'appeal' to the Conscience of a 'total pagan' (who has never once even heard of Christ), and to a 'worshipper in a false religion' (who has never once heard a 'clear presentation' of the 'Biblical plan of salvation') assumes that, in spite of the historic Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, there remains 'something' in fallen creatures which was not obliterated in that horrible Fall, to which the Holy Spirit is able to make a 'fruitful appeal'. In other words, what we have been affirming regarding the 'effective work of the Holy Spirit' through 'General Revelation', assumes that 'the image of God' in the soul of mankind was not destroyed, though greatly damaged, in the Fall of Man.

It is the 'conviction' of the writer of this 'paper', that what Alan Richardson states in his book on *Christian Apologetics* is absolutely true: "If our foregoing description of the nature of general revelation be held to be in any way sound, it follows that the image of God in man is NOT TOTALLY DESTROYED BY THE FALL; THERE IS THAT IN MAN TO WHICH GOD CAN APPEAL AND THROUGH WHICH HIS GRACE CAN WORK. Such powers as man retains of recognizing truth, beauty and righteousness, though he always sees them through the distorting medium of his own self-interest, are nevertheless the 'vestiges' of the divine image, which is marred but not lost...If man comes into the world with a propensity for selfishness, HE POSSESSES ALSO WITHIN HIMSELF THE MEANS OF KNOWING THAT SELFISHNESS IS WRONG. The high achievements of many forms of non-Christian humanism and of non-Christian ethical and religious systems demonstrate the reality of man's original righteousness and THE FACT THAT IT HAS NOT BEEN ALTOGETHER LOST; the divine grace given in general revelation is manifestly at work through them." (Ibid., pp. 131, 132)

GOD HATH GIVEN TO EVERY MAN A CERTAIN DAY OR TIME OF VISITATION

ALL PERSONS IN HISTORY, whether living before or after the coming of Jesus to earth (Incarnation), or whether or not they have been fortunate enough to know about the historical existence of Jesus, CAN BE SAVED! Why? Because "the true light gives light to every man." (John 1:9) THE POSSIBILITY OF SALVATION IS UNIVERSAL! Wrote Robert Barclay (early Quaker writer and theologian): "GOD, who out of his infinite love sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, who tasted death for

every man, HATH GIVEN TO EVERY MAN, whether Jew or Gentile, Turk or Scythian, Indian or Barbarian, or whatsoever nation, country, or place, A CERTAIN DAY OR TIME OF VISITATION; DURING WHICH DAY OR TIME IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO BE SAVED, AND TO PARTAKE OF THE FRUIT OF CHRIST'S DEATH." (Elton Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, pg. 77)

One can believe (as a committed follower of Christ) that the Son of God is the 'Supreme and Unrivalled Light of God' – the 'consummation of all previous and scattered and partial lights of divine revelation' – and at the same time believe that the 'lesser revelations' of God, before the coming of Christ, were used by God effectively to bring the 'lost ones' to genuine salvation. "There is no contradiction between the idea that God has been revealing Himself fully in one time and one place." (D. Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, pg. 226)

One can affirm the 'exclusivity of Christ' – that Jesus is 'the way, the truth, and the life', that He is the 'only way to the Father', that He is the 'one door to heaven', that He is the 'only name' given by the Father by which sinners can be 'saved' – and, at the same time, also believe that many persons 'find heaven as their eternal home' who never were fortunate enough during their human existence to know about the earthly birth and the sinless life and the atoning death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Notes Elton Trueblood: "It is only by the Light of Christ that men may find the way . . . but THIS LIGHT IS NOT LIMITED TO THOSE WHO, BY GOOD FORTUNE, HAVE KNOWN CHRIST IN THE FLESH OR EVEN KNOWN ABOUT HIM IN THE FLESH. Though this Light is seen in Jesus in its full and complete manifestation, IT APPEARS IN A MEASURE IN EVERY SON AND DAUGHTER OF EARTH. It is the Light that lighteth every man who comes into the world. THUS THE CHRIST OF EXPERIENCE IS IDENTICAL WITH THE CHRIST OF HISTORY, though not limited to particular historical events and particular places. IT IS STILL TRUE THAT CHRIST IS THE WAY, BUT GOD, IN HIS MERCY, HAS MADE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS WAY OPEN TO MEN IN COUNTLESS FASHIONS. The enormous advantage of this conception is that it keeps the uniqueness of Christ while avoiding the blasphemy of supposing that God condemns men for mere ignorance. This makes it possible to believe that there were many Christians before Christ because they saw something of the very Light which he was." (Ibid., pg. 226)

Peter Kreeft (a well-known and highly-respected Christian contemporary apologist) wrote a detailed commentary of the Catholic Catechism. This Roman Catholic scholar, whose insights and commentary reflect the 'official position' of the world-wide Catholic Church, writes: "The scriptural data tell us that CHRIST IS THE ONLY SAVIOR, BUT THEY DO NOT TELL US THAT THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS ARE THE ONLY ONES SAVED.

“If any are saved, they are saved by Christ. But Christ is divine as well as human. MANY OF THE SAVED MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN HIM ON EARTH IN HIS HUMAN INCARNATION, but only as the ‘Logos’, the Truth, ‘the true light that enlightens every man’ (John 1:9). EVERY MAN KNOWS GOD INNATELY, BY REASON AND CONSCIENCE AND NATURE (Romans 1:19-20). And the only way to know God is through the light of truth that he gives us. And that light is the ‘Logos’, the Word or Mind or Revelation of the Father. And that Logos is the Son of God. Therefore, EVERYONE WHO KNOWS GOD DOES SO THROUGH THE SON. JUST AS ALL WHO SEE THE CREATION SEE IT THROUGH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN, ALL WHO KNOW THE CREATOR KNOW HIM THROUGH THE LIGHT OF THE SON.

“Who then are saved? WE DO NOT KNOW WHO OR HOW MANY. When his apostles asked him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ (Luke 13:23), Jesus replied ‘Strive to enter.’ He did not satisfy our curiosity about comparative population statistics of heaven and hell. WHAT HE DID TELL US IS THAT HE IS THE ONLY SAVIOR.” (Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*, pg. 76)



**CAN A CHRISTIAN FORFEIT HIS SALVATION AND
ULTIMATELY BE 'BARRED' FROM HEAVEN?**

BY RON CHRISTIAN

CAN A CHRISTIAN FORFEIT HIS SALVATION AND ULTIMATELY BE 'BARRED' FROM HEAVEN?

The Bible (God's authoritative word) answers this question clearly and forthrightly! Listen to the words of God, through His prophet Ezekiel: *"I (God) have said the good man will live. But if he sins (a lifestyle of sinning), expecting his past goodness to save him, then none of his good deeds will be remembered. I will destroy him for his sins."* (Ezekiel 33:13 Living Bible)

Believers have a responsibility to 'reach out in love' to persons who have fallen away from their relationship with God. The backslider is capable (by God's gracious invitation and by the believer's personal persuasion and prayers) of being forgiven and restored to fellowship with God and with fellow believers. James (half-brother of Jesus) wrote: *"Dear brothers, if anyone has slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord, and someone helps him understand the truth again, that person who brings him back to God will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing about the forgiveness of his many sins."* (James 5:19-20 Living Bible)

But what happens to the backslider person, the one-time believer who persistently refuses to respond to the appeals (calls and pleas) of God's love, and to the gentle invitations of concerned Christians? According to this passage of Scripture, the 'wandering soul' (the backslider person) will experience 'spirited' (eternal) death!

If a believer fails to care (warn) for a backslider person (a one-time follower of God), that indifferent believer will be chastised (punished) by God – for it is the express duty of each believer to be his 'brother's keeper'! (Read God's serious warning to every believer who neglects to 'warn' the backslider! - Ezekiel 3:17-18) *"But if you warn them (backslider person) and they keep on sinning, and refuse to repent, they will die in their sins, but you (who have done your duty to warn the backslider) are blameless – you have done all you could."* (Ezekiel 3:19 Living Bible emphasis added)

One who turns away from God, and who chooses to adopt a lifestyle of deliberate sinning – such a person is courting the judgment of Almighty God! God takes no pleasures in the death of any sinner – a sinner who never experienced salvation, or a backslider who never returned in repentance to his God (whom once he knew as his loving Savior)! Backsliding is a most serious matter: *"If a righteous person turns to sinning and acts like any other sinner, should he be allowed to live? No, of course not. All his previous goodness will be forgotten, and he shall die for his sins."* (Ezekiel 18:24 Living Bible) (Emphasis added)

"And when a person has escaped from the wicked ways of the world by learning about

our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then gets tangled up with sin and becomes its slave again, he is worse off than he was before. It would be better if he had never known about Christ at all than to learn of him and then afterwards turn his back on the holy commandments that were given to him. There is an old saying that 'A dog comes back to what he has vomited, and a pig is washed only to come back and wallow in the mud again.' That is the way it is with those who turn again to their sin." (2 Peter 2:20-22 Living Bible)

By Ron Christian



Part II

Experiencing Glorification In Christ

(A compilation of miscellaneous articles
– both short and longer – written by several authors,
that reveal the various dimensions of God’s heavenly rewards,
promised to the ‘Children of God’.)

A PREPARED PLACE FOR A PREPARED PEOPLE!

Christian, look up and take comfort. Jesus has prepared a place for you, and they that follow Him shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hands. Look forward to that glorious abode He has provided; look forward in faith, for it is yours. O Christian brethren, think what a glorious meeting that shall be. There we shall see the saints of old, of whom we have so often read; there we shall see those holy ministers whose faith and patience we have admired; there we shall see one another around the throne of our common Savior, and be parted and separated no more. There we shall labor and toil no more, for the days of mourning shall be ended.

(John Charles Ryle, “Heaven” in *Classic Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, pg.45)



ARE YOU ‘HOMESICK’ FOR HEAVEN?

There is something in man which earth cannot satisfy; not even the best things of earth. The testimony of those who have achieved coveted things is emphatic and uniform; there still remains a longing, and a hunger, and a heartache which nothing material or terrestrial seems able to meet. We live on earth and yet, somehow, we do not *belong* to it.

Now, I believe that although it is hidden, ignored, overlaid, and even denied, there is in man a homesickness for heaven.

I do believe that there is in man a homesickness for heaven: that that ache which earth cannot satisfy can be satisfied by God; that all feel it, but only some understand it.

God has put in the heart of every one of us a longing for Himself. The mass of men do not understand it. They just know that there are times when they want to be quiet; times when they want to be alone; times when the calendar, or the stars, or death speaks to them. They *hunger* and they *thirst* . . . but for what?

(William Sangster, “The Homesickness of The Soul” in *Classic Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, pp. 49-51)



SATISFYING SERVICE IN GOD’S ETERNAL COURTS!

Heaven is a place of uninterrupted service. It is a place where they serve God day and night in his temple, and never know weariness, and never require to slumber. Do you know what is the deliciousness of work? For although we must complain when people expect impossibilities of us, it is the highest enjoyment of life to be busily engaged for Christ. Tell me the day I do not preach, I will tell you the day in which I am not happy; but the day in which it is my privilege to preach the gospel, and labor for God, is generally the day of my peaceful and quiet enjoyment after all. Service is delight. Praising God is pleasure. Laboring for him is the highest delight a mortal can know. O, how sweet it must be to sing his praises, and never feel that the throat is dry! O, how blessed to flap the wing forever and never feel it flag! O, what sweet enjoyment to run upon his errands, evermore to circle round the throne of God in heaven while eternity shall last and never once lay the head on the pillow, never once feel the throbbing of fatigue, never once the pangs that admonish us that we need to cease, but to keep on forever like eternity's own self – a broad river rolling on with perpetual floods of labor! O, that must be enjoyment!

(Charles Spurgeon, *Foretastes of The Heavenly Life*, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, Vol. 3, 4, pp. 142, 143)



WILL I FEEL 'COMFORTABLE' WITH MY FELLOW OCCUPANTS IN HEAVEN?

Think for a moment of how sweet and familiar the conception of heaven as the Father's house makes it to us. There is something awful, even to the best and holiest souls, in the thought of even the glories beyond. The circumstances of death, which is its portal, our utter unacquaintance with all that lies behind the veil, the terrible silence and distance which falls upon our dearest ones as they are sucked into the cloud, all tend to make us feel that there is much that is solemn and awful even in the thought of eternal future blessedness. But how it is all softened when we say, "My Father's house."

Surely if He be the Father, and heaven be His house, the relation of the redeemed to one another must have in it more than all the sweet familiarity and unrestrained frankness which subsists in the families of earth. A solitary heaven would be but half a heaven, and would ill correspond with the hopes that inevitably spring from the representation of it as "my Father's house."

Heaven is a place, full of all sweet security and homelike repose, where God is made known in every heart and to every consciousness as a loving Father, and of which all the inhabitants are knit together in the frankest fraternal intercourse, conscious of the

Father's love, and rejoicing in the abundant provisions of His royal House.

There will be a great many occupants of the mansions in heaven that Christian men here on earth will be very much surprised to see there, and thousands will find their entrance there that never found their entrance into any communities of so-called Christians here on earth.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Many Mansions, Classical Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, pp. 86, 87, 88, 89)



HOW SHOULD I LIVE TO PREPARE FOR MY IMPENDING DEATH?

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth.”
(Psalms 73:25)

He, who is focusing on God, cannot at the same time focus on anything or on anyone lesser than God. He, who is full of love for his Lover, cannot covet lesser objects of affection at the same time. ‘The things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.’

“Those who are far from you will perish, you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me it is good to be near God.” (Psalms 73:27-28)

Who are those that are far from God? It is those who (according to Psalms 73:6-11) are proud, violent, self-indulgent, spiritually indifferent.

“... so their pride sparkles like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven of cruelty! These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! They scoff at God and threaten his people. How proudly they speak! They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut through the earth. And so God's people are dismayed and confused and drink it all in. ‘Does God realize what is going on?’ they ask. ‘Therefore pride is as a chain about their neck. Violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than heart could wish. They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression. They have set their mouth in the heavens. And their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore, his people return hither: And waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’”

These shall perish who are faithless – i.e., those who leave the Lord's presence to pursue

the way of worldliness shall be destroyed.

But soul security belongs to the faithful! Drawing near to God constitutes goodness and defines wisdom. Putting one's trust in God rather than in the godless, results in understanding the meaning of life.

-By Ron Christian-



THE PERPETUAL PEACE OF THE ETERNAL DWELLERS!

Heaven is a state of complete acceptance with God, recognized and felt in the conscience. I suppose that a great part of the joy of the blessed saints consists in a knowledge that there is nothing in them to which God is hostile; that their peace with God has not anything to mar it; that they are so completely in union with the principles and thoughts of the Most High; that his love is set on them; that their love is set on him; that they are one with God in every respect.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Foretastes of The Heavenly Life*, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, Vol. 3, 4, pg. 144)



HEAVEN'S MULTITUDES THAT NO ONE CAN NUMBER!

Some narrow-minded bigots think that heaven will be a very small place, where there will be a very few people, who went to their chapel or their church. I confess, I have no wish for a very small heaven, and love to read in the Scriptures that there are many mansions in my Father's house. How often do I hear people say, "Ah! Straight is the gate and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it. There will be very few in heaven; there will be most lost." My friend, I differ from you. Do you think that Christ will let the devil beat him? That he will let the devil have more in hell than there will be in heaven? No: it is impossible. For then Satan would laugh at Christ. There will be more in heaven than there are among the lost. God says, that "there will be a number that no man can number who will be saved;" but he never says, that there will be a number that no man can number that will be lost. There will be a host beyond all count who will get into heaven. What glad tidings for you and for me! For, if there are so many to be saved, why should not I be saved? Why should not you?

(Charles Spurgeon, *Heaven and Hell*, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, pp. 301, 302)



DEATH CANNOT ROB YOU OF YOUR GOD-CREATED ‘SELF’!

At death we are going to lose something, each of us. We are going to lose the physical. We are going to lose our possessions. Whatever may be our material wealth in this world, we may depend upon it that the hands of the dead are not clutching hands. Our shrouds will have no pockets. Death will rob us of all that is material.

But there is one something that Death cannot take away from us. It cannot rob us of ourselves. Yesterday I was myself. I will be myself still tomorrow. I will continue to be myself as long as heaven is heaven: as long as God is God.

The truth of the matter is, death is not going to touch me personally at all. It is not going to touch the real “me”. For this reason I am going to be exactly the same man the first minute after death as I was the last minute before death.

(Clovis Gillham Chappel, *A Glimpse of The Afterlife, Classical Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, pp. 100-101)



THE CENTRAL BATTLE HAS BEEN FOUGHT AND WON!

If He be Victor over every conceivable form of essential evil, He is Victor ultimately over all the results of evil, suffering, sorrow, and sinning, as well as sin. How long that ultimate day seems to us in coming! The consciousness of evil remains. We know it, for death and sinning are still with us, and evil lifts its proud head even today threatening goodness. Ah! But my brethren, when that consciousness of evil threatens to oppress the heart overmuch, let us ever condition it by this fact of His victory over evil at its heart and center, knowing that we are taking part in an administrative warfare. The central battle has been fought and won.

If He rose not, then we are of all men most pitiable, for we have seen a vision and indulged a hope which is false. But not with the gloomy foreboding of any such suggestion do we end this meditation, but as men and women who remind our heart amid the travail and the toil that He is risen, and that because it was not possible that He should be holden of death.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *The Resurrection, The Westminster Pulpit*, Books 9 and 10, pp.



TIME FOR A PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“Loving Heavenly Father, You have revealed to me, in Your Word (Holy Bible) that there are specific ‘steps’ which must be taken (as conditions for authentic spiritual conversion). They are:

- 1.AWAKENING (Conversion) – awareness of specific sins that have been committed against God and others!
- 2.REPENTANCE – a godly sorrow for committing sins and a desire to make a moral U-turn.
- 3.CONFESSION – admitting that I (as a sinner) have been wrong regarding my actions and attitudes in life, and that God’s way is the only right way to live, and telling God how sorry I am regarding my rebellious life.
- 4.EXPRESSING FAITH in Jesus Christ as the only Savior who is willing and able to forgive my sins.
- 5.SURRENDER of my will to God’s will, with a willingness to follow Christ the rest of my life.
- 6.RESTITUTION – asking those whom I have hurt, because of my past sinful lifestyle, to please forgive me, and trying to ‘repay’ those whom I have deeply hurt.
- 7.OBEDIENCE – respecting Christ’s commandments, and seeking to live a life of integrity and love towards everyone – through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

“Yes, dear Lord, I believe I have taken these serious steps! I claim your forgiveness of all my past sins. In addition, I claim (by faith) assurance that my future is bright, with your numerous promises of provision and purity and power and presence. You have promised to walk with me for life, and then some glorious day to receive me into heaven.”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

Those who repent now will be spared God’s judgment hereafter! But those who spurn God’s mercy now will reap God’s fiery judgment hereafter! One of the great benefits of forgiveness is security against the future wrath of Almighty God. When the mighty waters of judgment rise, the righteous ones will remain safe. The waters of God’s judgment will not reach them!

-By Ron Christian-



OUR ANTICIPATION OF A NEW, HEAVENLY BODY! (SCRIPTURAL PROMISE)

“We know that the same God who brought the Lord Jesus back from death will also bring us back to life again with Jesus, and present us to Him along with you. These sufferings of ours are for your benefit. And the more of you who are won to Christ, the more there are to thank Him for his great kindness, and the more the Lord is glorified.

“That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won’t last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God’s richest blessing upon us forever and ever! So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon will be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

“For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down – when we die and leave these bodies – we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself, and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies which we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies. These earthly bodies make us groan and sigh, but we wouldn’t like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us and, as a guarantee, he has given us his Holy Spirit.

“Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus. We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. And we are not afraid, but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives laid bare – before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body.”

(II Corinthians 4:14-5:10, New Living Bible)

THE WEAK TERRESTRIAL BODY WILL BECOME THE BEAUTIFUL CELESTIAL BODY!

You see here a crawling caterpillar, a picture of yourself, a creature that eats and drinks, and may readily be trodden on. Wait a few weeks, that caterpillar shall spin itself a shroud, lie down, become inactive, and sleep. A picture of what you shall do. You must spin your winding-sheet and then be laid in the tomb. But wait a while; when the warmth of the sun shall come that apparently lifeless thing shall burst its sheath. The chrysalis shall fall off, and the insect fly forth equipped with glittering wings. Having arrived at its full state of perfection, the very image of the creature shall be seen by us all dancing in the sunbeam. So shall we after passing through our wormhood here to our chrysalis state in the grave, burst our coffins and mount aloft glorious winged creatures made like unto the angels; the same creatures, but oh! So changed, so different, that we should scarce know our former selves, if we could be able to meet them again after we have been glorified in heaven.

(Charles Spurgeon, *The Resurrection, Spurgeon's Sermons*, pp. 201, 202)



WHY SHOULD YOU PUT YOUR 'FAITH' IN CHRIST'S RESURRECTION?

Between the Lord of life, and death, and sin. If He did not rise again, then death won, and sin won. If He hath been raised, then He won and death is vanquished, because sin is spoiled. Then the sinner has found his Redeemer. If He took His life again, to share it, then I know that His dying was victorious dying; and the value of His dying He makes over to me for pardon; and the virtue of His life He makes over to me for power, and the presence of my risen Lord shall forevermore be the method of my victory.

Death apart from resurrection makes no appeal to my confidence. Death in the light of the resurrection is that in which I put my trust. I come into the presence of the death of Christ while the light of His resurrection plays upon it, and I say, He loved me and gave Himself for Me; He was wounded for my transgressions, He was bruised for my iniquities; the chastisement of my peace was upon Him and with His stripes I am healed. It is all night if He rose not. It was a tragic death, awful death, a death of failure, as other deaths have been. In the light of resurrection I know it was a death triumphant, a death of accomplishment, a death of victory in the process of which He procured for me the pardon that my sinning heart needs, and the power my weakened life demands.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *The Value and Proof of The Resurrection, The Westminster Pulpit*, Books 3 and 4, pp. 100-101)



DEATH HAS NO POWER OVER THE NEW RESURRECTED BODY!

We all know that our bodies are so constituted that they cannot remain here except for a limited period, and they must – so God has willed it – return to their native dust. Not so, however, the new body: “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.” It will be a body upon which the tooth of time can have no power, and into which the dart of death can never be thrust. Age shall roll after age, but that body shall exist in everlasting youth. It shall sing, but never shall its song be stayed by weakness; it shall fly, but never shall its flight flag with weariness. There shall be no signs of mortality; the shroud, the mattock, and the spade are never seen in heaven. Such a thing as an open grave shall never appear in the celestial kingdom; there they live, live, live, but never, never, never shall they die. See, then, how different the body must be; for as this body is constituted, every nerve and every blood vessel tells me I must die. It cannot be otherwise. I must endure this stern decree, “Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes,” but in heaven every nerve of the new body shall cry, “Immortality.” Every part of that new frame shall speak for itself, and tell to the immortal spirit that they are everlasting companions, married in eternal wedlock.

(Charles Spurgeon, *The Resurrection, Spurgeon’s Sermons*, pg. 201)



PERSEVERING FAITH AMIDST HEART-CRUSHING SORROW!

She was a devout lady, but she did not believe that devotion to God excluded laughter and fun and humor and joking and “holy levity”! Quick witted and able to have a “good time”, amidst long days of work on the farm.

She often saw “the funny side of life”. Unlike my grandmother (who, although she was not formally educated, was nevertheless well read and studious), Aunt Margaret was not given to studying and to reading as much, and she did not feel that she had the “spiritual gift” of teaching, as my grandma had. Aunt Margaret (my grandmother’s sister) was a woman who worked hard, but she took time to laugh and to have a “good time” on the farm, with her large family. Lots of laughter could be heard by all her children – some of whom, like her, were rather ‘witty and good humored’!

Yes, it is true that Aunt Margaret knew how to laugh and to relax amidst her long days of hard work. However, what greatly defined her life was her experience of a loss and a

tragedy in her life, that threatened to tear her up emotionally and to impair her mentally! When she got word on January 10, 1945, that her youngest son (Eugene Wilson) was “missing in action” (World War II) as a navigator, she was “crushed” in spirit. The young man (unmarried, about 20 years old) was her youngest child, and he was very well liked in his community! In fact (just before I was to be born on January 20, just 10 days after Eugene was reported as “missing in action”, my parents gave me Eugene’s name, as my middle name (Gene). It was on January 30 (10 days after I was born) that Eugene was reported as ‘dead’! To this day, it is not known, for sure, what happened to him. It is supposed that, as a navigator on a fighter plane, his plane was shot down by the German enemy, perhaps over the North Sea!

The Bible says that we “have” this treasure (the presence of God) in “earthen vessels” (weakened bodies and weak physical constitution). Even though we claim to love God truly, nevertheless we humans are subject to all kinds of affliction. The person (Christian) whose heart is pure and who is fully devoted to Christ, is still subject to great grief and deep feelings of terrible loss – losses of all kinds, including the heart-breaking loss of loved ones! “Does Jesus care when I’ve said ‘goodbye’ to the dearest on earth to me? Oh yes, He cares, I know He cares! His heart is touched with the grief of my heart!”

Not too long after her sister’s funeral, her own funeral was conducted, and I had the honor of being a part of the occasion (which was really a ‘celebration’ of Margaret Wilson’s ‘victory in Christ’). The “former things are all passed away” for Aunt Margaret, and, behold, all things are now new! No more tears! Joy forevermore, with her Lord, and with the innumerable company of saints and angels!

Welcome home, Aunt Margaret Wilson!

-By Ron Christian-



ARE CHRISTIANS ALLOWED TO WEEP AND WEEP?

This is not the gospel of callousness. We still miss our loved ones, and we still shed tears. Our sense of loss is the result of what God made us emotionally, and we should be less like God if we did not miss them. Our tears He never rebukes. I miss the loved one who is leaving my home and crossing the ocean for a little while, and I have even known tears shed on such occasions. The sense of loss is not wrong when the loved one passes on, and I know I shall never again touch that dear hand until the morning of resurrection. This is not the gospel of callousness. Christ does not rebuke your tears. It is the gospel of comfort. The boy you have let go far away across the ocean, you miss him yet, but he

is not as safe as the child Jesus took to be with Himself, not nearly as safe. Tears there are, but the rain of our tears in the light of the resurrection creates the rainbow which arches all the sky and is the perpetual witness to the ultimate victory.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *Death Abolished*, *The Westminster Pulpit*, pp. 111, 112)



IS YOUR INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY PRESERVED IN HEAVEN?

Though there are wide extremes of difference between the tiny mustard seed and the great tree beneath the branches of which the birds of the air build their nests, yet you never for a moment question by what they are precisely the same. The identity is preserved. So shall it be in the resurrection of the dead. The difference shall be extraordinary, yet shall the body be the same.

The same body that is weak shall be raised in power. We are puny things here; there is a limit to our labors, and our usefulness is straightened by reason of our inability to perform what we would. And oh, how weak we become when we die!

If you sow barley, it will not produce wheat; if you sow tares, they will not spring up in the form of rye. Every grain hath its own peculiar form: God hath given to every seed his own body. So, my brothers and sisters, there are differences among us here; no two bodies are precisely alike: there are marks on our countenances, and in our bodily conformation, that show that we are different. We are of one blood, but not of one fashion. Well, when we are put into the grave, we shall crumble back, and come to the same elements; but when we rise, we shall every one of us rise diverse from the other. The body of Paul shall not produce a body precisely like that of Peter. Nor shall the flesh of Andrew bring forth a new body like that of the sons of Zebedee; but to every seed his own body. In the case of our blessed Lord and Master, you will remember that when he rose himself from the dead he preserved his personality; there were still the wounds in his hands, and still there was the spearmark in his side. I do not doubt that he underwent his transfiguration, and at the time of his ascension up to heaven, he still retained the marks of his wounds. For do we not sing, and is not our song based upon Scripture?

He looks like a Lamb that has been slain,
And wears his priesthood still.

So, brethren, though of course we shall retain no weaknesses, nothing which will cause us sorrow, yet every Christian will retain his individuality; he will be like and yet unlike all his fellows.

(Charles Spurgeon, *The Resurrection, Spurgeon's Sermons*, pp. 198, 202, 207)



TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The one who enjoys the forgiveness of sins is the one who assures himself against punishment and condemnation at the future judgment of God.

Like a rising flood of water, which threatens to sweep away an earthly dwelling, so, the impending judgment of God hereafter will be like the mighty waters, which rise to reach and to sweep away the wicked.

The 'mighty waters' of God's judgment will not reach the righteous, however, for their confessed sins have already been forgiven, as a result of their sins having already been judged on Mount Calvary when Jesus died for sinners.

-By Ron Christian-



DO YOU FEEL 'NEAR' TO YOUR DEPARTED LOVED ONES?

We were afraid of death because death meant severing of associations and the ending of fellowships.

The communion abides; we are not divided. We are waiting, so are they. We are not yet perfected, neither are they. They are in the Paradise of God where the vision is clearer and temptations are over, and the battle is won, but they are not yet perfected. "God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." We are united in our waiting. They are waiting for that for which I am waiting, the resurrection. We cannot visit them. They cannot talk to us, and we violate the whole order of revelation when we try to do it. They cannot revisit us, I do not know that they can watch us, except perchance now and then by some special permission of heaven.

There is a unity and affinity which defies and laughs at absence of articulate speech and the vision of the senses. I pass no day that I am not conscious of the nearness of at least one who entered within the veil sixteen years ago, my first lassie; but I never try to bring her up to mutter to me. I never insult the high and holy revelation of God by making use

of some fleshly medium that I may hear a whisper that is from hell and not from heaven. But I know the touch of her spirit upon mine, for the spirit life cannot be measured by the dimensions of the material. I know though she cannot come to me, I shall go to her.

Not as a child shall we again behold her;
For when with raptures wild
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child;
But a fair maiden in her Father's mansion,
Clothed in celestial grace;
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion
Shall we behold her face.

I have not lost my child, she is mine as she never was before.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *Death Abolished, The Westminster Pulpit*, pp. 110, 111)



IS YOURS A 'HOLY LAUGHTER' BECAUSE OF YOUR ANTICIPATION OF HEAVEN?

A mansion in heaven has been prepared for every living soul! Isn't that fact enough to make Jesus hang back His head and open His mouth and laugh in such a manner that the echo of that divine laughter can be heard throughout all the corridors of the heavens? Reverberations of that divine laughter of the victorious Christ can be heard throughout God's mighty expanse (perhaps throughout the endless depths of the vast universe)!

'Holy laughter' coming from the lips of Jesus because His tomb lies empty and because Jesus now has taken His place at the right hand of His Father! 'Holy laughter' because the enemy of mankind has been defeated and the victory for mankind has been guaranteed! Satan is now a defeated foe, and his execution date has already been fixed by the victorious Christ!

The most resounding 'laughter' in the universe is the 'laughter' of the Living Christ! If Christ is 'laughing', His followers definitely have a 'right' and a 'reason' to laugh and laugh and laugh! Christians serve a 'laughing' Christ – a Christ who sets the servants of Christ 'laughing'! Our 'laughter' is a reflection of the 'laughter' of the victorious Christ!

To be acquainted with these 'realities' is to be acquainted with the 'unmatched' and the life-transforming 'realities' of the entire universe! This knowledge is the source of the

‘joy of all joys’ – the unmatched joy of God – a portion of which God wills for every person to experience!

When the ‘smile of God’s approval’ rests upon you (because of your personal faith in Christ), then you will have a reason to ‘stand on tiptoe with joy’! You have discovered the very essence of true life, the very ‘fountain of all joy’, and the very purpose for abundant living!

Therefore, assurance that your sins are forgiven, and assurance that your name is written in the book of life – these basic life assurances give you a reason to relax in God’s love and to share God’s love with others!

-By Ron Christian-



THE BENEFITS OF SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT DEATH!

A true meditation upon death would be exceedingly healthful to our spirits. It would cool that ardor of covetousness, that fever or avarice, always longing after and accumulating wealth, if we did but remember that we should have to leave our stores, that when we have gotten our most, all that we can ever inherit for our body is one six feet of earth. It would certainly help us to set lightly by the things which we here possess. Perhaps it might lead us to set our affections upon things above, and not upon the mouldering things below. At any rate, thoughts of death might often check us when we are about to sin. If we look at sin by the light of death’s lantern, we might see more of the hollowness of sinful pleasure, and of the emptiness of worldly vanity. Surely we should be kept back from many an evil act, if we remembered that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And, mayhap too, these thoughts of death might be blessed to us in even a higher sense, for we might hear an angel speaking to us from the grave, “Prepare to meet your God.” This might lead us to set our house in order, because we must die and not live. If even one of these effects shall be produced by considering our latter end, it would be the purest wisdom continually to walk arm in arm with that skeleton teacher – Death.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Remember Death, Spurgeon’s Sermons*, pp. 127, 128)



CAN I ENJOY RELEASE FROM PAST SINS AND ESCAPE FUTURE JUDGEMENT?

“I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – ‘and you forgave the guilt of my sin’” (Psalms 32:5b)

What an unspeakably great joy to know that the sins of one’s past are totally forgiven and that the heavy guilt is totally resolved! No longer does one feel the heavy hand of God resting upon him, but instead the gentle hand of God guiding him!

The frown of God’s disapproval is replaced by the smile of God’s approval. One no longer feels his bones wasting away, but instead he feels his health being restored and renewed.

His groans of despair are turned to songs of praise and thanksgiving. His strength is no longer ‘sapped by guilt’, but his strength is renewed by grace.

The bondage of sin gives way to the liberation of love. The bad memories of foregone days in sin’s evil plots are replaced by the sweet plans of new and anticipated projects of love and mercy.

-By Ron Christian-



HOW ‘FAMILIAR’ ARE YOU WITH THE ‘COUNTRY BEYOND YOU’?

Men fear death because the beyond is unfamiliar; but the beyond is not unfamiliar to us. We know the country well to which the loved ones go. But you say, that is the difficulty, we do not. Think again. I am afraid the Church of God is losing that great and gracious art of contemplating the country beyond. I know that it is out of fashion to teach even children to sing about a heaven beyond the blue. It is certainly quite out of fashion for Christian people to talk about heaven. We are told to make heaven here. I believe that with all my heart. We need have no anxiety about the heaven beyond, but it is good sometimes to contemplate it. As the saintly Rutherford said, “it is good to climb and look in advance upon the home of the soul forever; to observe its buildings, its furnishings; the country, the hills and valleys.” We do it all too little. This is the thing I want to say. We know the country for we argue of the country from the country’s King. If you really want to know what heaven is like, get any little bit of earth where Jesus is King, and you will see it. Do not be afraid of your imagination. Flowers? Oh yes, immortals, Asphodel, never fading. Birds and animals? Surely yes; armies of white horses for the saints to ride upon. You say, “You are talking figures of speech.” Quite probably so, but figures are used to help people to see facts that are too brilliant for their seeing. Facts are always finer than figures. I argue the country from the country’s King.

No, the country beyond is not unfamiliar. I not only know it, I am learning its language, I am gradually coming to understand its very accent. I know men and women, saints of God, who have walked and talked with Him for fifty years or more, and their accent is so much the accent of the other side that men call them foreigners. We know the country to which the loved ones have gone because we know the country's King.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *Death Abolished, The Westminster Pulpit*, pp. 109, 110)



DEATH'S 'FAREWELL' TO ALL THINGS ON EARTH

To the best men in the world dying is a solemn thing. Though "I can read my title clear to mansions in the skies," and know that I have a portion among them that are sanctified, yet must it always give some trembling to the flesh, some quivering to the human frame, to think of breathing out my soul, and launching on an unknown sea. He that can laugh at death is a fool – stark staring mad is he. He who can make jokes with regard to his end will find that if he should die jesting, it will be no jest to be damned. When this tent is being taken down, when this clay tenement begins to creak and shake in the rough north wind of Death, when stone after stone tumbles from its place, and all the bonds are loosened, it will be a terrible moment then.

Let me think, too, that when I die I must leave behind me all that I have on earth. Farewell! to that house which I have so fondly called my home. Farewell! to that fireside and the little prattlers that have climbed my knee. Farewell! to her who has shared my life and been the beloved one of my bosom. Farewell! All things – the estate, the gold, the silver. Farewell! Earth. Thy fairest beauties melt away, thy most melodious strains die in the dim distance. I hear no more, and see no more. Ears and eyes are closed, and men shall carry me out and bury their dead out of their sight. And, now, farewell! To all the means of grace. That passing bell is the last sound of the sanctuary that shall toll for me. No church bell now shall summon me to the house of God.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Remember Death, Spurgeon's Sermons*, pp 131-132)



WILL YOU HAVE A 'CUSTOM-MADE' HOME IN HEAVEN?

Sometime ago I indulged and ordered two shirts from a tailor. I selected the cloth. The tailor measured my body. And several weeks later, I received two shirts made especially for me. There is a big difference between these two shirts and the other shirts in my

closet. The tailored shirts were made with me in mind. The other shirts were made for any hundred thousand or so males my size. But not these two. They were made just for me.

As a result, they fit! They don't bulge. They don't choke. They are just right. Such is the promise of heaven. It was made with us in mind. Elsewhere Jesus invites us to "*receive the kingdom God has prepared for you since the world was made*" (Matt. 25:34).

The problem with this world is that it doesn't fit. Oh, it will do for now, but it isn't tailor-made. We were made to live with God, but on earth we live by faith. We were made to live forever, but on this earth we live but for a moment. We were made to live holy lives, but this world is stained by sin.

This world wears like a borrowed shirt. Heaven, however, will fit like one tailor-made.

(Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, pp. 62-63)



EXCHANGING YOUR 'EARTHLY TENT' FOR YOUR 'HEAVENLY MANSION'!

Man is more than his dwelling place. You crush a shell on the beach with your heel, and you slay its tiny inhabitant. But you can pull down the tent, and pluck up its pegs, and roll up its canvas, and put it away in a dark corner, and the tenant is untouched. The foolish senses crown Death as last, and lord of all. But wisdom says, 'Life and thought have gone away side by side, leaving doors and windows wide,' and that is all that has happened.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Exposition of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 354)



WILL YOU FEEL "AT HOME" IN YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE?

He left detailed instructions about this voyage. His Word is our map; the Holy Spirit is our compass.

He outlined the route and described the landmarks we should seek.

He even told us what to pack for the trip: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23)

And most remarkably, he's gone before us and goes with us. He's both a pioneer and a co-traveler! And when we grow weary, all we need to do is listen to his voice. He's got special promises to keep us on the journey.

Here is one of the best.

"There are many rooms in my father's house."

What a tender phrase. A house implies rest, safety, warmth, a table, a bed, a place to be at home. But this isn't just any house. It is our Father's house.

Your Father is preparing a place for you. A place with *many* rooms. An ample place. A place with space for you. There is a special room for you. You will be welcome.

(Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, pg. 177)



HOW SHOULD I FACE MY INEVITABLE DEATH?

The ever present possibility of death could and often does send terror to the Heart of Man, but for believers there is the antidote of love and faith to ward off the fear of death. *"Perfect love casteth out fear, for fear hath torment."* (John 4:18) Why fear to die when one knows that physical death is simply the doorway into the presence of the loving Heavenly Father?

Death, for the believers, need not be a fearful thing, wrought with evil. Why? Because Christ has already gone through death and has come through death with 'flying colors'! Christ is the 'first fruits' of those who shall rise from the dead. Death does not have the 'final word'. Life is stronger than death, righteousness is stronger than evil, and Christ is stronger than Satan. Because of Christ's resurrection, Satan is now a 'defeated foe'. *"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (I Corinthians 15:57)

-By Ron Christian-

EXCHANGING THE 'WALK OF FAITH' FOR THE 'DIVINE BOSOM OF LOVE'!

There is a new depth and closeness of union with Jesus waiting the Christian soul, when it lays aside the separating film of flesh. Here the bodily organization, with its limitations, necessarily shuts us off from the closeness of intercourse which is possible for a naked soul. We know not how much separation may depend upon the immersing of the spirit in the fleshly tabernacle, but this we know, that, though here and now, by faith which dominates sense, souls can live in Christ even whilst they live in the body; yet there shall come a form of union so much more close, intimate, all-pervading, and all-encircling, as that the present union with Him by faith, precious as it is, shall be, as the Apostle calls it in our context, 'absence from the Lord.' 'We have to be discharged,' says an old thinker, 'of a great deal of what we call body, and then we shall be more truly ourselves,' and more truly united to Him who, if we are Christian people at all, is the self of ourselves and the life of our lives. No man knows how close he can nestle to the bosom of Christ when the film of flesh is rent away.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 355)



WHAT OUR BODIES WILL BE LIKE

Some of you have asked, "How will the dead be raised to life? What kind of bodies will they have?" Don't be foolish. A seed must die before it can sprout from the ground. Wheat seeds and all other seeds look different from the sprouts that come up. This is because God gives everything the kind of body he wants it to have. People, animals, birds, and fish are each made of flesh, but none of them are alike. Everything in the heavens has a body, and so does everything on earth. But each one is very different from all the others. The sun isn't like the moon, the moon isn't like the stars, and each star is different.

That's how it will be when our bodies are raised to life. These bodies will die, but the bodies that are raised will live forever. These ugly and weak bodies will become beautiful and strong. As surely as there are physical bodies, there are spiritual bodies. And our physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies.

(I Corinthians 15:35-44; Contemporary English Version)



CAN I BE ASSURED THAT MY 'HEAVENLY INHERITANCE' WILL BE GUARDED UNTIL THE END OF MY 'JOURNEY'?

"I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before his face I see.
But 'I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that he is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto him against the day.'"

(I Know Whom I Have Believed)

During my lifetime I have known many godly persons who have consistently followed the Lord for many years, whose lives have 'stood the test of time'. They learned the 'secret' of daily victory – through prayer, and meditation, and obedience, and resistance of temptation. These precious ones demonstrated to me that they were 'single-minded' in their devotion to Christ, 'whole-hearted' in their commitment to a lifestyle of holiness. As a pastor for 27 years in one local church, it was my privilege to serve several hundreds of persons, most of whom were earnest believers, persevering in their 'daily walk of faith'. At the funeral services of many older 'saints', I experienced great joy as I offered 'tributes' regarding the unusual faithfulness of these followers of Christ. Yes, I have known so many persons who 'lived well' and who 'died well'! They 'crossed the finish line of life' with the love of God as the constant and unwavering and driving 'force' of their lives! They remained faithful to their Lord, until physical death separated their spirit from their body, and now they are crowned with the 'crown of eternal life' in heaven!

Even though the trials are severe, the persecutions are bitter, the temptations are strong, the losses are great, the mysteries and inequities and injustices in the world are widespread, and the sorrows of life are deep, God's grace is all-sufficient and His power is unmatched and His love is unconditional. God is able to guard His children from the onslaughts of the 'evil one' (devil). Wrote Paul, "*The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.*" (2 Thessalonians 3:4, Living Bible) "*No temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it.*" (1 Corinthians 10:13, Living Bible)

-By Ron Christian-



SHOULD GOD'S 'CONTINGENCIES' DEplete MY HOPE OF EVENTUAL LIFE IN HEAVEN?

Someone said that the 'biggest word in the English language' is IF. The following illustration vividly demonstrates the truth of this assertion.

Freeborn Garrettson, an American-born, itinerant Methodist preacher who traversed the Atlantic seaboard on horseback, kept a journal that contains the following record of his heavenly vision, dated July 30, 1780. "Sunday 30, brother Cromwell and family accompanied me. At seven o'clock we had a love-feast; about two hundred of brethren were present, and our Saviour was in the midst. Afterwards I preached in the Dutch church. About thirty of our friends accompanied me about eight miles to another Dutch church, where I preached to many with freedom. Many went with me three miles further to Mr. Vaun's, where we had a watch night. The labors of this day were wearisome to the body, but I was strong in faith, and willing to give my little all to God. The next day a crowded audience assembled at the same place; some time before, and whilst the people were gathering, my mind was uncommonly exercised: but I found great freedom whilst enforcing, 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' The cloud was dispersed, and I felt myself uncommonly sweet and comfortable. This dear family drank deeply into the blessed Spirit. I went to bed very happy: but my night visions were uncommonly strange: I thought I was taken dangerously ill, and expected shortly to be in eternity. I doubt not, but I felt just as dying persons do. I appeared to be surrounded with thousands of devils, who were all striving to take from me my confidence; and for a time it seemed almost gone. I began an examination from my first awakenings – then my conversion – my call to preach – the motives which induced me to enter this great work – my intention, and life from the beginning. In the time of this examination, every fear was dismissed, and every fiend vanished; and a band of holy angels succeeded with the most melodious music that I ever heard. I then began to ascend, accompanied by this heavenly host; and thought every moment the body would drop off, and my spirit take its flight. After ascending a vast height, I was over-shadowed with a cloud as white as a sheet; and in that cloud I saw a person, the most beautiful that my eyes had beheld. I wanted to be dislodged from this tabernacle, and take my everlasting flight. That glorious person, more bright than the sun in its meridian brilliance, spake to me as follows, "IF you CONTINUE FAITHFUL TO THE END, this shall be your place; but you cannot come now; return, and BE FAITHFUL: there is more work for you to do.' Immediately I awoke, and my spirit was so elevated with a sense of eternal things, that I thought I should sleep no more that night. Great, and glorious discoveries have been made to me,

both sleeping and waking; but all the PROMISES of heaven and eternal glory, HAVE BEEN CONDITIONAL. In scriptures we have a little, but significant word, IF – IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH, you shall have a crown of life. I would advise all the children of God, to be very careful and watchful, and CONTINUE in well-doing until death.” (Quoted in “*Discover the Secrets of Heaven*” – *A Guideposts Book*, pp. 24, 25)

-By Ron Christian (compiler)



2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-5:10, LIVING BIBLE (TLB)

“That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won’t last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God’s richest blessing upon us forever and ever! So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever. (5:1-10)

For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down – when we die and leave these bodies – we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies that we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies. These earthly bodies make us groan and sigh, but we wouldn’t like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus. We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. And we are not afraid but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives lain bare – before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body.”

Revelation 20:1-10

THE RESURRECTION SEALED SATAN'S DOOM!

War took place in heaven! The most beautiful and powerful angel of heaven, who was himself a created being, became drunken with pride and decided to replace God on His throne! The origin of sin is found in this treasonous act when God's chief angel sought to exalt himself above his created position.

Satan was cast out of heaven, only to cause problems on earth. Satan instigated man's fall into sin. Satan became known as the 'prince of this world' for he usurped God's rightful place of authority.

Considering the power of Satan and the sway of evil, can we truthfully say that Jesus is Lord of history? Considering Satan's cruel power, and considering Jesus' humble earthly life, how can one say that Jesus is the conquering king and Satan is the defeated foe?

The resurrection is the basis for such a positive declaration! By His death and resurrection, Jesus has destroyed him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and Jesus frees those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

What an irony! Through Jesus' death, death for mankind is destroyed! What Satan thought was his greatest victory, became instead his greatest defeat!

Why did Jesus' death destroy death? Because Jesus' death was followed by His resurrection! The death and resurrection of Jesus are two parts of one whole. The death of Jesus must always be interpreted in light of the resurrection of Jesus – turned out to be the greatest triumph of history because of the resurrection!

The resurrection is what makes Jesus the conquering king and Satan the defeated foe! "Christians, though living in a world still under the prince of darkness, give daily testimony that the prince of darkness has already been judged and the lordship of Jesus is already affirmed. We await the coronation." (Donald Bastian, *Belonging: Adventures in Church Membership*, pg. 45)

The prince of this world, Satan, has been judged. Satan's head has been crushed (Genesis 3:15). His sentence of death has been pronounced. The broken seal on Jesus' tomb becomes Satan's seal of death! God has already appointed his day of execution: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:10) While he awaits his final day of execution, Satan is taking out his bitterness upon mankind. However, Satan's total destruction is certain!

Jesus guaranteed final victory for His Church when He arose victoriously from the dead. Said the victorious Christ: *“I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!”* (Matthew 16:18)

Prayer: “Victorious Christ, the judgment of the enemy guarantees the execution of the enemy! The crushing of the serpent’s head guarantees the total destruction of the serpent! Satan shall no longer be ‘on the loose’. Glory! Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The bitterness of the battle against evil can be endured when I am assured of the victorious outcome of the battle!

-By Ron Christian-



HOW LONG SHALL THE WICKED TRIUMPH?

II Corinthians 5:6-10

We have noted thus far that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for faith and hope. Christianity also believes that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of justice.

Oftentimes in this present life, wrong goes unpunished and right goes unrewarded. In this life it sometimes seems that the balance is tipped in favor of the wrong. One is tempted to ask with the Psalmist, “How long shall the wicked triumph?” (Psalm 94:3) When Jesus was crucified, it seemed that evil was triumphant and justice was mocked, but God’s resurrection of Jesus vindicated God’s righteousness and justice. Christians believe that the resurrection is proof that ultimately righteousness will be rewarded and evil will be punished. Christ is the first fruits of those who will rise from the dead. The righteous, like Christ, will be raised to the resurrection of life and then the righteous of all ages will be vindicated, and impartial justice will be rendered.

In this life it sometimes seems that the balance is tipped in favor of the wrong, but in eternity each man will receive his just due. Lenin wrote: “Every religious idea, every idea of God, even flirting with the idea of God, is unutterable vileness of the most dangerous kind, contagion of the most abominable kind. Millions of sins, filthy deeds, acts of violence and physical contagion are far less dangerous than the subtle, spiritual idea of a God.” Lenin’s disregard for God and religion has perpetuated brutality and unrestrained evil in the Communist system. It is said that if Joseph Stalin, a leader of the Communist Revolution, had done nothing else all his life but to write the names of his innocent victims, his life would not have been long enough to finish the job! Hitler

killed six million Jews, but Communism has killed thirty million Russians and millions of Chinese and others, including many Jews!

The resurrection of Jesus guarantees a future resurrection of all men – the righteous to a resurrection of life, and the wicked to a resurrection of damnation! “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. *“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.”* (II Thessalonians 1:6-10 NIV)

“Thou Great Accountant of the universe, I know You will someday ‘balance the books.’ Unrestrained evil will be punished, and unrewarded good will be rewarded. I commit the cause of justice into the hands of a just God! Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because this is a moral universe, I will act justly and righteously!

-By Ron Christian-



FULFILLED ASPIRATIONS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF TIME

I Corinthians 2:9; Hebrews 11:10, 13-16

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for all of life. The foundation for faith, hope, and justice. Also, as we will see today, the foundation for fulfilled aspirations.

There is within the breast of every man a longing for immortality. Man is born with a thirst for infinity. Man is overbuilt for this world, and his aspirations call for a fulfillment that is beyond the scope of time.

The very existence of aspirations is a clue that man is not merely a product of nature, but that he is a spiritual creature whose true greatness is found in the supernatural. Says Harold Sloan, “In nature, then, man aspires, but he merely aspires and dies. The universe provides no fulfillment for his outreachings. Two courses only are open to him. He can surrender to disillusionment, despair, and cynicism, or he can turn from the natural to the supernatural, discovering the answer to his need in forces which transcend nature. . . .

Shall man, then, whose faculties lift him so high above the beast, deny the actuality of everything those higher faculties need for fulfillment, and shut himself up to the universe of the beasts? . . . Man's aspirations belong to his inner world; and it is this inner world which he knows most immediately, and therefore best." (*He Is Risen*, pp. 22, 27)

If a man's aspirations are so real to him and these aspirations cannot possibly be fulfilled within the short span of a lifetime, then the very presence of the growing aspirations points to a fulfillment beyond the confines of time, a fulfillment that reaches into eternity. But if aspirations are to be fulfilled in eternity, there must be a life hereafter. But there can be no life hereafter if Christ did not rise from the dead. Therefore, Christ's resurrection is necessary as the foundation for the fulfillment of man's deepest aspirations.

Man spends his entire lifetime, striving to grow, working to create, laboring to accumulate wisdom and knowledge. And then man dies! A thousand unfulfilled dreams! Does death end it all? Is there no future opportunity for man's deepest longings to be fulfilled? Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no resurrection for man, and without a resurrection for man, there is no opportunity for life's deepest aspirations to find fulfillment! The satisfaction of man's deepest aspirations in the supernatural, immortal realm is only made possible because of Christ's resurrection.

"Loving Creator, thank You for life's clues to spiritual reality. The lungs are made for air, the stomach for food, the eyes for beauty, the ears for music. Are not the deepest aspirations of my spirit created by God to be fulfilled by God in eternity?"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Christ lives, my aspirations will not die!

-By Ron Christian-



THE RESURRECTION DEMONSTRATED GOD'S POWER

Colossians 2:9-15

"The clash you see at Calvary was not only between Jesus and His enemies: it was between God and the devil – the two great world powers grappling there, locked in wrestler's grip. And if the cross finished things, then down in the underworld that night there must have run a savage cry, 'We win! We win! God is blotted out.' Power? Says Paul. If Christ be not raised, don't tell me God is power." (Steward, *The Gates of New*

Life, pg. 163)

“The triumph of the resurrection was conclusive evidence of the vast spiritual power exerted through Christ against those enemies of man which had never previously been defeated – sin and death. . . . God, by spiritual power, raised his Son from the dead. The physical force which moved the stone from the tomb and reduced the tough Roman soldiers to terror was only a trifle, a mere straw in the wind which in its holy blast destroyed the power of sin and death. Can you hear the ring of holy joy behind these exultant words of Paul: ‘And then, having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, he exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in his final glorious triumphant act.’” (J.B. Phillips, *Good News*, pp. 200-201)

What Satan thought was his greatest triumph became in reality his greatest tragedy! Satan claimed victory when he saw Jesus hang His head in death on the cross. Satan was crushed three days later when he looked into an empty tomb and knew that Jesus was to ascend to the right hand of His Father’s kingly throne! The demons’ cries of triumph on Calvary’s Friday suddenly turned into cries of terror on Easter morning! Christ disarmed the power of Satan!

Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus my Saviour!
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o’er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with his saints to reign;
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

(Robert Lowry, *Up From The Grave He Arose*)

The greatest weapon of Satan has always been death. When Christ arose from the dead, Jesus captured Satan’s chief weapon!

“‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Corinthians 15:55, 56 NIV)

“Mighty God, I see that I do not fight for a victory; I fight from a victory! The victory over Satan has already been won – on Easter morning! Help me to claim that historic

victory as my personal victory!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I place my faith in Jesus, I am placing my faith in one who has conquered my greatest enemy – Death!

-By Ron Christian-



EXERCISING RESURRECTION HOPE DURING LIFE’S ‘DARK DAYS’!

Do you have a hope that cannot be shaken or lost? You see it really is important that we do – otherwise we will feel hopeless about situations and conditions that face us. Do we have hope in the U.S. president or whoever is going to be the new president? If we do, then we are probably going to be disappointed. When you are facing tough, tough circumstances if you don’t have hope then you may consider other ways to get out of your circumstances – some take their lives, some ruin other’s lives as well as their own, some sink into deep and dark depression, some just exist with no joy in their lives, and yet some thrive. What is the difference? Do keep reading . . . please.

I think at some point in life all of us personally experience overwhelming circumstances or have family or friends that do. Currently we have had several situations like this. We have been praying a lot, committing loved ones to the Lord, grieving with them over the circumstances, praying for God to get the glory in the situation (and often wondering how that will happen), praying for healing and restoration, and clinging to a hope that cannot be shaken. Despite what goes on around us can we place our hope in something that is bigger and more long-term than our current crises?

The Bible speaks very clearly about the importance of hope and casts a vision of hope over and over again. What is hope? “Hope is an assurance that God is working good in our lives for His glory and our growth in Christ” (Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries). Do you see anything in this definition that says everything will work out the way we want it to? Not really, but you do see that we can take comfort that God is working good in our lives – for His glory and so we will grow in our faith.

Psalm 42:5 says *“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.”* I can picture that David was so depressed, he had to pick himself up by his bootlaces and tell himself to “hope in God,” I remember a point in my life when I was quite depressed, I certainly felt at the bottom and I can’t say I even “felt God near” through that time, but I did stake my claim on knowing I needed to hope in Him anyway.

The event that snapped me out of that depression was when I was given some hope for a change in circumstances. Even though that change may not have happened, it changed my hope and brought me out of the depths of darkness into the light. I was then able to cope with the very circumstances that contributed to my depression, in a new way. Those of you who have experienced depression will know what I am talking about, those of you that haven't – praise God you haven't. Before I had [experienced depression], I used to think people with depression should just 'get over it' . . . I have a new sympathy and understanding, now having experienced it.

-By Angela Frye-



EMBRACING RESURRECTION HOPE WHEN FACING AN UNKNOWN FUTURE!

Because I believe that the Bible has all the answers to life issues, (i.e., the Bible is sufficient), I want to highlight some verses in regards to hope. Some of these may help you to counsel yourself.

Psalms 42 and 43 – if you are in the midst of depression, take some time to meditate on these two Psalms. Write out what God shows you as you read these and think over and over the words and the promise of hope in the end... 42:11 and 43:5 both end with instructions to ourselves to *“Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him. The help of my countenance and my God.”* This helps us to get our eyes off ourselves and look to Jesus. Hebrews 12:1-2 speaks of us running the race of life with endurance and throwing aside the things that hold us down: *“looking unto Jesus, the author (or originator) and finisher (perfector) of our faith,”* to follow Christ's own example. Now here is the reason for Jesus' hope – in the midst of knowing what He would face, *“who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* Jesus knew what was at the end – this gave him hope!

1 Peter 1:3 tells us that God (because of His great mercy) has *“caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* That is what God has given us – a living hope! This is not a hope in man or circumstances. It is a hope in God.

In Genesis Chapters 39-50 we read of the story of Joseph – a young man that went through some bad experiences for extended periods of time, yet had hope in God – he told his brothers that even though they meant to harm Joseph by getting rid of him, God meant it for good. Joseph kept the vision of hoping in God, this is what kept him going.

Romans 15:4 – “*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, **we might have hope.***”

1 Peter 1:13 – “*Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, **fix your hope completely on the grace** to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” This means setting your mind – choosing to dwell on things that are eternal and promised, not on ourselves or the situation as desperate as it may seem.

Romans 5:5 says “*Now **hope does not disappoint**, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” The Holy Spirit brings us hope, as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will have more hope.

Romans 15:13 says the Holy Spirit helps us **abound in hope** by His power, and that God is the God of hope. Be filled with the Spirit – this will help your level of hope.

-By Angela Frye-



HOW CAN YOU, AN EARTHLING, BEST PREPARE YOURSELF TO ENJOY THE NEW ENVIRONMENT OF YOUR HEAVENLY DWELLING?

The Revelation tells us of golden streets and gates of pearl. It tells us also of beings who shall walk in them with a precious and mystic name written on their foreheads. Let us be sure that the new name in the forehead is what makes the reality of Heaven far more than the gold under the feet. The new circumstances shall be much, but the new man shall be more! Only by knowing that can we be truly getting ready for Heaven here. We can do nothing now to build the streets and gates, but by God’s grace we can do much, very much, now, to begin to become the men and women to whom Heaven shall one day be possible. Then Heaven, when it comes, will not be strange. Only a deepening of the faith, by which we sought it, shall receive and absorb and grow in and by its richness forever and forever.

(Phillips Brooks, *Seeking Life*, pg. 257)



WHAT PRIMARY CHARACTER TRAIT WILL YOU MOST DEVELOP FOREVER IN YOUR HEAVENLY DWELLING?

Eternal life, and life after death, is primarily spiritual and secondarily material. In both the intermediate heaven, and during the final state of heaven, the physical world will not be dominant, but subservient. Just as it was when Jesus walked the earth. Since this is the case, it is important to think about what will replace our current overwhelming devotion and concern with our material needs and existence – what will consume our attention in heaven? The answer is love. And remember, love is not a material reality. Nor is joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, or grace, all of which are byproducts, or manifestations, of love. This does not mean that love and peace and the like do not involve some physical act or material representation. They often do. For instance, creation itself is an act of creative good, a gift of love for all humanity, given by God to all of us. As is life itself. But love existed prior to the creation of the world. Love is the motive behind the act of creation.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pp. 107, 108)



WILL I EXPERIENCE BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL “PROPERTIES” IN MY NEW RESURRECTED BODY, GIVEN TO ME EVENTUALLY BY GOD?

Neither Dallas believed, nor do I believe, that all of eternity will be limited to a spiritual, or nonmaterial, nonphysical existence. Rather, Dallas believed we will be resurrected, at some time in the future, into new bodies, that will, in some measurable fashion, be comprised of a distinctly physical and spiritual dimension of life on a new physical earth. He believed that Jesus’ resurrected body modeled this for us. Luke 24:39-43 makes note of how Jesus highlights his fleshly characteristics. He spoke with others in a way that seems to indicate he had a physical voice, walked on the ground, wore clothes, handled food, ate food, was touchable and visible. It also appears that Jesus’ resurrected body had all five senses, unless we want to assume he couldn’t taste or smell the fish he ate with the disciples. At the same time, Jesus’ resurrected body was perhaps also able to teleport, to dematerialize and move from one place to another immediately or suddenly, walk through walls or doors (John 20:19), and levitate (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9)

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pp. 97, 98)



“FOR YOU TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN FOR YOU” - TO LIVE WITH CHRIST IN JOYFUL LABORS FOREVER!

Eternity is the dwelling place of God, where those who have chosen God's ways will work with, in, by, through, for, and because of His perfect plan. His will will be our will – willingly. The grand “gain” of death that Paul describes in Philippians 1:21 comes from the release of the entanglements that so easily ensnare us and inhibit us from running the race God has set before us (Heb. 12:1).

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pg. 91)



WHAT KIND OF PERSON WILL YOU BE WHEN YOU ENTER YOUR ETERNAL STATE?

I've often heard it said, “You never see a U-Haul being pulled by a hearse.” The idea is that we don't take anything with us after we die. That's actually not true at all; we enter eternity as the people we have become. We take our “selves” with us – our memories, our characters, our personhoods, our spirits, our souls. Our entire holistic beings carry on into eternity. This is similar to what happens when we move from one house or apartment to another. We tend to box up only our most treasured, valuable, or useful possessions with us and get rid of the rest through garage sales or thrift store donations. Likewise when we each enter eternity, we only take one thing with us, and it's the most valuable asset we ever possess: the sum of our life. The question is, what kind of people will we be when we enter the eternal state? Other questions should naturally follow: Have we done our part in transforming our characters in such a way that our lives are filled with the fruit of a life lived in the power, peace, wisdom, and love of God? Are we preparing our lives, filling our days, and directing our minds and bodies toward the good life Jesus offers us that begins right now and extends throughout eternity? What is it that we will carry forward in the “suitcase” or “boxes” of our lives? Are we prepared to live and experience the abundant life both now *and* forevermore?

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pg.7)



WILL YOU HAVE A GREATER GRATITUDE FOR SIN'S FORGIVENESS IN HEAVEN THAN YOU HAD ON EARTH?

Dallas believed that heavenly existence will not be a state wherein it is as if we had never sinned. Instead, we will forever realize and be eternally thankful for the grand mercy and grace of God's love and forgiveness. Such awareness will require an understanding of why we were forgiven, some understanding of what we were forgiven

of, and the depths of love that overcame our sin. The constant realization of such huge measures of undeserved favor will be a major cause of our never-ending gratitude and worship of Christ throughout eternity. To erase the memory of sin is to also erase the conscious awareness of God's overwhelming power, grace, love, mercy, and faithfulness.

Yet it is important to state that maintaining a memory of sin does not mean sin continues to have dominion over us. Truly, sin will have no power in heaven. But part of the memory of sin's black stain works to create the eternal backdrop on which the illimitable brightness of God's glorious acts throughout history will shine. And with it, the conscious depth of our gratitude and wonder of God's works will be reflected as well.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pp. 24, 25)



WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR PHYSICAL BODY, WILL YOU ALSO LEAVE BEHIND ALL THE SINFUL EFFECTS OF YOUR EARTHLY LIFE?

To be clear, the myth at the crux of the cosmic car wash ideology is the belief that as our last breath leaves our physical body, so too, we leave all of the results or effects of our sin behind. Thus, the assumption goes, we begin eternity, from the very moment we "open our eyes" or "wake up" in heaven as shiny, new spiritual beings, utterly whole, lacking in nothing, in a state as if our sin and its effects have left no impact on our lives or perhaps never existed at all. Such a belief system drains much, if not most, of the motivation away from engaging in the difficult, slow, and patient process of spiritual transformation and character development while on earth. Instead, all the cosmic car wash requires is for us to hang on by our fingernails, keeping hold of our systems of "sin management" until we die, and the car wash will take care of the rest.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pg. 23)



WHEN YOU "CROSS THE FINISH LINE" OF YOUR LIFE, WHAT WILL BE YOUR LEGACY THAT YOU WILL LEAVE BEHIND?

The process of death presents an opportunity for a heroic culmination of the wonder and potency of the gift that our lives have been up to the present moment. Viewed this way, death becomes a curtain call, a celebration, a joyful look at what has come from the investment of the time and gifts given us. We can then present our lives as a bountiful

harvest to our loved ones, to the world, and to God. In this vein, death's sorrow, grief, and pain are overcome by the valor, beauty and poignant grandeur discovered at the very pinnacle of a life well lived. The pinnacle, the summit of a life well lived is not at midlife. For one conscious of the purposefulness in every day, every moment of our lives, the idea of being over the hill and on the downhill of life after the age of fifty is ludicrous. The pinnacle is not reached, the finish line not crossed, at midlife, but at the end of life. Such a perspective can only become a reality for us if or when we begin to realize death as just the end of the beginning that leads to eternity, not as an end in itself.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pp. 54, 55)



WHAT WILL YOUR EXPERIENCE DURING THE TIME BETWEEN YOUR PHYSICAL DEATH AND THE FINAL RESURRECTION?

Those who have placed their full confidence in Christ are not with their physical bodies; therefore, they are “with the Lord”, clothed or robed in his glory, living an eternal type and quality of life, in time, watching at least some, if not all, events as they unfold in history, fully conscious and aware of who and what they are, and who and what they are not.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pg. 29)



WILL IT BE YOUR PRIVILEGE IN HEAVEN TO BE TAUGHT BY SOME OF YOUR MATURE, HEAVENLY FELLOW CITIZENS?

We need to realize that in heaven, we will have relationship with God and with others, always. We will never be alone in the ways we consider isolation and solitude now. We won't be able to “lock” or “shut” people out of our lives as is so easily our habit today. We won't be able to ignore those whom we simply find annoying or unpleasant. Of course, the assumption is that no one will be annoying or unpleasant in heaven. There is nothing in the scriptures, however, to suggest such an assumption is an absolute.

More likely, Dallas believed, heaven would be similar to what C.S. Lewis describes in *The Great Divorce*. People will have patience, endurance, grace, deference, and submission for one another as we grow, develop, learn, and mature. Like good older siblings watching their younger siblings grow, learn, and discover who and what he or she is, there will be those in heaven who are far ahead of us in their understandings of

God and his ways. They are with us, committed to us, and loving us despite our ignorance. And we are with them, blessed by their graciousness, awed by their wisdom, and thankful for their guidance. Perhaps after a few dozen millennia, we, too, might find those whom we can help, guide, direct, and instruct in what we have learned and understood about the nature of life and existence in our world. But one has to develop these skills and desires. One has to be a lover of people, not as we want them to be, but as they actually are.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing For Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pp. 227-228)



TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalms 73:26) Not houses and lands, position and power, or earthly friends are the source of the Psalmist’s strength. These things may not be wrong within themselves and indeed may be very good, but they have no ability to strengthen the fainting heart, and none of these can provide soul securities in the hour of physical death.

Why covet the things of the world when they leave the heart dissatisfied in time and the soul unsecured in eternity? Death will ultimately and inevitably overtake every person, and, therefore, God alone is able to carry the deathless soul of man safely through the tempests of life and through the gates of death. Man’s earthly portion – his material wealth – will be taken from him. We brought nothing into the world and it is certain we will take nothing out of the world but our naked soul!

God is the inheritance of the righteous, and the righteous ones who on earth make God the object of their undivided love and affection, will in heaven have God as their ‘portion’ forever!

God will satisfy all the desires of the righteous forever in heaven. *“The days of the blameless are known to the Lord, and their inheritance will endure forever.” (Psalms 37:18)*

-By Ron Christian-



**MAKING ALL EXPERIENCES – GOOD AND BAD – MAKE YOU BETTER
PREPARED FOR HEAVEN!**

A noble independence this gives to a man's soul. Poverty comes up and joins you, and you say, "Welcome, Poverty. We will walk together for a while, and when I have done with you, when you have done for me all that you can, then you shall go. I will dismiss you with my thanks." Riches comes rolling up to be your fellow-traveler, and you say, "Welcome, Riches. There will come an end to you; but while you last we will be friends, and you shall help me." Men praise you and you accept their praise as, when you are sailing in a ship, you accept a wind which will not last forever, but which, while it lasts, may fill your sails and speed you on your way. Men blame you, and you take their blame and bid it make you humble that you may be more strong, because more trustful of a greater than yourself when the sunshine comes again. The more your soul is set upon the ends of life, the more you use its means in independence. You use them as a workman uses his tools, taking them up in quick succession, casting them down one after the other, never falling in love with the tool because the work possesses him.

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the World*, pg. 372)

ALL THINGS ARE TEMPORARY AND PERISHABLE EXCEPT GODLY CHARACTER!

How is it with you, oh, my friend? There comes an end to all these things which you are doing now! Not because God snatches them out of your hands, but because they exhaust themselves and expire, because they are by their nature temporary and perishing, they die. You follow out any of them a little way and you come to this inevitable epitaph of their mortality, "Then cometh the end." How is it then with you? Have you anything which is not perishable? Have you anything to which there comes no end? "What?" you say; "what sort of thing?" And I reply, "Any passion for character and love of God!" Those are eternal. There comes no end to those. You may change your dress, your name, your habits, your companionships, your work, – everything that you do, – but your passion for character and love for God, if you have them, you never change; they are the same forever.

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the World*, pg. 371)

**UPON ONLY ONE PERSON WILL ALL THE GLORY OF HEAVEN BE 'FIXED'
– THE SAVING CHRIST!**

None will ever be able to praise Christ adequately for His willingness to shed His blood for the redemption of mankind! There is strong evidence that the five wounds of Christ (which He received on the cross) will be visible on Christ's heavenly (resurrected) body!

The eyes of all the saints in heaven will be fixed on those wounds – the wounds that speak of Christ's sacrificial love for every human being! "Love divine all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down!" Love that went to the cross, to die for a race of lost and unworthy sinners!

Holy Scripture (John 14) seems to teach that heaven is a localized place, a place where all persons will be known and recognized, a place of sweet and conscious fellowship, a place where redeemed spirits are embodied with a new and resurrected body, like as to the body of their resurrected Lord!

-By Ron Christian-



CHRIST'S ETERNAL LOVE WILL 'DIGNIFY' AND 'HONOR' OUR LITTLE LIVES IN HEAVEN!

The point to which we must return again and again is that, in our conviction that the decay of the flesh is not a final event, we must meticulously avoid reference to a vague spirituality. There may be in store for us something better than what we know of personality, but we may be assured that this new life will at least be personal. Though we know that "we shall be changed," we have good reason to suppose that the love of Christ will not change and that it will dignify our little lives, however different they may be from anything we now experience. Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then we shall see face to face. In this life we are forced to live by faith; in the life to come we shall live, not by faith, but by open vision.

(Elton Trueblood, *A Place To Stand*, pp. 127, 128)



IN HEAVEN, WILL YOU PARTICIPATE IN 'HOLY LAUGHTER'?

Heaven is also a place where there is unspeakable joy, restful relaxation from all of earth's labors and stresses, total deliverance from all of earth's illnesses (total health), and (surprising to some) a place where the heavenly saints will enjoy delightful laughter!

We must remember that Jesus (while He was a man on earth) had a joyful ‘sense of humor’ (as recognized in some of His parables)! Since we are created in the divine image, why wouldn’t we (as redeemed persons) express, at times, humor and laughter in heaven? As God-like creatures, we too, like Jesus, will surely hang back our heads and open our mouths and resound with hearty laughter – in heaven!

Laugh because Jesus won the victory (over Satan) when Jesus died and when Jesus arose from the dead! Laugh because you (along with the multitude of saints around you) made the right decision when (on earth) you repented of your sins and when you believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world, and, consequently, you got your name written in the ‘book of life’!

Laugh because you are in a place where you will enjoy both ‘eternal rest’ and ‘eternal labors’ – all ‘in the name of Jesus’ and all for the ‘glory of God’! There are many reasons why you should ‘laugh’ when you find yourself in the most glorious place that can be found in the entire universe!

Even the angels in heaven (the angels who have never known the meaning of redemption) will ‘envy’ your position in God’s vast universe! Why wouldn’t you ‘laugh’ with a ‘holy laugh’ when you arrive (by grace) in a place that cannot be invaded by any type of ‘evil’, in a place from which no one can ‘kidnap’ you, in a place where you will love others and where you will be loved by others forever, in a place without competition and without comparisons, and without jealousies and without boredom and without weariness.

Total worship of the King, total involvement of your creative service to everyone around you, total confidence and wholesome self-esteem with no selfish pride and with no self-absorption, total self-acceptance with no self-consciousness and no self-advancement, total teachableness and progressive growth in learning about the glorious mystery of God’s holy trinity!

-by Ron Christian-



DEATH ALLOWS A PERSON TO UNBURDEN HIMSELF OF HIS HEAVY BURDENS!

The cry of the boy of twenty that life is too long, that the end is far away, that there are

weary years to travel before the end is reached, – that cry does not come from very deep down in the soul. The soul is really full of joy in life, of gladness in the abundant days and in the years of bounteous promise; but this cry, so far as it is real, means the beginning of satisfaction in the fact that there is an end. Already there are some things in life which the soul would fain get out of life. The first sketch has so marred the canvas that the perfect picture seems impossible.

And as life goes on to more than twenty that conviction grows. The cry may not be uttered as it was at first. The habit of living gets to be so strong that men do not think so much about the end, but the expectation of it is still there. Tell any man that he, out of all these mortals, was never to die, that there was to be no end for him, and, whatever might be his first emotion, by and by must come something like dismay; for every man has gathered something which he must get rid of, something which he would not carry always, and so there is promise to him when it is prophesied, “Then cometh the end.”

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of The World*, pg. 363)



HE WAS A HEAVEN-BOUND ‘SAINT’ WHO LOVED TO EXHORT HIS ‘FELLOW PILGRIMS’!

He suffered greatly (for several years) from Parkinson’s disease. As a bedfast person (in later years), unable to eat except through a “feeding tube”, he was a “pathetic sight”. But, he remained loyal to his Lord, and loving towards everyone who visited him, in his humble adobe (mobile home). His wife was most faithful and loving in her care of him, to the very end of his life.

The sweetness of the Spirit of Christ within him was particularly evident, as he suffered physically to a great degree, during the last few years of his life. This man, whose mind was so brilliant, and whose heart was so tender, and whose fervency in prayer was so great, remained in “essence” (as just noted) the same man during his advanced physical deterioration. Though his body was tragically growing old and dying, his spirit was very much alive! During his vibrant ministry (pastoring and preaching), I think Robert Kerby knew (by memory) more hymns (and more stanzas of the hymns) than anyone anywhere!

He could, while he shared devotional thoughts at Camp Meeting, quote stanza after stanza of hymn after hymn! I stood back with utter amazement! When he would get “real happy in the Lord” (sharing a promise from God’s Word), sometimes he could not “contain” himself emotionally. In a “state of ecstasy”, all of a sudden, he would let out a

“loud shout” of praise and joy!

What Robert Kerby taught, he certainly lived! His ‘word’ and his ‘walk’ were the same! He sought earnestly to please his God in all that he said and in all that he did! He, to me, was one of the most holy (godly) persons I ever knew! *“Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty.” “Touch not the unclean thing!” “Be ye holy, for I the Lord thy God am holy.” “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* These are but a few Scriptures that describe God’s call to a holy life, and Robert Kerby not only taught holiness, he lived a holy life.

He was holy “in all manner of conversation” – in his speech, in his attitudes, in his behavior, in his priorities, in his relationships. And, consequently, this faithful man died as a holy man! He often sang about heaven (and he had a great voice for singing) and he found heaven’s doors opened to him when he died!

(I was both surprised and honored when Robert’s wife asked me to preach his funeral message!)

(Note: Robert Kerby is, in my mind, a man who will long be remembered as a God-fearing, holy preacher, one who possessed a “touch mind” and a “tender heart” and a “decisive pen” – a communicator of God’s Truth by word and by pen! From the time of my youth and throughout my adulthood, Robert Kerby has left an “indelible mark” on my life – for good and for God!)

-By Ron Christian-



IN HEAVEN YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY IS RETAINED AND CHERISHED!

By the resurrection of the body Christians, from the earliest times, have meant that in the life that succeeds our experience here, individuals will retain their personal identity. Since the body is, in this life, a means of distinguishing one individual from another, the conviction is that in the future life there will be an analogue. Otherwise we should lose that which is intrinsic to personality, its singularity. Christ taught that each one is precious, but if personal identity is lost, what Christ prized will also be lost. Our conviction, as Christians, is that it will not be lost.

(Elton Trueblood, *A Place To Stand*, pg. 126)



THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Scripture: John 20:26, 27

Some years after my father's death I went to Sea Island, Georgia, to preach a sermon at a big camp meeting. Thousands of people gathered in a big tabernacle. I was sitting on the platform with a dear friend of mine, Bishop Arthur Moore, and he was leading this huge congregation in the singing of old gospel hymns. Presently he asked, "How many preachers are there in this audience?" They held up their hands. There must have been several hundred of them. The Bishop then said, "I want you preachers to come out from where you are and come down and stand here. Form a choir and show these people some real singing."

And as they came down the aisle they were singing "At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light," an old-time gospel song. These preachers were coming out from the congregation and streaming down the aisle, singing this song.

I was sitting on the platform watching and, all of a sudden, I saw my father. Why my father was at Sea Island, Georgia I wouldn't know; but there he was. He looked about forty years of age, vigorous and coming down the aisle singing the song, with his head thrown back, no book: he knew it by heart. I leaned forward on my chair. It was so real that I forgot the entire congregation. I could see only him. As he came close to me he raised his hand in the old familiar gesture. I reached for him . . . and he was gone. I sank back in the chair and began to sob like a baby (which I never do, I assure you). The Bishop asked, "What's the matter, Norman?"

"I'll tell you later," I said.

Later I told him and asked, "Was it an hallucination, Bishop?"

"Don't you remember how in the early days when the disciples were gathered together, He appeared and then vanished out of their sight? Those appearances were to show that He is close by." As for me, I will never have the slightest doubt that I saw my father at Sea Island, Georgia, that day.

-By Norman Vincent Peale-



IN HEAVEN ALL JUSTICE WILL BE VINDICATED AND ALL COMPENSATION WILL BE GIVEN!

If God really is, and if He is in a meaningful sense fully sovereign in His universe, He cannot be defeated in His loving purpose. In the words of Micah, this purpose, in which reverent men join, includes both justice and mercy. But if this life is all there is, then justice and mercy are denied to millions. Those who have died by torture are not really less deserving of happiness than I am. If death ends all, we are forced to conclude that for many life is an unmitigated tragedy and thus constitutes a concrete denial of God's individual care. If, on the other hand, this life is not all, justice may still be done. Without the life everlasting the problem of evil is as insoluble as it is damaging to faith in God; with life everlasting, divine justice is possible. We cannot, if we believe in God at all, believe in His defeat; therefore we believe that there is another and fuller life in which the justice that is denied here may be finally achieved.

Elton Trueblood, *A Place To Stand*, pg. 119.



WILL YOUR 'NEW FORM' IN HEAVEN BE PATTERNED AFTER CHRIST'S RESURRECTED BODY – IDENTIFIABLE AND CONCRETE?

In heaven, the redeemed saints will have spiritual, localized, and recognizable (concrete) bodies – bodies that are similar, if not identical, to the body of the resurrected Lord! Heaven has a local habitation. Heaven is an actual place in the great universe of God, not a mere 'state of the mind'!

The spiritual (resurrected) body in heaven will surely be more 'real' than the body that exists on earth! How? Of course, we must wait to 'find out' when we enjoy our new body in that 'fair and wonderful dwelling place'!

After Jesus arose from the dead (and when He spent 40 days on this earth, before His ascension), Jesus appeared to be like He was, before He died! It is true that Jesus could go from one physical location to another location, without the normal necessity of walking. He could suddenly appear at one location, and then suddenly be at another location! Jesus' 'resurrected body' obviously had a marvelous 'power' (capacity) that His mere physical body did not have.

On the other hand, the resurrected Jesus told 'doubting Thomas' (when He appeared to Thomas after the resurrection) to touch the wounds in His body. If Jesus was some kind of ethereal (hazy and undetermined) essence, rather than a 'concrete body', Thomas

would not have been able to ‘touch’ Jesus! It seemed that Jesus’ body, though concrete in essence (touchable and seeable), was, nevertheless, of a spiritual essence (beyond the physical ‘material’ of a lowly, confined earthly body).

Jesus died once (for mankind’s redemption), and, as the resurrected Lord, He shall never die again. Humans, embodied in a corruptible body, will – if they are redeemed by Christ – die only once, and, like their resurrected Lord, they will never die again!

Like the Lord whom they serve, they will live forever! Just as Jesus, in heaven, has a ‘glorified human body’ (with the five wounds from His crucifixion visibly apparent), the redeemed souls of earth will appear in heaven with their glorified (human) bodies. As we were identified by our unique ‘features’ in our human body on earth, so we will (in some way) be readily identified by our unique ‘features’ in heaven!

If God loved ‘uniqueness’ (variety) when He created the earth, don’t you think that God will love (enjoy) great variety in the unique ‘features’ of His heavenly creatures (citizens) in heaven?

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS LIVES ON

Scripture: Luke 24:13

Two disciples were walking to Emmaus, a village not far from Jerusalem, down a stony road. In our time, you can travel from Jerusalem to Emmaus on a smooth road, but the old road is still there. As these two disciples were walking, they were joined by a mysterious Stranger who asked them why they were so sad. They replied, “Why, don’t you know? Jesus of Nazareth, who was so wonderful in deed and word and whom we trusted as the Messiah, is dead. They have killed Him.”

The Stranger reasoned with them saying, “Ought Christ not to have suffered these things in order to enter into His glory?”

When they came to their destination they invited the Stranger in for supper. As they sat at the table He took one of those little brown loaves in His sun-browned hands and broke the bread. And something in His manner made them know. Then He vanished out of their sight. It was late, but they started running and ran back to Jerusalem to tell all the others that Jesus wasn’t dead – that He lives.

And He lives today no less than on that first Easter morning long ago. He is alive not merely as Charlemagne and Napoleon and Lincoln, for example, are alive – that is, as memories of great men. Jesus is not a memory. He is an actual, contemporary, reachable Person. He is the living Christ, who has the power to enter into people's lives and change and lift them up. That, I think, is the great truth of Easter. Every present day the living Christ is at work among us.

-By Norman Vincent Peale-



UNFULFILLED DREAMS AND UNACCOMPLISHED WORK WILL BE FULFILLED IN HEAVEN!

Disappointing as human life may be, and often is, it gives evidence of being intrinsically an unfinished business, for something is begun which requires completion for its very significance. All this makes sense if we are getting ready for something more glorious than anything which we now know. If it is a fulfillment, and not merely a continuation or repetition, it will necessarily be as different from what we now experience as consciousness is different from mere life. This is the meaning of the biblical affirmation that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

Elton Trueblood, *A Place To Stand*, pg. 117.



AL PARKER WAS A TIRELESS “SOLIDER OF THE CROSS”

During the few years I associated with him (during his semi-retirement), he was not a young man, but he, nevertheless, was very active and vivacious in the Church he loved so much, namely, ‘The Salvation Army’, where he served as an officer for decades!

By temperament, Al was ‘high-strung’, ‘restless’, a ‘man of action’, ‘driven by his high-minded and worthy goals’. He was a person who ‘made things happen’. He seemed to know how to ‘pull the right ropes’ to accomplish ‘great things for God’. All kinds of things, most of which I would not know. But I do remember one of his simple ‘projects’. Al was liked in the community, and he had rapport with many businessmen who learned to share with Al certain compassion concerns in the community. Some of those businessmen were ‘notable farmers’, and Al regularly contacted them with a request that

they would donate one calf each year (or more calves possibly) to provide needed meat for the needy (poor). Al had a great concern for the poor, and the needy, and the overlooked people in society.

Both as a lifetime hobby and as a part of his serious ministry, Al Parker greatly enjoyed music. Even though none would consider him a “professional musician” (by which he would make money), probably everyone would consider him a person who was rather knowledgeable in music.

“The Old Rugged Cross”, one of the most popular and most frequently sung hymns throughout the Christian world, was composed and written by George Bennard. George Bennard was a Salvation Army Officer, and a friend to Al Parker! Al talked to me about George Bennard, and he talked to me about his friendly conversations with him. The last stanza of that familiar hymn is as follows:

*“To the old rugged cross I will ever be true,
It’s shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then He’ll call me someday to my home far away,
Where His glory forever I’ll share”*

Says the Lord, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”.

Al Parker was the most faithful servant of His Lord – and he was faithful for an entire lifetime! He was called to his home far away, where Christ’s glory he is forever sharing! What a friend he was to me! What a good husband, a good father, a good grandfather, a good officer, and now a good citizen of Heaven.

-By Ron Christian-



THE HOPE OF EASTER

Scripture: Matthew 28:18

I believe God says to us through the radiance of Easter that no matter how deficient, how defective, how hateful, how sin-filled our lives may have become, they can be raised up into newness of life by the risen Christ. Jesus told us that because He lived, we should live also. That is the promise. He lives, and if we are united with Him we then have life for ourselves now and eternally. That is the promise to the individual.

But the message is also for society. Because He lives, a Christian society shall live. There are many people who think that the Western world today is a decadent, declining culture; that the forces of evil and deterioration are becoming stronger; that the strong, vibrant forces which gave it life have been arrested; that free society in which the individual is honored as a child of God, in which there is justice for men of all types, creeds, colors, and conditions of life, is being undermined from within.

The Easter message stands in sharp contrast to this mood. Jesus Christ expected His followers to wade into human society and correct injustices in His name. He expected them to be architects of the new world, to be exponents and builders of brotherhood. He called upon them to assume a social responsibility to the life of mankind. But He told them that in order to do all this they must be grounded in the faith; they must be well-trained and astute and they must also have peace in their hearts, for an individual who does not have peace in his own heart can hardly be expected to bring peace to the world. And this peace comes from the good news of Easter. God tells us that what was lifeless can be brought to life again.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we pray for all your children in this world. Help young and old alike take in the hope of the Resurrection. Grant that at Eastertime we may feel a resurrection within our souls. Give us now, and help us to accept, amazing eternal life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

-By Norman Vincent Peale-

**YOUR HERITAGE AND HOPE AS A BELIEVER IS TO PERSONALLY
BEHOLD THE FACE AND PRESENCE OF CHRIST!**

Much as true believers admire the perfections of the Redeemer of mankind, and much as they wonder at his amazing condescension in becoming man, and dying for the sins of the world; all their present amazement and wonder will be as nothing when compared with what they shall feel when they come to see him in all his glory, the glory that he had with the Father before the world was. In reference to this we may apply those words of St. John: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2)

Adam Clarke's *Commentary*, vol. 6; pg. 564.

WILL YOU FEEL “RIGHT AT HOME” AND NEVER “OUT OF PLACE” IN HEAVEN?

Heaven is a place where we feel ‘at home’, never alone, and never lonely! When we are in heaven, it will be awesome, most glorious, but, even though we will be ‘awestruck’ with amazement, because of the beauty of heaven, we, nevertheless, will not feel like a ‘stranger’ there.

We will never feel ‘out of place’. Rather, though we feel unworthy, we will feel that we are where we are supposed to be, where we truly ‘belong’! We will not ‘feel ill at ease’. We will feel ‘comfortable’; feel like we are in a place where ‘we belong’!

Even though we will sense that we are not ‘worthy’ to be in this indescribably beautiful place, and even though we will be ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise’, we, nevertheless, will feel ‘right at home’.

Even though we will recognize that there are ‘giants of the faith’ (famous saints of the ages) in this dwelling place (and sometimes those saints may walk rather close to us), we, nevertheless, will not be intimidated by these ‘giant Christians’! We will enjoy their presence, and we will ascribe proper honor to them!

In fact, we will desire to meet these unusual servants of Christ, and we will desire to thank these great leaders of the ‘faith’, for their amazing contributions to the cause of Christ, while they ministered so effectively on planet earth. We will likely wish some time to sit at the feet of these ‘giant saints’, to learn spiritual truths from their lips, truths that will help us in our continuing growth in our heavenly dwelling place.

-By Ron Christian-



FOREVER IN HEAVEN YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE UNSPEAKABLE JOY OF THE UNFOLDING KNOWLEDGE OF THE INFINITE GOD!

Thou, O my God, art ever new, though Thou art the most ancient; - Thou alone art the food for eternity. I am to live forever, not for a time – and I have no power over my being; I cannot destroy myself, even though I were so wicked as to wish to do so. I must live on, with intellect and consciousness forever, in spite of myself. Without Thee, eternity would be another name for eternal misery. In Thee alone have I that which can stay me up forever: Thou alone art the food of my soul. Thou alone art inexhaustible,

and ever offerest to me something new to know, something new to love. At the end of millions of years, I shall know Thee so little, that I shall seem to myself only beginning. At the end of millions of years, I shall find in “Thee the same”, or rather, greater sweetness than at first, and shall seem then only to be beginning to enjoy Thee: and so on for eternity I shall ever be a little child beginning to be taught the rudiments of Thy infinite Divine nature. For Thou art Thyself the seat and centre of all good, and the only substance in this universe of shadows, and the heaven in which blessed spirits live and rejoice.

Cardinal John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*, pp. 100-101.

**THE CLEANSING AND MATURING OF YOUR EARTHLY LIFE IS
PREPARING YOU FOR YOUR HEAVENLY LIFE HEREAFTER!**

So, beginning with simple faith in Him, partially receiving the beauty of His transforming Spirit, seeking here on earth by assimilation to the Master in some humble measure to adorn the doctrine and to glorify the Christ, we may hope that each blackness shall be all changed into brightness; our limitations done away with, our weakness lifted into rejoicing strength; and that we shall be like Him, seeing Him as He is, and glorified in Him, shall glorify Him before the universe.

Alexander Maclaren, *Music for the Soul*, pg. 224.

**YOUR IDENTIFICATION WITH THE RESURRECTED CHRIST GIVES YOU
PERSONAL VICTORY OVER ALL EVIL POWERS!**

When death arrays himself as the king of terrors, and with bony fingers grasps his javelin and shakes it at us, we point him to the vacant tomb of Jesus. For the victory of Jesus Christ over the last enemy is our triumph. His resurrection assures ours: “I am the resurrection and the life.” When Satan challenges us, we will cheerfully accept, with the hint to Apollyon that he will find our substitute, his old Conqueror, on the field. Ah! It is the power of the living Jesus to identify Himself with every believer that carries terror and defeat to our foes.

Daniel Steele, *Milestone Papers*, pg. 150.

CHRIST IS MANKIND'S "CHAMPION" - VICTOR OVER SIN, DEATH, HELL – OPEN DOOR TO HEAVEN!

God, who is the just Judge, the Judge who rewards good and punishes evil, is none other than the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Moses, and also of Christ, who is His Son. This God is, above all, Love. Not just Mercy, but Love. Not only the Father of the prodigal son, but the Father who “gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16)

His redemptive Death and His Resurrection was an Eschatological Event. This is the beginning of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). For everyone, life beyond death is connected with the affirmation: “I believe in the resurrection of the body”, and then: “I believe in the forgiveness of sins and in life everlasting.” This is Christocentric eschatology.

(Pope John Paul II – Pope of Catholic Church, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, pp. 184-185.)



JESUS' IDENTIFICATION WITH HUMAN WOES ALLOWS BELIEVERS TO ENJOY PERSONAL IDENTITY WITH CHRIST IN HEAVEN!

Oh, what a short-lived victory. In the most ironic twist of all history, what Satan meant for evil, God meant for good. Jesus' death on the cross bridged the gap between a perfect God and a fatally flawed humanity. On the day we call Good Friday, God defeated sin, routed death, triumphed over Satan, and got his family back. In that act of transformation, God took the worst deed of history and turned it into the greatest victory. No wonder the symbol never went away; no wonder Jesus commanded that we never forget.

Because of the cross, I have hope. It is through the Servant's wounds that we are healed, said Isaiah – not his miracles. If God can wrest such triumph out of apparent defeat, can draw strength from a moment of ultimate weakness, what might God do with the apparent failures and hardships of my own life?

Nothing – not even the murder of God's own Son – can end the relationship between God and human beings. In the alchemy of redemption, that most villainous crime becomes our healing strength.

The fatally wounded healer came back on Easter, the day that gives a sneak preview of how all history will look from the vantage point of eternity, when every scar, every hurt, every disappointment will be seen in a different light. Our faith begins where it might have seemed to end. Between the cross and the empty tomb hovers the promise of history: hope for the world, and hope for each one of us who lives in it.

The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann expresses in a single sentence the great span from Good Friday to Easter. It is, in fact, a summary of human history, past, present, and future: “God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him.”

(Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, pp. 273, 274.)

**WHEN THE EVENING TIME OF YOUR LIFE ARRIVES, YOU WILL BE
INTRODUCED TO THE BEAUTIFUL LIGHT OF AN ETERNAL LAND!**

The old man is on his bed; the sun is going down, and he has no more light. “Throw up the windows, let me look for the last time into the open sky”, says the old man. “The sun has gone down; I cannot see the mountains yonder; they are all a mass of mist; my eyes are dim, and the world is dim too.” Suddenly a light shoots across his face, and he cries, “O Daughter! Daughter, here! I can see another sun rising. Did you not tell me that the sun went down just now? Lo, I see another; and where those hills used to be in the landscape, those hills that were lost in the darkness, Daughter, I can see hills that seem like burning brass; and methinks upon that summit I can see a city bright as jasper. Yes, and I see a gate opening, and a spirit coming forth. What is that they say? O they sing! They sing! Is this death?” And here he has asked the question, he hath gone where he needs not to answer it, for death is all unknown. Yes, he has passed the gates of pearl; his feet are on the streets of gold; his head is bedecked with a crown of immortality; the palm branch of eternal victory is in his hand. God hath accepted him in the beloved.

“Far from the world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in,
He is numbered with the saints in light,
And the promise is fulfilled,
At evening time it shall be light.”

(Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, vols. 3, 4, pp. 287-288.)

**TEARS OF THIS EARTHLY LIFE FLOW, BUT SOON YOUR TEARS WILL BE
WIPE AWAY AND YOUR HEAVENLY LIFE WILL BE JOY-FILLED!**

Those who read Holy Scripture in a reflective spirit found this experience in Paul, translated into the profession of Christian hope: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). The center of gravity of existence has shifted as a result of this certainty: now it lies at the morning of life, which means that it takes away the oppressiveness and the pressure of the moment and dissolves the tears of evening by the power of a grace that lasts forever. This is precisely what Easter faith is designed to give us: the ability to look across from the evening to the morning, from the part of the whole, and thus to journey toward the joy of the redeemed that springs from that morning of the third day, which first heard the message: Christ is risen!

(Joseph Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI, *Seek That Which Is Above*, pp. 95-96.)

**YOUR REIGN WITH CHRIST ON EARTH (BY FAITH) WILL BE MOST
GLORIOUSLY MANIFESTED IN HEAVEN (BY SIGHT)!**

In the glory of heaven, the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God’s will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him, “they shall reign forever and ever.”

By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has “opened” heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise; “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pg. 268.)

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY MANSIONS! (JESUS CHRIST)

Jesus promised to give a beautiful home to His followers, when they die! “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

When you place your faith in the Deathless One – Jesus Christ – you shall never die! Of course, your earthly body will die, your corruptible body will return to dust! But, the ‘real you’ – your spirit – will never die!

Jesus said, “If a man keeps my saying he shall never see death.” (John 8:5) “Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.” (John 11:16) Notes J.B. Phillips, “It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality.”

When we believe in Jesus – truly believe – our sorrows are soothed, our broken hearts are mended, and our void of loneliness is filled. Throughout our long spiritual pilgrimage on earth, God is preparing us for the last mile of our way, when our journey will finally be completed!

The imperfections (from our earthly pilgrimage) that remain with us, when we go through the ‘Gates of Heaven’, these imperfections will all be eliminated in heaven (perhaps through a ‘purging process’, sometime in heaven, and probably accomplished by the kindly administration of our merciful Heavenly Father).

Relationships that were broken on earth will likely (and even necessarily) be mended and be reconciled in that heavenly dwelling place. Perfect peace and genuine understanding and wholehearted love – these are the ‘natural ingredients’ of Christ’s heavenly home! Anything that is contrary to these qualities (in the character of a believer) must be rectified (reconciled) some time, if not on earth before the believer’s death, then in heaven!

-By Ron Christian-



EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY BODIES

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” I Corinthians 15:22

This body of ours is the means of revelation to us, the camera in which God’s eternal shows are set forth. By the body, we come into contact with nature, with our fellow men, with all their revelations of God to us. Through the body, we receive all the lessons of passion, suffering, love, beauty, and science. Through the body, we are trained outward from ourselves and driven inward into our deepest selves to find God.

We cannot yet have learned all we are meant to learn through the body. How much of the teaching even of this world can the most diligent and most favored man have exhausted before he is called to leave it! Is all that remains to be lost?

We need not only a body to convey revelation to us, but also a body to reveal to us to others. The thoughts, feelings, and imaginations that arise in us must have their garments of revelation whereby the unseen world within us will be manifested to our brothers and sisters around us; otherwise, each is left in human loneliness. Now, if this be one of the uses my body served on earth, the new body must be the same body, glorified as we are glorified, with all that was distinctive of each from his fellows more visible than ever before. The accidental, nonessential, unrevealing, and incomplete will have vanished. That which made the body what it was in the eyes of those who loved us will be tenfold there. Will not this be the resurrection of the body? Of the same body though not of the same dead matter? Every eye will see the beloved. Every heart will cry, “My own again – more mine because it’s more himself than ever I beheld him!”

(*The Best of George MacDonald*, pp. 116-117.)



NO NEED TO FEAR PHYSICAL DEATH

*‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?...
Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through
our Lord Jesus Christ.’
I Corinthians 15:55, 57*

Once you lived without prayer – without God, without Christ – in the world. Didn’t Christ stretch out His hands all day long? Once you were lying under conviction of sin. Didn’t Christ draw near to your soul, saying, “Peace be unto you”? Again, you were groaning under temptation’s power, crying out against indwelling sin: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). Didn’t Christ

draw near and say, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”? (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Once more you may yet groan under the weight of dying agonies. The last enemy is death. It may be a hard struggle; it may be a dark valley. Yet Jesus is standing at the right hand of God, waiting to receive you to Himself. Death loses its sting when God is with you, the Spirit is within you, and Christ is waiting to receive you. Behold, He stretches out His hands to receive your departing spirit. Breathe it into His hand, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Learn that death is no death to the Christian. “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:26). It is only giving the soul into the hand of Christ. He knows its value; He died for it. Learn that to die is, to the believer, better than to live. If Christ rises up to receive the soul, the soul goes to be with Jesus. But to be with Christ is to be in glory. Therefore, it is far better.

(*The Best of Robert Murray McChesney*, pp. 163-164.)



SERVANTS, HERE AND BEYOND

“Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”
Colossians 3:23

It is right for Christians to be diligent in business. They have good conscience that oils the wheels. “A merry heart does good, like medicine” (Prov. 17:22). A light heart makes easy work.

They love to honor their Lord. They would not have it said that a believer in Jesus was an idler or sluggard; the love of Jesus compels them to all that is lovely. And yet a believer should buy as though he doesn’t possess because “the time is short”.

Oh, believers, you can’t be misers because you are but stewards. All that you possess here is your Lord’s, and the day is at hand when He will transfer you to take care of another property in a brighter land. You are but servants. It would not do if you were to set your hearts on the things of this lower room because in a few days the Master will call you to serve in His own dear presence. Serving Christ in Heaven!

Be ready to leave your loom for the golden harp at a minute’s warning. Be ready to leave your desk for the throne of Jesus, your pen for the palm of victory. Be ready to leave the

market below for the street of the New Jerusalem where the redeemed will walk.

If you were in a sinking ship, you wouldn't cling tightly to bags of money; you'd hold everything loosely and be ready to swim. This world is like a sinking ship, and those who grasp its possessions will sink with it.

(The Best of Robert Murray McCheyne, pp. 109-110.) (Emphasis added.)



THE CERTAINTY OF HEAVENLY GLORY

*"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so,
I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."
John 14:2*

When a family is going to emigrate to a foreign country, often the oldest brother goes beforehand to prepare a place for his younger siblings. This is what Christ has done. He doesn't intend for us to live here always; He has gone on a far journey in order to prepare a place for us.

Oh, Christians, believe in Christ preparing a place for you. It will greatly take away the fear of dying. It is an awful thing to die even for a forgiven and sanctified soul, to enter a world unknown, unseen, and untried. One thing takes away fear; Christ is preparing a place quite suitable for my soul. He knows all the wants and weaknesses of my frame. I know He will make it a pleasant home for me.

(The Best of Robert Murray McCheyne, pg. 76.) (Emphasis added.)



REFLECTIONS ON HEAVEN

*"The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men."
Psalm 11:4*

If God has a way, then that is the only way. Every little thing in which you would have your own way has a mission for your redemption, and He will treat you as a disobedient child until you take your Father's way for yours.

There will be this difference, however, between the rich man who loves his riches and the poor man who hates his poverty. When they die, the heart of the one will be still crowded with things and their pleasures, while the heart of the other will be relieved of their lack. The one has had his good things, the other his evil things. But the rich man who held his things lightly nor let them nestle in his heart, who was a channel and no cistern, who was ever and always forsaking his money – starts, in the new world, side by side with the man who accepted, not hated, his poverty. Each will say, “I am free!”

The only air of the soul, in which it can breathe and live, is the present God and the spirits of the just – that is our heaven, our home. Cleansed of greed, jealousy, vanity, pride, possession, and all the thousand forms of evil self, we will be God’s children on the hills and in the fields of that heaven, no one desiring to be better than another.

(The Best of George Macdonald, pg. 129.)



A QUESTION OF ETERNAL LIFE

“What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”
Mark 10:17

It is unnecessary to inquire precisely what the youth meant by “eternal life”. Whatever shape the thing took to him, it represented something he needed and didn’t have – something that, it was clear to him, could be gained only by some path of good. But he thought to gain that thing by *doing*, when the very thing desired was *being*. He would have that as a possession that must possess him.

The Lord cared neither for isolated truth nor for orphaned deed. It was truth in the inward parts, it was the good heart, the motivation of good deeds that He cherished. It was the live, active, knowing, breathing good He came to further. He didn’t care for any speculation in morals or religion. It was good men He cared about, not notions of good things or even good actions, except as the outcome of life. Could Jesus by one word have set to rest all the questionings of philosophy as to the supreme good and the absolute truth, I venture to say that word He would not have spoken. But He would die to make men good and true. His whole heart would respond to the cry of the sad publican or despairing Pharisee, “How am I to be good?”

(The Best of George Macdonald, pg. 124.)

HEAVENLY REWARD

“Then came the first (servant), saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’”

Luke 19:16-17

Every man will be rewarded according to how his work has been. Some will be made rules over five cities, some over ten cities. I have no doubt that every sin, inconsistency, backsliding, and decay of God’s children takes away something from their eternal glory. It is a loss for all eternity.

The more fully and unreservedly we follow the Lord Jesus now, the more abundant will our entrance be into His everlasting kingdom. The closer we walk with Christ now, the closer we will walk with Him through all eternity. “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4).

(The Best of Robert Murray McCheyne, pg. 167.) (Emphasis added.)



UNIMAGINABLE DELIGHTS AND UNTOLD SATISFACTIONS IN THAT ELEVATED HOME!

No mature Christian ever thinks that he knows what heaven is like, and most reverent people recognize how unprofitable all speculation on this point really is. On this, as on so many subjects, John Baillie spoke and wrote with a sure touch, avoiding the errors of both overconfidence and irreverence. “No doubt,” he said, “it will all be utterly different from anything we have ever imagined or thought about it. No doubt God Himself will be unimaginably different from all our present conceptions of Him. But he will be unimaginably different only because He will be unimaginably better. The only thing we do certainly know is that our highest hopes will be more than fulfilled, and our deepest longings more than gratified.”

(Elton Trueblood, A Place To Stand, pp. 113, 114.)



WILL MY SINS BE REMEMBERED AGAINST ME AFTER I DIE?

Inevitable Death! Pardon received and shames removed are wonderful benefits of ‘confession of sins’. However, some believers unfortunately are still worried about the future. “Will my sins be thrown in my face at the judgment of God someday?”

“Will my hidden sins be exposed in eternity, if I have confessed them to God during my time on earth?” “Will my sins follow me to the judgment bar of God in eternity, like a ‘blood hound’ tracking blood in the winter snow?” “Will my sins be recited to me before the accusing angels in the hereafter?”

TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

The Good News Is This: The Sins, which God has pardoned, and the Shame, which God has covered here on earth, will not be brought before you in eternity!

If God has hidden your Sins in the ‘Sea of His Forgetfulness’, when you confessed them here on earth, you can be assured that your Sins will remain buried at the time of final judgment hereafter. *“What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record?” (Psalms 32:2, Living Bible)*

Jesus is our ‘sin bearer’ and He took our judgment for us when He died on the Cross. “My sin – O the bliss of that glorious thought! My sin – not in part, but the whole, is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more; Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O My Soul!”

-By Ron Christian-



HEAVEN’S UNFOLDING KNOWLEDGE – KNOWLEDGE OF MYSELF, KNOWLEDGE OF SAINTS, KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY TRINITY!

The joy of knowing others (with all the excitement of what that ‘discovery’ of persons entails), and the joy of knowing ourselves – without any shame and without any embarrassment – will be a joy, indeed, that will be unspeakable and full of glory!

The glorious ‘uncovering’ of the true and the mysterious identity of other heavenly citizens, will bring joy and awe and wonderment to both the discovering one (yourself), and to the discovered one (yourself)!

The greatest of all wonderment will be the wonderment of gradually discovering

(throughout eternity) the ‘mystery of the holy trinity’! The gradual unfolding of this ‘mystery’ will be the greatest excitement of every heavenly citizen!

Sharing new knowledge with each other – with full openness to the truth and with all the ‘barriers’ to learning destroyed! The joy of discovering new knowledge, which, in turn, leads heavenly citizens to the discovery of more and more new knowledge – and forever learning and learning!

The joy of becoming more and more like God, without, of course, ever becoming ‘little gods’. Of course, we shall forever (in heaven) remain ‘redeemed humans’ (clothed with a new, resurrected body), but as redeemed humans, we are, nevertheless, in a ‘glorified’ (permanent) ‘state’! Eternal fellowship and eternal happiness!

-By Ron Christian-



WE WILL LIVE FOREVER

Scripture: Matthew 24:31

Of course, this is what differentiates Christianity from other religions, this teaching of the fact that the human soul identified with God lives forever. Nothing like this had ever been given to mankind in this form before. And the preaching of the resurrection was the thing that gave Christianity the power to change the world. The disciples went out from Jerusalem preaching the Gospel of the resurrection and like a prairie fire flying from heart to heart it captured mankind. They moved up against Rome. The sophisticates of Rome had dabbled in every philosophy under the sun. But these simple Christian disciples came saying that in the name of Jesus Christ people could live.

The Romans had laid away their dead, they had thought about the mysteries, but they had never heard this before. This it was, together with the idea of the sovereignty of the human mind, that captured the Roman Empire and swept over the entire West. This doctrine of the resurrection, of the immortality of the soul, toppled kingdoms and autocracies and became the cornerstone of a free society.

-By Norman Vincent Peale-



THE GLORIOUS 'FREEDOM' OF CONSCIOUS, INDIVIDUALIZED EXISTENCE IN HEAVEN!

If God really is, as Christ both believed and revealed, then there is nothing strange at all about the continued existence of those who are the special objects of the Father's care. The oddity would be cessation of existence, since that would mean that God either will not or cannot keep alive the individuals whose life He prizes.

It must be understood that the life everlasting, as affirmed by Christians, and as expressed in the entire New Testament, is unequivocally personal and individual. There is nothing said about the individual spirit returning to God and being lost as a drop of water loses its identity when it returns to the ocean. It is not the mass of humanity, or some abstract deposit of spirit, that is supremely valued, but rather the individual person, for it is in the principle of individuality that value resides. Not sparrows in general, but the individual sparrow is the object of the Father's care. "Not one of them is forgotten before God" (Luke 12:6). Though spirit in general is a mere abstraction, individual spirit is concrete, and God, as represented by Christ, values the concrete. We do not and probably cannot know the details of the life to come, but we are assured that it will be a conscious existence, marked by a true liberation from many of the limitations we suffer in our brief period of preparation on this earth.

(Elton Trueblood, *A Place To Stand*, pg. 112.)



THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

Scripture: Romans 6:23

We live in a dynamic universe. That which is alive in God is alive. In my humble judgment Jesus Christ doesn't believe in death. Standing by a little girl whose grieving father had told Him she was dead, He had replied that she was only asleep. At Bethany, when they told Him that Lazarus was dead, He said, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, and I am going there to wake him up" (John 11:11)

What is really sinister is not the death of the body, but the death of the soul. The soul that sins shall die, developed in his soul. And it, says the Bible, can die. "Sin pays off with death," we read in Romans 6:23. But nothing can kill dynamic life that is in Christ.

-By Norman Vincent Peale-



WILL HEAVENLY CITIZENS BE AWARE OF GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FOR EARTHLY SINNERS?

And the great truth is this: In heaven, all the happy dwellers know that they forever will serve a great God: A God who on earth loves all and who wills to 'save' all; the Jesus who died for all; a God whose human creatures (sinners) are savable (able to be saved); a God who has sent the Holy Spirit to all persons to call all persons to repentance and to new life; a God who has prepared a place in heaven for every human being; and a God who is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all persons should come to repentance, and, thus, at death, be 'ushered into heaven'!

God loves the human race, including the 'least', the 'last', the overlooked, the 'most unworthy'. God loves the high and the low, the most gifted and the least gifted, the wealthy and the poor, the beautiful and the ugly! God loves the powerful ones and the weak ones, the high profile ones and the obscure ones, the highly educated ones and the most illiterate ones.

God loves the positioned ones and the most overlooked ones, the very beautiful ones and the out rightly repulsive ones! God loves the young adults and He also loves the decrepit (aging) ones, the up-and-out moralistic sinners and the down-and-out sinners (the immoral and 'raw' sinners)!

If God would have His own way, there would not be a single person who would die in his/her unrepentant sin! If God had His way (that is, if God's 'perfect will' were carried out) there would be universal, spiritual health, as the result of the forgiveness of every sin of every person!

Christ died so that each person could be forgiven of his/her sins, and the Spirit calls all persons to repentance, and a place is prepared for every person in heaven – therefore, there is no reason why any human being should be without hope and without salvation!

What more can God do, other than what He has done – to make it possible for everyone to enjoy the glories of heaven forever! If God – the loving and merciful and forgiving God – had His way in the affairs of men, and regarding the destiny of men – every soul would be forgiven on earth, and every soul would have his/her name written in the 'Lamb's Book of Life' (assuring him/her a place in the eternal kingdom)!

-By Ron Christian-



YOU ARE THE ‘OBJECT’ OF GOD’S SPECIAL AFFECTION – ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN

There are few contrasts between the Old Testament and the New which are sharper than that concerning life after death. In the Hebrew faith before the time of Christ, the conception of life after death was fragmentary and shadowy at best, but, with the coming of Christ, all was radically altered. The entire New Testament glows with the conviction that this life is not all and that our best personal experience, far from being ended by the death of the body, can be thereby brought to completion and fulfillment. The new faith is not expressed in isolated passages, but is found in both the Gospels and the Epistles. The most striking feature of Christ’s own teaching on this subject is its unqualified and unequivocal confidence. The essence of His position is that, because God really is, and because the whole world, both present and future, is under His fatherly care, we shall be objects of His affection just as much after the death of the body as we were before. Because we could not be objects of His affectionate care if we not alive, then those who love Him will continue to live. The heart will stop beating, but that it is only a minor incident.

(Elton Trueblood, *A Place To Stand*, pp. 110, 111.)



THE HOPE OF NEW LIFE

Scripture: Revelation 14, 13

I remember a conversation I had with Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., builder of the General Motors Corporation. His wife, whom he idolized, had died, and Mr. Sloan was inconsolable. I had known him slightly, and he asked if I would come to see him. I went to the Fifth Avenue apartment of this remarkable man and was ushered into his living room. There he was, his face like a granite cliff, strong, rugged. I knew he had put together one of the giant industries of this country and that his was one of the most brilliant organizational and scientific minds of our country.

He fixed his piercing eyes on me and opened the conversation by saying, “I want to ask you a question and I want a straight answer. I don’t want any half-truth. And I want the answer to be yes or no, based on facts.”

“I will answer your question, Mr. Sloan, if I know the answer,” I replied.

“My dear wife has died. She meant everything to me.” (And, incidentally, it is curious

how such a strong man, such a dominant character, could be like a child, dependent upon his wife. It was revealing, touching, human.) “What I want you to tell me is this: Will I see her again?”

I looked straight at him and said, “The answer is yes.”

“I knew you’d say yes,” he said, “I too believe it is yes.” Then he sat there and talked about what Christ meant to him. I remember his saying, “Jesus Christ always fascinated me. There has never been anybody like Him.”

Jesus offers us life. So let us keep the faith, and die in the faith, and by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ live forever in the faith.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we know in our hearts that because Christ lived we shall live also, and that those blessed dear ones who have gone on before us will be there waiting when we cross the river into the sunlight of an eternal morning. Help us so to live that the glint of immortality may be in our souls. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-By Norman Vincent Peale-



MANY ‘HUGS’ ON EARTH – AND MANY MORE ‘HUGS’ IN HEAVEN!

On the fateful (dreadful) morning of August 6, 2011, I was not prepared to hear the message that my niece had to deliver to me (her uncle). She simply told me that her mother (my sister) was found dead earlier that morning. She died in the big chair where she often slept (when she couldn’t get comfortable in her regular bed)!

I was shocked beyond words! I could not believe what I was hearing! My beloved sister dead? How could this be? I just talked on the phone to her two days previous to this morning! She sounded as normal and as healthy as she always did! Her cheerful voice and her warm exchanges!

I could not believe that, for the coming years, I would not have the presence and the prayers of my loving and joyous and laughing older sister. I would never hear again her loving and her special words of affection to me! No one else ever called me (an adult man) ‘My baby doll!’ (And other endearing words).

There was only one person in our family who could be so uninhibited in the expression of affection. If Bobbie felt like ‘hugging’ someone, she hugged them! She had to ‘be herself’. She seemed to be so ‘comfortable’ with who she was. Of course, she was appropriate in physical expressions, but she had her own definition of what is

‘appropriate’.

Bobbie had a special way of communication! Bobbie’s communication was a communication, not so much of the ‘reason of the mind’, but rather a communication of the ‘love of the heart’ (with outward expressions of her inner love)! Bobbie’s persuasive power was the persuasive power of love – a love that wrapped itself around the persons with whom she was communicating. She studied the Word faithfully and she prayed earnestly and consistently. She had a special place in her house which was her ‘prayer chapel’ (I think a certain chair where she daily met her Lord)! Her personal relationship with her Savior spanned several decades.

If heaven is a place that is full of love, then Bobbie Lancaster will feel ‘right at home’ in heaven! If people (heavenly citizens) do any hugging in heaven, then Bobbie will be at the ‘front of the line’, ready to ‘hug’ and ‘hug’ and ‘hug’ and ‘hug’! And everyone will love her hugs! Everyone in heaven, whom she touches, will immediately know that they are being touched by a ‘supernatural lover’, of redeemed human beings! If there is a heavenly citizen who, while on earth, never knew the joy of receiving a ‘hug’, that heavenly citizen will quickly know the joy of a hug, when my sister Bobbie approaches him/her!

-By Ron Christian-



REFLECTIONS OF IMMORTALITY

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:9

The writer Ardis Whitman wrote an article about a young mother who was getting breakfast for her five children and husband, getting them off to school and work, respectively. The kitchen swirled in turmoil as she fixed orange juice, poured coffee, and fried bacon and eggs for everybody. The sun was streaming into the kitchen where they were having breakfast, and everybody was talking at once. Her husband was playing with the youngest child, punching him affectionately in the chest, and things were all in a hubbub – when suddenly ethereal light flooded the kitchen, brighter than the light of the sun. It was reflected on the faces of her children and her husband. She realized how terribly much she loved them all and what a glorious privilege life was. The beauty of that moment showed her for all time what motherhood was, and family life, and the essence of life itself. It had burst through the veil which separates the fleeting from the eternal. It was the glory of immortality perceived amid the commonplace.

Whitman also wrote about an old man with whom she sat during a journey by train one day. He was gazing out the window, watching everything. She did not know this old man. But as they passed a flashing brook coming out of a woods and picking up the diamonds of the sun, he said to her, “Look at that brook! Did you ever see anything so clean? Isn’t it fascinating?” Then, catching sight of a bluebird reflecting the sun on his wings as he glided downwind, the old man exclaimed, “Look at the beauty, the grace, the symmetry, the loveliness of that bluebird!” Next, he saw a hay wagon going into a barn and he said, “Isn’t that beautiful, a hay wagon in a barn door in the morning?”

“Sir, you astonish me,” Adris Whitman remarked, “and you move me deeply. You have described beauty to me. And all are such simple things.”

He was silent for a long moment and then he said, “I was told by a doctor yesterday that I cannot possibly live more than two months. Last night I had a great battle with myself and I talked it over with God. This morning I awakened in a normal way – and yet I didn’t. It is as though I have never been truly awake before. I’ve never in all my life seen the beauty that is in the world as I see it this morning.”

What was it? Reflections of that higher world, intimations of immortality in the commonplace. People who know God have this sensitive, exquisite delight in the world.

Oh, surely God would never have made a world like this had He not made something infinitely better. There is so much imperfection in this world, so much sin, so much contention, so much prejudice, so much hate, so much downright meanness. And yet, so much goodness, so much love, so much perfection, so much beauty, so much faith that can only be understood as reflections of immortality that have gotten mixed up with mortality but nevertheless shine through.

-By Normal Vincent Peale-



TIME FOR A PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“Thank You, God, that those believers who, like sheep, maintain a close relationship to You, the Good Shepherd, will enjoy great protection and abundant provisions. The resources, which You the Good Shepherd make available to the sheep, are most wonderful – Contentment, Peace, Restoration and Guidance. The relationship between the Good Shepherd and the sheep is strong and durable – durable in spite of the threat and eventual inevitability of physical death, durable in spite of the fact of life’s many spiritual enemies, durable in spite of the changes and the chances of life’s circumstances

over a long period of time.”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

It is the purpose of the Good Shepherd (Psalms 23) to take every one of His Sheep to heaven! Allow the Good Shepherd to love you, to sustain you, and to restore you. Learn daily to allow the Good Shepherd gently to lead you into “green pastures” and beside “still waters”.

If you follow Him closely in life (obeying His instructions), then it will be ‘natural’ (and most glorious) for you to follow Him into your eternal home. Death will not be an ‘enemy’ (a terror), but, instead, a ‘FRIEND’!

-By Ron Christian-



OVERCOMING OUR NATURAL RELUCTANCE TO DIE BECAUSE OF GOD’S PROMISE OF UNIMAGINABLE TREASURES!

So, then, Christian faith does not destroy the natural reluctance to put aside the old companion of our lives. The old house, though it be smoky, dimly lighted, and, by our own careless keeping, sluttish and grimy in many a corner, yet is the only house we have ever known, and to be absent from it is untried and strange. There is nothing wrong in saying ‘we would not be unclothed but clothed upon.’ Nature speaks there. We may reverently entertain the same feelings which our Pattern acknowledged, when He said, ‘I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.’ And there would be nothing sinful in repeating His prayer with His conditions, ‘If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.’

But then the text suggests to us the large Christian possessions and hope which counterwork this reluctance, in the measure in which we live lives of faith. There is the assurance of that ultimate home in which all the transiency of the present material organisation is exchanged for the enduring permanence which knows no corruption. The ‘tent’ is swept away to make room for the ‘building’. The earthly house is dissolved in order that there may be reared round the homeless tenant the house eternal, ‘not made with hands,’ God’s own work, which is waiting in the heavens; because the power that shall frame it is there.

The Apostle says: ‘I would rather not. I should like if I could escape it. It is an unwelcome necessity; but when I see what I do see beyond, I am ready. Since so it must

be, I will go, not reluctantly, nor dragged away from life, nor clinging desperately to it as it slips from my hands, nor dreading anything that may happen beyond; but always courageous, and prepared to go whithersoever the path may take me, since I am sure that it ends in His bosom.' He is willing to go from the house of the body, because to do that is to go home to Christ.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pp. 359-360.)



THE BEAUTIFUL SIDE OF DEATH

It's hard to think of death as something beautiful. We normally think of it as ugly, vicious, an unwanted and reprehensible intruder. But there is a sense in which death can be beautiful: "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*" (*Psalms 116:15*)

The death of a believer is precious to God. He has gone home. An old Christian song says, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through." Paul wrote that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). Second Corinthians 5:8 says, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

Home is a beautiful word – and the believer's home is not this planet, but heaven, "with the Lord." Death can be precious if you know that you are going home.

Paul described death as gain rather than loss. He spoke of his desire "to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." He wrote: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body* (Philippians 1:21-24).

What a tremendous perspective! He lived his life for others, but his great desire was to be with the Lord in heaven. Death can be a sweet release into the presence of God.

John caught a glimpse of that when he wrote: "*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' Yes, 'says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them''*" (Revelation 14:13)

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! That's the beautiful side of death.

(David Hocking, *Who Am I?*, pp. 136, 137.)



ENTRANCE INTO HEAVEN ONLY BECAUSE OF A RESPONSIVE HEART TO GOD'S REVEALED 'LIGHT'!

One's eternal destiny depends upon one thing and one thing only – the kind of 'heart response' that a person gives to God's revelation of the Light that God gives to a person (even if that 'Light' comes in a diminished form of 'General Revelation' and not 'Special Revelation').

Only those will be in heaven who have, honestly and positively, responded in their heart to God's revelation of "light" (whether it is response to the "Concealed Christ" or response to the "Known Christ")!

It is encouraging for us members of a "fallen Race" to know that God did not abandon us when, through our Race's Representative (Adam), the entire human race miserably 'fell into sin!' Through a rather long and complex plan (over a period of many centuries), God finally brought His Son into the world to accomplish His plan for 'world redemption'.

No human can fully understand the 'mystery of iniquity' (sin), or the 'mystery of divinely-accomplished redemption through the cross and resurrection', or the 'mystery of the human free will' – but, great as these mysteries are, - God, nevertheless, mightily 'works his miracles' of human transformation!

There are millions of persons today, throughout the world in probably every country, who are 'openly acknowledging and serving Christ', and, doubtless, (because of the universal 'work of the Holy Spirit') there are, doubtless, also many more persons throughout the entire world whose hearts are presently turned toward the Living God! These latter (many) persons are presently seeking the 'concealed' Christ, as best as they know, with their very limited knowledge and with their narrow opportunities, spiritually-speaking!

All persons will be in heaven who on earth 'walked in the light of truth' as God gave them 'light'! Some persons will enter heaven, possessing so much more knowledge of Jesus than other persons – other (less fortunate) persons who received so much less light on earth, persons who possessed little knowledge regarding the true identity of Jesus.

What God will judge, in the end of human existence, is not the accuracy of one's mental

knowledge about God, and about Man, and about Sin, and about Jesus Christ, and about the complexities of the plan of salvation (atonement, justification, regeneration, sanctification).

Instead of the mental knowledge of Christian Doctrine, it will be the response of the human heart to the revealed truth of God, given in abundant measure to some persons, and given in very small measure to some other person.

-By Ron Christian-



TO BE SEPARATED FROM EARTH'S COMPANY IS TO BE UNITED WITH HEAVEN'S CITIZENS!

Seen from this side, the ministry of Death parts a man from dear ones, but oh! If we could see round the turn in the corridor, we should see that the solitude is but for a moment, and that the true office of Death is not so much to part from those beloved on earth as to carry to, and unite with, Him that is best Beloved in the heavens, and in Him with all His saints. They that are joined to Christ, as they who pass from earth are joined, are thereby joined to all who, in like manner, are knit to Him. Although other dear bonds are loosed by the bony fingers of the Skeleton, his very loosing of them ties more closely the bond that unites us to Jesus, and when the dull ear of the dying has ceased to hear the voices of earth that used to thrill it in their lowest whisper, I suppose it hears another Voice that says: 'When thou passest through the fire I will be with thee, and through the waters they shall not overflow thee.' Thus the Separator unites, first to Jesus, and then to 'the general assembly and Church of the first-born,' and leads into the city of the living God, the pilgrims who long have lived, often isolated, in the desert.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 61.)



WILL THERE BE 'TERROR' OR 'PEACE' WHEN YOU FIRST MEET GOD?

There is an instinctive recoil from Death, because there's an instinctive suspicion that after Death is the Judgment, and that, somehow or other – never mind about the drapery in which the idea may be embodied for our weakness – when a man dies he passes to a state where he will reap the consequences of what he has sown here. But to Christ's servant that last thought is robbed of its sting, and all the poison sucked out of it, for he can say: 'He that died for me makes it possible for me to die undreading, and to pass

thither, knowing that I shall meet as my Judge Him whom I have trusted as my Savior, and so may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.

Knit these four contrasts together. Death as a step into a dim unknown *versus* Death as a step into a region lighted by Jesus; Death as the cessation of activity *versus* Death as the introduction to nobler opportunities, and the endowment with nobler capacities of service; Death as the separator and isolator *versus* Death as uniting to Jesus and all His lovers; Death as haling us to the judgment-seat of the adversary *versus* Death as bringing us to the tribunal of the Christ; and I think we can understand how Christians can venture to say, ‘All things are ours, whether life or death’ which leads to a better life.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg.62.)



DEATH OPENS THE ‘DOOR’ INTO THE NEARER PRESENCE OF OUR LOVING LORD!

Brethren, we have to take His yoke upon us by the act of faith which leads to a love that issues in an obedience which will become more and more complete, as we become more fully Christ’s. Then death will be ours, for then we shall count that the highest good for us will be fuller union with, a fuller possession of, and a completer conformity to Jesus Christ our King, and that whatever brings us these, even though it brings also pain and sorrow and much from which we shrink, is all on our side. It is possible – may it be so with each of us! – that for us Death may be, not an enemy that bans us into darkness and inactivity, or hales us to a judgment-seat, but the Angel who wakes us, at whose touch the chains fall off, and who leads us through ‘the iron gate that opens its own accord,’ and brings us into the City.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pp. 64, 65.)



VICTORY OVER ‘THE FEAR OF DEATH’!

As a pastor, I have dealt with many folks who were afraid to die. Death is a terrible enemy to them. It obliterates their plans, wrecks their dreams, and ends their hopes. Many people seem in a race with death, fearful that it will overtake them before they’ve done the things they hoped to do.

The Bible does call death “the last enemy” (I Corinthians 15:26). But to the believer,

death is a conquered enemy and there is no reason to fear. The book of Hebrews says: *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).*

Believers in Jesus Christ have been set free from the fear of death! The death of Jesus Christ for our sins has smashed the power of the devil. He has no more control over us. Our sin and its consequence – death – has been paid for, and Christ's resurrection guarantees our own resurrection, when we will live with him forever. So much for the fear of death!

(David Hocking, *Who Am I?*, pg.138.)



TO BE REDEEMED IN LIFE IS TO BE RESURRECTED IN ETERNITY!

If men are to be redeemed from the power of the grave, there must be a new personal centre of life; and union with Him, which can only be effected by faith, is the condition of receiving life from Him, which gradually conquers the death of sin now, and will triumph over bodily death in the final resurrection.

Since Christ's Resurrection assures us of the future waking, it changes death into 'sleep,' and that sleep does not mean unconsciousness any more than natural sleep does, but only rest from toil, and cessation of intercourse with the external world.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Exposition of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 248.)



THE 'CONDITION OF ONE'S HEART' OR THE 'BRILLIANCE OF ONE'S MIND'?

God will judge the 'condition of one's heart', not the fullness of one's mental comprehension of Christian Doctrines! It will be the condition of the human heart (i.e., the receptivity to the Holy Spirit's multiple works of enlightenment, conviction, offer of forgiveness and new life, etc.) that will determine the final outcome of one's eternal destiny!

If a person's heart is right with God (and only God can fully and accurately determine

this), then that person will be welcomed into God's eternal kingdom – to enjoy the glories of heaven, along with the saints who early in their life responded to the 'revealed Christ' of 'special revelation'!

Both the 'privileged ones', and the 'much less privileged ones', will be together in holy fellowship in heaven – those who responded to the lesser 'light' of general revelation, and those who responded to the greater 'light' of special revelation!

According to the famous passage in Matthew 25, it seems quite apparent that Jesus, as the Judge of all men, at the End of human existence, will applaud each person's HEART RESPONSE to the needs of one's fellow men, even if some of the compassion-oriented persons do not have a so-called 'evangelical conversion'! Jesus said of the compassionate person (who does all kinds of good deeds) that "inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

All they know is that they desire to help people, to alleviate their terrible sufferings, to befriend the lonely, to give a listening ear to the troubled words of persons, to give a generous portion of their money to help the poor, to visit those who are grief-stricken, to share their presence with those in prison, to give away their talents to bless the troubled ones, and so much more.

You may respond to these compassion-oriented persons that they could not do all these 'acts of charity' unless they are 'born-again Christians.' Precisely! These 'fruits of godliness' come not from mere sentimental inclinations'.

The one who is humbly compassionate is the same one who is a 'child of God – truly 'born again'. Such a person has surrendered his heart and his will to others – to serve, to care, to empathize, and to be an instrument of healing to others.

-By Ron Christian-



FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST CAN EXPECT A PEACEFUL DEPARTURE FROM THIS WORLD!

My dear friends, we have each of us to pass through that last struggle; but we may make it either a quiet going to sleep with a loved Face bending over our closing eyes, like a mother's over her child's cradle, and the same Face meeting us when we open them in the morning of heaven; or we may make it a reluctant departure from all that we care for, and a trembling advance into all from which conscience and heart shrink.

Which is it going to be to you? The answer depends upon that to another question. Are you looking to that Christ that died and is alive for evermore as your life and your salvation? Do you hold fast that Gospel which Paul preached, ‘how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures’? If you do, life will be a calm, persevering, expectant waiting upon Him, and death will be nothing more terrible than falling asleep.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 215.)



A HEAVENLY CONSTITUTION THAT IS COMPATIBLE WITH THE HEAVENLY ENVIRONMENT!

To use modern terms, organism and environment must be adapted to each other. A fish must have the water, the creatures that flourish at the poles would not survive at the equator. A man with his gross earthly body, so thoroughly adapted to his earthly abode, would be all out of harmony with his surroundings in that higher world, and its rarified air would be too thin and pure for his lungs. Can there be any possibility of making him fit to live in a spiritual world? Apart from revelation, the dreary answer must be ‘No.’ But the ‘mystery’ answers with ‘Yes.’ The change from physical to spiritual is clearly necessary, if there is to be a blessed life hereafter.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 249.)



THE ‘WONDER’ OF THE ‘GLORIFIED BODY’!

The glorified body is called “a building of God, a house not made with hands” in 2 Corinthians 5:1, and “our house which is from heaven” in 2 Corinthians 5:2. This is in contrast to our mortal bodies which came from the dust of the earth. “*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*” (1 Corinthians 15:49). It is important to note that Paul was not groaning because he was in a human body, but because he longed to see Jesus Christ and receive a glorified body. He was groaning for glory!

This explains why death holds no terrors for the Christian. Paul called his death a “departure” (2 Timothy 4:6). One meaning of this Greek word is “to take down one’s tent and move on.” But how can we be sure that we shall one day have new bodies like

the glorified body of our Saviour? We can be sure because the Spirit lives within us. Paul mentioned the sealing and the earnest of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 1:22 (see also Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer's body is the "down payment" that guarantees the future inheritance, including a glorified body. In modern Greek, the word translated "earnest" means "engagement ring." The church is engaged to Jesus Christ and is waiting for the Bridegroom to come to take her to the wedding.

(Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, vol.1, pg. 645.)



PARTICIPTION IN GOD'S ETERNAL LIFE – NOW AND FOREVER!

Through union with Him each of us may possess His immortal risen life, in which Death, the engulfer, is himself engulfed; Death, the conqueror, is conquered utterly and forever; Death, the serpent, has his sting drawn, and is harmless. That participation in Christ's life is begun even here, and God 'giveth us the victory' now, even while we live outward lives that must end in death, and will give it perfectly in the resurrection, when 'they cannot die any more,' and death itself is dead.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scriptures, I Corinthians*, pg. 250.)



WILL IT BE A SURPRISE TO SOME PERSONS THAT THEY ARE INHABITANTS OF HEAVEN (MATTHEW 25)?

Based upon the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25, I think that it is likely that there will be a multitude of persons in heaven who, while they lived on earth, did not profess a deep and a personal relationship with Christ, but who will, nevertheless, be in heaven (apparently to their own surprise, according to the kind of response that these certain persons will give to Jesus, in eternity)!

These citizens of heaven (who are surprised at the wonderful outcome of their compassionate life, surprised that the Master gave them 'entrance' into heaven), I say, these surprised citizens of heaven 'walked in all the light of truth' that they received on earth, namely, the 'LIGHT OF TRUE COMPASSION' towards their fellow men on earth.

They did not realize, while they carried on their active life of compassion on earth, that the origin (fountainhead) of their compassion was nothing less than the very

‘compassionate heart’ of Jesus Himself!

Such persons responded to the ‘saving grace’ of Jesus rather ignorantly, at the very time that they sincerely committed (surrendered) their entire life and energies and talents and skills and training and motivations to the caring for the imprisoned and the starving and the weak and the oppressed and the widow and the poor and the injured persons around them!

They manifested the ‘fruits of Christlikeness’, so, indeed, they surely possessed the very person of Christ! Even though, today, these compassionate persons are unaware of it, while they are gladly and joyously and sacrificially carrying out their ‘works’ of charity’, the motivation for their labors of compassion was the indwelling Holy Spirit!

There is a multitude of medical doctors, throughout the world, who are ‘doing the work of Christ’ and some of them do not even realize that their works are motivated by Christ’s Spirit! Their compassionate works have the ‘smile of God’s approval’ resting upon them!

It would be much better if all (unenlightened) doctors (ignorant of the motivation for their genuine works of medical intervention), would have their ‘eyes opened’ to the reality of the Christ who stands beside them while they perform delicate surgeries, and while they are bringing comfort to their dying patients.

Whether or not these physicians are aware of the divinely-imparted strength within them, to enable them to perform their medical procedures, it is, nevertheless, true that it is the ‘unseen Christ’ who is the ‘Author’ of all healing. No doctor, of course, can heal a human body, but Christ (the Healer) has chosen (in most situations) to ‘use’ human ‘instruments’ (like surgeons and psychiatrists) to ‘achieve’ the healing of the human body and mind.

-By Ron Christian-



THE HARDSHIPS OF EARTH WILL BE REPLACED BY THE RICHES OF HEAVEN!

All the limitations and weaknesses which are necessarily associated with the perishableness of the present abode are at an end for ever. No more fatigue, no more working beyond the measure of power, no more need for recuperation and repose; no more dread of sickness and weakness; no more possibility of decay. ‘It is sown in

corruption; it is raised in incorruption' – neither 'can they die any more'.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scriptures, I Corinthians*, pg. 336.)



OUR 'BARREN' BODIES ARE YEARNING FOR FULL DELIVERANCE – IN ETERNITY!

All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

(Portions of Scripture from Romans, Chapter 8, In the 'Message Bible'; by Eugene Peterson)



TIME FOR A LITTLE INSIGHT!

Not only has Christ decisively won the victory over death for all humanity in a universal sense, but also the Good Shepherd has promised individually to be with the dying saint to bring comfort. *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me!" (Psalm 23:4)*

Even in the hour of death, there is comfort for the child of God. The Good Shepherd will not forsake his sheep then, but He will gently carry them in His arms through the "Valley of Death"! How durable is the relationship of the Good Shepherd with His sheep? It is so durable that not even physical death can destroy this relationship. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep through the valley of death into the portals of heaven.

Paul said, *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”!*

Death for the believer is not a fearful enemy but a kind friend, which allows the believer to enjoy the nearer presence of Christ in heaven.

-By Ron Christian-



EXCHANGING YOUR EARTHLY ‘TENT’ FOR YOUR HEAVENLY MANSION!

The ‘tent’ is ‘earthly’, not merely because, to use a kindred metaphor, it is a ‘building of clay’, but because, by all its capacities, it belongs to, corresponds with, and is fitted only for, this lower order of things, the seen and the perishable. And, on the other hand, the ‘mansion’ is in ‘the heavens’, even whilst the future tenant is a nomad in his tent. That is so, because the power which can create that future abode is ‘in the heavens.’ It is so called in order to express the security in which it is kept for those who shall one day enter upon it. And it is so, further, to express the order of things with which it brings its dwellers into contact. ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.’ That future home of the spirit will be congruous with the region in which it dwells; fitted for the heavens in which it is now preserved. And thus the two contrasts – adapted to the perishable, and itself perishable, belonging to the eternal and itself incorruptible – are the two which loom largest before the Apostle’s mind.

(Alexander Maclaren, Expositions of Holy Scriptures, I Corinthians, pp. 336, 337.)



WHAT DOES THE ‘MASTER OF MEN’ SAY ABOUT DEATH AND THE HEREAFTER?

As a minister, I’m often asked to speak at funerals. I no longer have to ask the family what they want me to say; I already know. Oh, I may have to ask a question or two about the deceased, and that I do, but I don’t ask them about what they want me to say. I know.

They want to hear what God says about death. They want to hear how God would answer their questions about the life hereafter. They don’t want my opinion; nor do they want the thoughts of a philosopher or the research of a scientist. They want to know what God says. If Jesus were here, at the head of this casket, in the middle of this cemetery, what would he say?

And so under the canopy of sorrow, I give God's words. I share the eulogy Jesus gave for himself. The disciples did not know it was his farewell address. No one did, but it was. He knew he had just witnessed his final sunset. He knew death would come with the morning. So he spoke about death. Here is how he began.

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me.
There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not
tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to
prepare a place for you. After I go and prepare a place
for you, I will come back and take you to be with me
so that you may be where I am (John 14:1-4).

What kind of statement is that? Trust me with your death. When you face the tomb, don't be troubled – trust me! You get the impression that to God the grave is a no-brainer. He speaks as casually as the mechanic who says to a worried client, "Sure, the engine needs an overhaul, but don't worry. I can do it." For us it's an ordeal. For him it's no big deal.

(Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, pp. 61, 62.)



WILL YOUR TALENTS, ABILITIES, SKILLS BE PUT TO USE IN HEAVEN?

It tells us that what we are doing here is learning our trade, and that we are to be moved into another workshop there, to practise it. Nothing can bereave us of the force we made our own, being here; and 'there is nobler work for us to do' when the Master of all the servants stoops from His Throne and says: 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee rule over many things; have thou authority over ten cities.' Then the faithfulness of the steward will be exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for a share in the joy of the Lord.

So another of the elements which make Death an enemy is turned into an element which makes it a friend, and instead of the separation from this earthly body, the organ of our activity and the medium of our connection with the external universe being the condemnation of the naked spirit into greater activity. For nothing drops away at death that does not make a man the richer for its loss, and when the dross is purged from the silver, there remains 'a vessel unto honour, fit for the Master's use.' This mightier activity is the contribution to our blessedness, which Death makes to them who use their activities here in Christ's service.

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 60.)



PASSING THROUGH DEATH INTO HEAVEN – UNALTERED IN YOUR PERSONALITY!

And, finally, the bearing of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ upon our own hopes of the future may be suggested. It teaches us that life has nothing to do with organisation, but persists apart from the body. It teaches us that a man may pass from death and be unaltered in the substance of his being; and it teaches us that the earthly house of our tabernacle may be fashioned like unto the glorious house in which He dwells now at the right hand of God, There is no other absolute proof of immortality than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If we accept with all our hearts and minds Paul's Gospel in its fundamental facts, we need not fear to die, because He has died, and by dying has been the death of death. We need not doubt that we shall live again, because He was dead and is alive for ever more. This Samson has carried away the gates on His strong shoulders, and death is no more a dungeon but a passage. If we rest ourselves upon Him, then we can take up, for ourselves and for all that are dear to us and have gone before us, the triumphant song, 'O Death, where is thy sting?' 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

(Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, I Corinthians*, pg. 205.)



A MUCH BETTER BANQUET AWAITS US

*"The form of this world is passing away."
1 Corinthians 7:31*

I have noticed that children, when they were going out to a feast, eat sparingly so that they might have a keener appetite for the coming desserts. Likewise, dear friends, you are going to a feast above. Don't dull your appetite with earthly joys. Hold them loosely, looking upon them as fading. As you walk through a flower garden, you never think of lying down to make your home among its roses, so pass through the garden of this world's best joys. Smell the flowers in passing, but do not tarry. Jesus calls you to His banqueting house, where you will feed among the lilies on the mountains of spices. Oh,

it ill becomes a child of God to be fond of an earthly banquet when you will be sitting down quite soon with Jesus. It ill becomes you to be greatly preoccupied with dress and show when you will so soon see the face that was crowned with thorns.

Brethren, if you are ever so deeply taken up with any enjoyment that it takes away your love for prayer or for your Bible, or that it would frighten you to hear the cry, “The bridegroom comes” and you’d reply, “Has He come already?” then you are abusing this world.

(*The Best of Robert Murray McCheyne*, pg. 112.)



AS A HEAVENLY CITIZEN, YOU WILL EXPERIENCE DEEP LOVE AND MUTUAL SHARING WITH YOUR ETERNAL ‘FAMILY MEMBERS’!

In terms of humility, I once read a few excerpts from the diary of the young woman (who died when she was only 24) who was Catholic, and had been honored by Pope John Paul II, whose name is St. Therese of Lisieux. This lady was so much in love with Jesus that she was “indifferent whether God chose her, or anyone else, to do his work”. (Francis Cardinal Arinze, *Divine Providence*, pg. 53) In her diary she wrote, “What does it matter to me that it be I or another person to show this way to souls; as long as it is shown, what does it matter who the instrument is?”

What a Christ-centered, others-oriented, self-forgetful, (and liberating) way to live! It matters not who the instrument is (me or someone else) that God chooses: to preach, to teach, to evangelize, to disciple, to do missionary work, to do linguistic work of Bible translations. Or to write great books, to administrate great colleges or seminaries, to compose great music, to sing heart-touching songs, to raise large amounts of money for missions, to think brilliant theological thoughts, to found and develop great Christian movements, to speak daily on the radio or television about Christ to millions of folks!

As this true young saint said before her death at only 24, “What does it matter who the instrument is?”

The famous theologian, Jonathan Edwards, said that he believed in heaven every redeemed person will enjoy the accomplishments of other redeemed persons, as if those accomplishments were his very own accomplishments! No envy, jealousy, covetousness, comparison, competition, strife in heaven, between the heavenly citizens, but only mutual love, appreciation, sharing, caring, and enjoyment of each other. There will be only profound respect and total self-giving, with no condescension, no pride (in personal

accomplishments). Everyone sharing the God-given gifts with each other, and everyone (with vast diversity of personality, experience, and talent) joining in corporate, united, and totally harmonious praise of the matchless and altogether beautiful Savior! This is what I think it will be like in heaven – perfect peace, harmony, love, and total humility. Everyone will be learning from one another without intimidation, humiliation, or belittlement. But learning together with great discernment, dignity, appreciation, and love. “All for each and each for all” - praising the great Tri-une God. God, who has stamped His image upon every human being in that Celestial City!

Yes, it is true that God will reward every person hereafter (in eternity) according to the degree and quality of works, which each person (on earth) has performed. Only God (in mercy) is qualified to Judge on that “Great Day of Evaluation”. There will be different degrees of levels of rewards in heaven – based on the quality of life each person has lived for Christ on earth. But, with this awesome “Judgment of Evaluation” in mind (which every Christian must anticipate and prepare for), however, each Christian must not panic or become competitive for greater “success” (fruitfulness) on earth (in order that he might get greater rewards in heaven, for himself). Why do we work on earth, as Christians? To build up a greater “store” of accomplishments, so that we will be assured of greater rewards hereafter? Surely not! For is not such reasoning an expression of “egotism” and “selfishness”? We work because we deeply love Christ and sincerely love others! Love is the greater motivator of our actions (good works).

-By Ron Christian-



JESUS CHRIST, MY SURE DEFENSE

Anon. German (1653)

Trans. Based on Catherine Winkworth (1863)

Jesus Christ, my sure defense
And my Savior, ever liveth;
Knowing this, my confidence
Rest upon the hope it giveth
Through the night of death be fraught
Still with many an anxious thought.

Jesus, my Redeemer, lives;
I, too, unto life shall waken.

Endless joy my Savior gives;
Shall my courage, then, be shaken?
Shall I fear, or could the Head
Rise and leave his members dead?

Nay, too closely am I bound
Unto him by hope forever,
Faith's strong hand the Rock hath found,
Grasped it, and will leave it never;
Even death now cannot part
From its Lord the trusting heart.

I am flesh and must return
Unto dust, whence I am taken;
But by faith I now discern
That from death I shall awaken
With my Savior to abide
In his glory, at his side.

Glorified, I shall anew
With this flesh then be enshrouded;
In this body I shall view
God, my Lord, with eyes unclouded;
In this flesh I then shall see
Jesus Christ eternally.

Then these eyes my Lord shall know,
My Redeemer and my Brother;
In his love my soul shall glow,
I myself, and not another!
Then the weakness I feel here
Shall forever disappear.

They who sorrow here and moan
There in gladness shall be reigning;
Earthly here the seed is sown,
There immortal life attaining.
Here our sinful bodies die,
Glorified to dwell on high.

Then take comfort and rejoice,

For his members Christ will cherish.
Fear not, they will hear his voice,
Dying, they shall never perish;
For the very grave is stirred
When the trumpet's blast is heard.

Laugh to scorn the gloomy grave
And at death no longer tremble;
He, the Lord, who came to save
Will at last his own assemble.
They will go their Lord to meet,
Treading death beneath their feet.

O, then, draw away your hearts
Now from pleasures base and hollow.
There to share what he imparts.
Here his footsteps ye must follow.
Fix your hearts beyond the skies,
Whither ye yourselves would rise.



**SHARLA WAS ABSOLUTELY BEAUTIFUL AND STRIKING!
(SHARLA'S HEAVENLY APPEARANCE)**

My brother (Jerry Christian) on the Friday night of August 14, 1981, experienced one of the “darkest nights of his soul” when he learned that his beloved 15 year old daughter, Sharla, died suddenly while she was riding on a roller coaster at an amusement park in Denver, Colorado! When Sharla was about 3 years old (if I recall correctly), she fell out of the backend of a pick-up truck, and because of the hard hit on her head, she became occasionally subject to seizures (for which, of course, she took medication). Whether she forgot to take her medication on that dreadful night in August, or whether her medication simply was “not working” that night, I do not know. But regardless of the reason for the tragic accident, Sharla went Home to Heaven very unexpectedly. Just thirteen days following her death, her father had a most unusual “visitation” from his daughter (who had been a heavenly citizen by that time, for almost two weeks)! Jerry shared that phenomenal experience (in writing) with some of his family members, including me. Even though I have not included all the specific details regarding the context of the evening when this happened, I have included the “essence” of the amazing “heavenly visit” that Sharla made to her beloved father. May God minister to your own spirit, and encourage your heart, as you contemplate the “glorious mysteries” of the “heavenly

realm” (that may be closer to us than we realize)!

“That which follows is so unusual, I realize it may be a mistake to reduce it to writing...I will make no attempt to interpret or explain; I simply want to record this so that I will never lose from my memory that which happened...it was so beautiful, yet so ‘shaking’!

“My mind was thinking through many things related to all the events that had taken place after Sharla died. I didn’t go to sleep – but rather was lost in a million thoughts and dreams.

“Then, at about 11:00 pm, I remembered that I had not left the lamp on down in the living room. I was afraid that Marsha might get up to go to the bathroom and not see the steps. I then got up, went downstairs, turned on the light, came back upstairs, looked out the windows at the beautiful view to the northwest, and then went back to bed.

“I still wasn’t able to sleep, so again I just lay there.

“At 11:30 pm, with no prior warning at all, Marsha got out of bed and with no hesitation what-so-ever went right out the bedroom door and turned right – to the other bedroom. I thought that perhaps she was mostly still asleep and was trying to get to the bathroom to the left. I waited about 30 seconds, and then decided that I should check on her.

“I went into the other bedroom, and found Marsha curled up on top of my foam mattress and sleeping bag – where she and Sharla had slept several times before. I assumed Marsha had gotten tired of the waterbed, and wanted to sleep on the foam mattress. I helped her open the bag and get all curled up inside it. Almost immediately, Marsha went to sleep; she looked so comfortable.

“I then went back to bed, and after awhile, I too fell asleep...

“I don’t know at what time the following happened, but I have never in my life had an experience like this one. (It will be humanly impossible to accurately relate this, but I want to try...)

“I have never experienced such intensity...First, I heard Sharla’s voice. Her voice was clear, but seemed to be coming from far away. She was saying in her beautiful, distinct voice, “Hello, dad. Hello, daddy. It’s me – Sharla.”

“Then, I saw Sharla. Sharla was absolutely beautiful and striking. She was healthy, and so totally alive. And most striking of all was something I can only describe as an “essence” - a halo of luminous light – a “glow” - surrounding her entire body. She

seemed to be “floating” - so gracefully, without any rush; just totally there, yet so distinctly different and beautiful...

“Sharla said, ‘Hi, dad. I can only stay for a while; then I have to leave again. I have come back to say how very much I love you. I want to lie between you and Marsha.’ Sharla then kissed, hugged, caressed, and expressed her love to Marsha and to me. She said, ‘Daddy, don’t be sad; I love you so much, daddy. I have gone to a better place – to Heaven. I love you, daddy. I must go now. I love you, daddy...’ and then Sharla, in all her perfect beauty “floated” off to heaven.”

(Account by Jerry Christian)



ARE YOU ANTICIPATING YOUR HEAVENLY LIFE OF UNALLOYED JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF YOUR JOYOUS GOD?

There is a wonderful picture of my nephew Jackson as a toddler that hangs in my parents’, his grandparents’, den. His face is glowing, His inviting smile and his innocent brown eyes proclaim a pure joyfulness that permeates his entire being as he holds a fist full of mud up to his mother behind the camera. The picture captures the moment perfectly. “See Mom? Mud is awesome!”

Somewhere in all of us, there is a hand full of mud, a brush full of paint, a sonnet, an aria, a piece of oak furniture, a set of curtains, a sundress, a picture album, a popsicle-stick log cabin, a Crayola drawing taped to the refrigerator, or a plateful of multicolored cupcakes that demonstrate the pure joy we experience from being in the world and working our talents and skills to create something that did not exist ten minutes, ten months, or ten years prior. The joy that proceeds from these creative acts is just a taste of what God pours out from himself every moment from all eternity into all eternity. We mustn’t forget that God is the most joyous and creative of all the beings in the universe.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing for Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pg. 245.)



CAN YOU IMAGINE THE JOY YOU WILL EXPERIENCE WHEN YOU FIND YOUR PLACE AT THE HEAVENLY BANQUET TABLE?

It’s no surprise that of all the metaphors used to describe heaven, the one that speaks to me most intimately is the image of a banquet. I imagine such a banquet will take a lot of

planning, eons of forethought, boundless energy, and amazing levels of devotion. Such a banquet will perfectly quench every possible hunger and thirst. The triune God, the celebration's most glorious participant, will sit at the head of this table. He will offer his blessing. We will radiate his glory as we finally behold him face-to-face. Every longing will cease, for we are wanted and honored around that table. There is a place setting for each of us. Most of us will likely have traveled long distances, and there will be amazing stories to tell. Old friendships and crucial relationships will be restored and redeemed. Faith will fill every cup. Hope will be the music carried in the air, and love's aroma will fill the room as it is lavishly served, one to another. We will experience eternal belonging. We will listen as the elders retell the story of God's glorious deeds, those known and unknown to us. We will serve others while being served by others. We will be delighted in while being delightful. We will celebrate while being part of the celebration. We will be thankful, restful, and peaceful, all at once.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing for Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pg. 269.)



TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O God, I see that covetousness is a universal experience of all mankind. Everyone experiences envy. It is what I covet that determines whether my covetousness is helpful or hurtful, pleasing or painful, God-honoring or shameful. If I envy the health, the wealth, and the power of the wicked, then my envy is evidence that my heart is set upon the wrong values of life. On the other hand, if I covet righteousness, holiness, godliness, wisdom, and the ‘smile of God’s approval’, then my covetousness becomes the incentive to moral discipline, prayer, and spiritual growth.

“Enable me to love God and to prepare for my death by coveting Your presence daily in all the situations of my life – Sad or Happy! Then my heart will be prepared to meet You when I take my last breath! I Love You! Keep me true to You at all times!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

‘What gets your attention gets you!’ every day practice fixing your attention on Christ and His Word (at work, at home, and at play), and you will become more like Christ. Moreover, you will never ‘Fall From Grace’!

-By Ron Christian-

WILL ALL HEAVENLY DWELLERS GROW TOGETHER THROUGH THE MUTUAL SHARING OF ALL THEIR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS AND TALENTS?

I don't believe there are any sidelines or benches as we have come to conceive of them in heaven. Rather, in eternity we will be encouraged, perhaps even required, to own our lives and pursue our gifts, talents, interests, and purpose as responsible members fitted into the larger body of Christ, while simultaneously assuming our own potential. We shouldn't (and in heaven likely won't be able to) delegate our sense of purpose and giftedness to others. The gift of our lives is ours to facilitate and develop for God's glory. There is no hiding in heaven; there is just what is. And what is, is unavoidable. Therefore, joy and purposefulness will be unavoidable as well. The inability to hide also means the inability to deny or distract attention away from who and what we are and who and what we can be as joyful, thankful, and empowered members of the bride of Christ.

(Gary Black Jr., *Preparing for Heaven (What Dallas Willard Taught Me)*, pp. 247-248.)



TESTIMONIES REGARDING HEAVEN'S GLORIES

BY

WELL-KNOWN (FAMOUS) PERSONS IN PAST HISTORY



ROBERT L. HERRMANN
(1912-2008)

An American professor of mathematics and Biochemist.

A PART OF GOD’S MASTER PLAN

A person who has no comprehension that God is at work in the world has urgency about living as long as he can – sometimes even a panicky desperation. I don’t share that frenzy, because I understand that this life is not all that there is. Instead of the “un-faith” of some of my research colleagues, I have an eternal expectation – a heavenly home that I expect to inhabit for a far longer period than my earthly lifetime. We read that in God’s house are many mansions and Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us there...

I know I am a part of God’s master plan. I am not here by chance or by accident, but by prescription. And my death will be a part of the same plan of a loving God who is ready to promote me to a better world.

(M. Moody, *Scientists Who Believe*)





WERNHER VON BRAUN
(1912-1977)

German-born American rocket scientist who dreamed of developing rockets from an early age. He designed the first ballistic missile and led the team which put the first American satellite into orbit.

NOTHING DISAPPEARS WITHOUT A TRACE

Many people seem to feel that science has somehow made “religious ideas” untimely or old-fashioned. But I think science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even in the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation. Now if God applies this fundamental principle of indestructibility to the most minute and insignificant parts of his universe, does it not make sense to assume that He applies it also to the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me and continues to teach me strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.

(Ravenhill, *Tried and Transfigured*, *Reader's Digest*, June 1960, pg. 86)





ALICE HEGAN RICE
(1870-1942)

Author of children's books and other books, including *My Pillow Book*, a little book of devotion, with comments and quotations chronicled during a lifetime by one seeking to grow in the spiritual life.

DAILY JOY IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM

I believe in a personal God, because my finite mind cannot conceive of Him in any other way, and because I have experienced a communion with Him, gaining strength in weakness, comfort in sorrow, and daily joy in fellowship with Him...I hold that Jesus Christ is the highest manifestation of God's intention for man, the supreme example of what He wishes us to be. Love is the Eternal Verity, and any real love we have given or received in this world, will not pass out of our lives in the world to come.

(*My Pillow Book*, 1937)





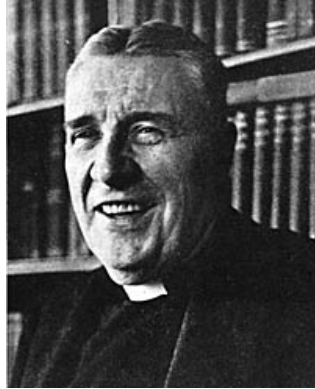
SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE
(1772-1834)

English poet, critic, and philosopher, who was greatly influenced by George Fox and Jakob Boehm. He struggled with his faith, but by the end of his life he was expressing his Christian beliefs: “God’s child in Christ adopted, - Christ my all: In Christ I live! In Christ I draw the breath of the true life!”

THE EVE OF MY DEPARTURE

I have known what the enjoyments and advantages of this life are, and what are the more refined pleasures which learning and intellectual power can bestow; and with all the experience that more than three-score years can give, I now, on the eve of my departure declare to you, that health is a great blessing, competence obtained by honorable industry is a great blessing, and a great blessing it is to have kind, faithful and loving friends and relatives, but that the greatest blessing, as it is the most ennobling of all privileges, is to be indeed a Christian.





SAMUEL MOOR SHOEMAKER
(1893-1963)

IT'S BEEN A GREAT RUN

As I sit in the study on a beautiful, cool August afternoon, I look back with many thanks. It has been a great run. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Much could and should have been better, and I have by no means done what I should have done with all that I have been given. But the overall experience of being alive has been a thrilling experience. I believe that death is a doorway to more of it...But with Christ's atonement and Him gone on before, I have neither doubt nor fear whether I am left here a brief time or long one I believe that I shall see Him and Know Him...It is His forgiveness and grace that give confidence and not merits of our own. But again I say "it's been a great run".

(Written shortly before his death in 1963)





PAUL ELMER MORE
(1864-1937)

Editor, critic, and scholar. Pages from *An Oxford Diary*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937, Chapter XXVIII and XXXIII.

FACE TO FACE

As for me, the writing on the face of the earth is too clear to leave place for hesitation. I can read nothing but this: a will and intelligence working out a design, a striving to accomplish some purpose through slowly yielding difficulties, a God...Only of this I am assured that some time and in some way, spirit to spirit, face to face, I shall meet the great Lord of life, and falling before Him, tell my gratitude for all He has done, and implore pardon for all that I have left undone.





C.S. LEWIS
(1898-1963)

Brilliant British scholar, writer, and poet of religious themes. He was born in Ireland and taught at Oxford and Cambridge. He became a believer after a long period of internal questioning and intellectual struggle. It was in 1931 that he was “surprised by joy.” Lewis’ own description of his conversion to Christianity and also the title of his autobiography. All his life he had experienced moments of joy for what they were – pointers or signposts to the perfect joy that awaited him in the presence of God.

YOU ARE THE ANSWER

I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer.
You are yourself the answer.
Before your face questions die away.

THE MOST PROBABLE EXPLANATION

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, the earthly beings, and on the other, never to mistake them for something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.





RAISSA MARITAIN
(1883-1960)

A French Jew who converted to Catholicism. The following excerpts are taken from Raissa's Journal, 1974.

A SPIRITUAL DESTINY

Faced with death, shall I be afraid? Ought I to be afraid? It seems to me, no. Well or ill, I have done what I could to keep on the track of my destiny. My eternal future is in the hands of God. I abandon myself to my heavenly Father. I shall go to Christ that will be deliverance. I have a peaceful feeling about it. The Lord knows what I have suffered.





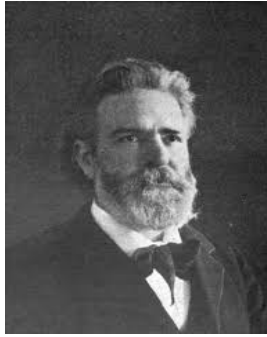
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN
(1860-1925)

Crusader, public servant, member of Congress who had devoted godly Christian parents. Bryan was an eloquent Christian spokesman who combined conservative evangelicalism with progressive politics. He became famous for being the lawyer who took the creationist position in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial.

LIKE A ROYAL GUEST

If the Father designs to touch with divine power the cold and pulseless heart of the buried acorn and to make it burst from its prison walls, will He leave neglected in the earth the...man made in the image of his Creator? If matter, mute and inanimate, though changed by the forces of nature into a multitude of forms can never die, will the spirit of man suffer annihilation when it has paid a brief visit like a royal guest to this tenement of clay? No, I am as sure that there is another life as I am that I live today!





EDWIN MARKHAM
(1852-1940)

American poet. When asked which of his poems he valued the highest he answered, "How can you choose between your own children?" He did say that his four lines called, "Outwitted" might have lasting qualities because love lasts. "He drew a circle that shut me out/Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win:/We drew a circle that took him in!"

LIFE ITSELF IS INCREDIBLE

That we should survive death is not to me incredible. The thing that is incredible is life itself.

Why should there be any life at all? Why should this world of stars have ever come into existence? Why should you be here and why I here? Why should we be here in this sun-illuminated universe? Why should there be green beneath our feet: How did all this happen?

This wonder that we know this is the incredible thing. What power projected it all into existence? This challenges my faith, excites my astonishment, and lifts me to the ineffable. Some power has called us here out of the unknown. We did not come here of our own wills. Some Higher Power has evolved it all. And the Power that has caused this revelation of wonder and mystery can easily have prepared for us another surprise beyond the shadows of death. I believe that this stupendous Power we call God has created a world beyond this world, a world of spirit for the spirit of man.





VICTOR HUGO
(1802-1885)

French literary genius, who, when fifteen was honorably mentioned by the French Academy. He is known for his novels, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Les Misérables*.

THE SOUND OF IMMORTAL SYMPHONIES

The nearer my approach to the end, the plainer is the sound of immortal symphonies of worlds which invite me. It is wonderful, yet simple. It is a fairy tale; it is a history.

I feel in myself the future life. I am like a forest cut down; the new shoots are stronger and livelier than ever. I am rising, I know, toward the sky. The sunshine is on my head. The earth gives me its generous say, but heaven lifts me with the reflection of unknown worlds...For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse; history, philosophy, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song; all of them have I tried, but feel that I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me. When I go to the grave I can say as others have said, "My day's work is done." But I cannot say, "My life is done." My day's work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight, but opens upon the dawn.



NOW AT LAST THEY WERE BEGINNING CHAPTER ONE OF THE GREAT STORY!

The light ahead was growing stronger. Lucy saw that a great series of many-colored cliffs led up in front of them like a giant's staircase. And then she forgot everything else, because Aslan himself was coming, leaping down from cliff to cliff like a living cataract of power and beauty.

...Aslan turned to them and said: "You do not yet look as happy as I mean you to be."

Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often."

"No fear of that," said Aslan. "Have you not guessed?"

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are – as you call it in the Shadow-Lands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page; now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before."

(Taken from ending of "*The Last Battle*" - The final of the seven books of the "*Chronicles of Narnia*" - One of C.S. Lewis' greatest books).



DEATH CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD, WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD!

Fear not the mystery of death! - Jesus has died, and shown us that it is the gateway into another life, more fair and blessed than this – a life in which human words are understood, and human faces smile, and human affections linger still. The forty days of

His resurrection life have solved many of the problems, and illumined most of the mystery. To die is to go at once to be with Him. No chasm, no interval, no weary delay in purgatory. Absent from the body, present with the Lord. One moment here in conditions of mortality; the next beyond the stars.

Fear not the loneliness of death! The soul in the dark valley becomes aware of another at its side, "Thou art with me". Death cannot separate us, even for a moment, from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the hour of death Jesus fulfills His own promise, "I will come again and take you unto Myself". And on the other side, we step into a vast circle of loving spirits, who welcome the newcomer with festal songs. (2 Peter 1:11)

Death! How shall they die who have already died in Christ? That which others call death, we call sleep. We dread it no more than sleep. Our bodies lie down exhausted with the long working day, to awake in the fresh energy of the eternal morning; but in the meanwhile, the spirit is presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

(F.B. Meyer, *The Way into the Holiest*, pp. 39-40.)



AMONG HEAVEN'S MANY "MANSIONS", JESUS HAS PREPARED A CUSTOM-MADE PLACE FOR YOU!

This is why I believe our Lord describes our presence with him in heaven as knowing him, even as we are known (See 1 Corinthians 13:12). God knows us in our weaknesses; we will know him in his transcendent majesty. He has always known us for who we really are; yet he calls us his children and his friends. And finally, when all is said and done, he calls us home to be with him. We will be at home with God! That's my destiny (see Revelation 21:3).

The cemetery, new or old, is not our ultimate destination; it is merely a place in which to remember the symbols of a farewell. The person is not there; only the last memory is there. The respect shown in a cemetery comes not because it is home, but because it is where we bid believing loved ones a temporary good-bye. Jesus came from the Father and returned to the Father to prepare a place for you and for me. That's home. That is our eternal dwelling. We cherish the tender metaphor of home because there we will unpack our suitcases for the last time.

The destiny God has for us does away with these things that we deem so important now

– shelters, tombs, and gravestones. In the end, our identities will be with God, and our personalities will be sublimely consummated to the purpose designed for each one of us. Our move from earth to heaven will serve as the thread that ties our memories together with reality and will enable us to see the temporal in the light of the eternal.

(Ravi Zacharias, *Grand Weaver*, pp. 157, 159, 167.)



WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR “SHELL” (CORPSE) BEHIND, YOU WILL BE MORE ALIVE THAN EVER BEFORE!

A Lutheran pastor friend – the Reverend Bill Vaswig – and I once were discussing Galatians 2:19 and wondering what it means to be crucified with Christ. I mean, what are we actually talking about? Bill said, “Let’s pray the passage into each other”. I had wanted to keep the discussion at arm’s length, but I gulped and said, “All right, how do we do it?” “I don’t know exactly,” was Bill’s response, “but you go first!” So I went over to him, placed my hand on his head, and began to pray. I have no idea what I said beyond the hope that he would experience what it means to be crucified with Christ.

When I finished and sat down, Bill looked at me wide-eyed and whispered, “It happened!” “What happened?” I responded blankly. He proceeded to explain that as I began praying, he saw a vivid mental picture of his Church with a funeral service going on inside. He could see everything clearly: the coffin with the lid open, the chancel, the high arching beams, but he was seeing it all from inside the coffin. It was his funeral! As the people, filled with sorrow, filed past the coffin, he tried to tell them that everything was okay, that he was fine, and that what was happening was good. They could not hear him; all they could see was a corpse, and yet he was more alive than he had ever been.

(Richard J. Foster, *Prayer – Finding the Heart’s True Home*, pg.64.)



DEATH FOR THE BELIEVER IS AN UNALLOYED GAIN, IN COUNTLESS WAYS!

Let me, however, remind the Christian, in order that there may be a flash of light in the thick darkness of this sermon that Death, to him, should never be a subject upon which he should loathe to meditate. To die! - To shake off my weakness and to be girded with omnipotence. To die! - To leave my pangs, and pains, and fears, and woe, my feeble heart, my unbelief, my trembling and my grief, and leap into the divine bosom. To die!

What have I to lose by Death? The tumult of the people and the strife of tongues. A joyous loss indeed! To the believer Death is gain, unalloyed gain. Do we leave our friends by Death? We shall see better friends and more numerous up yonder, in the general assembly and Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Do we leave our house and comforts? “There is a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Do we lose our life? Ah no, we gain a better far; for remember that we die to live, and then we live to die no more. Without any fraction of loss, death to the believer is a glorious gain. It is greatly wise, then, for a Christian to talk with his last hours, because those last hours are the beginning of his glory. He leaves off to sin and begins to be perfect; he ceases to suffer and begins to be happy; he renounces all his poverty and shame, and begins to be rich and honored. Comfort then; comfort then; ye sorrowing and suffering Christians. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.” Say unto them, “Your warfare is accomplished, your sin is pardoned, and you shall see your Lord’s face without a veil between”.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons*, vol. 7-8 pg. 133.)



DIVERSIFIED EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE FOR THE UNITED EDIFICATION OF ALL HEAVENLY CITIZENS!

Each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the Divine beauty better than any other creature can. Why else were individuals created, but that God, loving all infinitely, should love each differently? And this difference, so far from impairing, floods with meaning the love of all blessed creatures for one another, the communion of the saints. If all experienced God in the same way and returned Him an identical worship, the song of the Church triumphant would have no symphony, it would be like an orchestra in which all the instruments played the same note. Aristotle has told us that a city is a unity of unlikes, and St. Paul that a body is a unity of different members. Heaven is a city, and a Body, because the blessed remain eternally different: a society, because each has something to tell all the others – fresh and ever fresh news of the ‘My God’ whom each finds in Him whom all praise ‘Our God’. For doubtless the continually successful, yet never complete, attempt by each soul to communicate in unique vision to all others (and that by means whereof earthly art and philosophy are but clumsy imitations) is also among the ends for which the individual was created.

(C. S. Lewis, *Made for Heaven*, pp. 28-30.)

UNALLOYED JOY, WHOLEHEARTED LOVE, UNTARNISHED PURITY, INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP – GOD’S HOME!

It will be a world without death, disease, or sorrow. There will be no more crying. There will be no more pain. There will be no death; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. This does not only mean that there will be no tears shed in that happy world, but that all the tears that were ever shed will be turned into joy, that they will be more than healed and there will be no single memory or shadow of pain or grief to gall the perfect felicity of eternal years. Oh, sorrowing one, be patient. Lift up your heart. Rejoice! “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

NO SIN

The other feature of the renovated earth will be that there will be no sin, and nothing that defiles will enter into the holy city and the happy life of the coming ages. Satan will never tempt again. There will be no more curse or cursed one. Never again will God have to cloud His face and perform the strange work of judgment which He so little loves, but the universe will settle down to everlasting love and uninterrupted joy. We will be established and will know that we will never fall again. Angels will be confirmed in their high and holy state and the very shadow of evil will at last be forgotten. Heaven will be so pure that evil will not be thought, remembered or conceived. The curse of time is to know both good and evil. In the innocence of those happy years, man will not know evil but only good. Oh, for that day to come when the crushing, defiling shadow of sin and doubt and fear will never fall again!

(A.B. Simpson, *The Christ in The Bible Commentary*, Book Four, pp. 522-523.)



WILL YOU, AS A HEAVENLY CITIZEN, BE PRIVILEGED TO SHARE THE SACRED TIME AND PLACE OF YOUR EARTHLY CONVERSION?

There is nothing strange in the halo of dearness which, to every Christian, hangs around the scenes with which the beginning of his new life is associated. The place where two friends first met is sacred to them all through their friendship – all the more sacred as their friendship deepens and grows old. It is the same sort of feeling which sent the heart of Moses back to the bush. And to how many a saint the day and place where he first heard God’s voice will be earth’s one sacred memory, even long after earth’s life is over. Do you think that Moses will not speak of the bush, and Samuel of the little temple-chamber, and Peter and John of their boats on the still lake, and Paul of the Damascus

road, and Matthew of his tax-table, and the poor woman of the wayside well, when they are met above?

(Phillips Brooks, *The Candle of the Lord*, pg. 55.)



EARTH'S PAINFUL SEPARATIONS REPLACED BY HEAVEN'S JOYOUS REUNIONS – FOREVER!

Our temporary homes may be palaces or hovels, but our eternal heavenly home will be bright and beautiful. How could it be any other way? The great Architect and Builder of the universe designed a permanent dwelling place for His children. Earth has its beauty, but man has spoiled so much of it. In heaven, there will be no need for environmentalists to work for better air and water quality, or to decry the destruction of our land for housing developments.

In heaven, there will be no more sorrowful separations. For many people, life on earth has lost its meaning because a dear one or close friends who were a vital part of life on earth are no longer here. In heaven, we will be together in Christ. We will see the mother or father, the children, brothers, and sisters who have preceded us. We will have a family reunion like no other!

(Billy Graham, *Facing Death and the Life After*, pp. 246-247.)



HEAVEN IS A CUSTOM-MADE PLACE IN WHICH YOUR INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY IS FULFILLED!

Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the Divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. For it is not humanity in the abstract that is to be saved, but you – you, the individual reader, John Stubbs or Janet Smith. Blessed and fortunate creature, your eyes shall behold Him and not another's. All that you are, sin apart, is destined, if you will let God have His good way, to utter satisfaction. Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it – made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.

(C.S. Lewis, *Made for Heaven*, pp. 21-23.)



JOY WITHOUT ALLOY, PEACE WITHOUT SORROW, WORK WITHOUT WEARINESS, HOME WITHOUT RIVALRY – GOD’S DWELLING PLACE!

Think of it: We will be with God forever! And because we will be with Him, we will be absolutely safe from all evil. Sorrow and suffering will never again touch us – never. One of the most moving passages in all the Bible is found in its next to last chapter:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’” (Revelation 21:3-4)

Home is a place of peace and joy – and so is heaven. Home is a place of love and security – and so is heaven. Home is a place of welcome and rest – and so is heaven. The Bible says, “Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death”. (Isaiah 57:2) When we die in Christ, we are at home with Him forever.

As a footnote, sometimes people say to me, “Well, I’m not sure I want to go to heaven. It sounds so boring!” But we won’t be bored in heaven, for we will have all eternity to explore God’s riches. The Bible also says God will have work for us to do, for we will serve Him and reign with Him – but without the weariness of our work here. (Revelation 22:3, 5)

It also means our whole nature will be transformed. Someday we will be like Christ! Now we love imperfectly – but not then. Now our joy and peace are tempered by sorrow and turmoil – but not then. The Bible says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2) What a glorious promise!

(Rev. Billy Graham, *The Journey*, pp. 302-304.)



WILL THE “MASTER TEACHER” (JESUS) ASSIGN TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOU IN HEAVEN?

Heaven is a place where there will be growth and more growth. Eternal growth!

Progressively and joyously, we will become more and more like the One whom all heaven adores and magnifies – the Lord Jesus Christ!

Perhaps Christ (the Master Teacher) will assign a large number of teachers to us – to teach us, a little at a time, regarding the abundance of ‘truths’! The greatest truths of all will be the truths (mysteries) regarding the Holy Trinity! Truth about the character of our Triune God will occupy our thoughts for all eternity!

There are mansions in heaven, especially suited to each of us. There is no lack in heaven. Our every need will be supplied, our every desire will be fulfilled, and our every capacity will be developed. There is no overcrowding in heaven, and there is a special room that God has ready for each of the Kingdom’s inhabitants.

There is neither positioning nor deprivation in heaven! There will be perfect enjoyment of each other, and no one will get on another person’s ‘nerves’. We will never get tired of each other! We will spend some of our ‘time’ exploring the mysteries and the wonders of each other’s personality, and each other’s amazing gifts and talents and abilities!

No jealousy as we are absorbed in learning about each other! Total dignity and no shame in the feelings that we have of ourselves and of one another. No class consciousness and no racial discrimination. “All for each and each for all!”

Absolutely no self-absorption and no self-centeredness, but total self-giving and others-orientation. Humility without humiliation, and dignity without pride! Total fellowship and total communion and total preoccupation with the worship of the King of Kings – the Lord Jesus Christ! Singing with the holy angels the chorus of eternal praise to the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed for the redemption of the fallen world!

-By Ron Christian-



YOUR BODY WILL “FALL ASLEEP” IN DEATH, BUT YOU WILL YOURSELF EXPERIENCE GOD’S NEARER PRESENCE!

In our day, at least in the West, nobody exemplifies the widespread angst, and especially the fear of death, more dramatically than the tragic-comedian Woody Allen. He regards death and dissolution with terror. It has become an obsession with him. True, he is still able to joke about it. “It’s not that I’m afraid to die”, he famously quips, “I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” He calls death “absolutely stupefying”.

Jesus Christ, however, rescues his disciples from this horror. Consider one of his great “I am” sayings: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26) These verses contain a double promise of Jesus to his followers. The believer who lives will never die, because Christ is his life, and death will seem to him only a trivial episode. The believer, who dies, however, will live again, because Christ is his resurrection. Thus, Christ is both the life of those who live and the resurrection of those who die. Christ transforms both life and death.

It is said of Henry Venn, the eighteenth-century evangelical Anglican vicar, that when he was told he was dying, his joy at dying kept him alive another fortnight! Such a fearless, joyful attitude to the onset of death is possible only because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his conquest of death.

(John Stott, *Through The Bible – Through the Year*, pg. 283.)

**THROUGH YOUR “UNION WITH CHRIST” (CONVERSION),
RESURRECTION LIFE HAS ALREADY BEGUN!**

For a life, any life, once united with God by faith, and thus joined to the immortality of God, is a life over which death has no power. This stands in Scripture with the immeasurable authority of Christ behind it. And you and I may well ask, what are all our unanswered questions compared with Christ’s unanswerable certainty? We may well, with Martin Luther, turn the familiar lament, ‘In the midst of life we are in death’, into the glorious affirmation, ‘In the midst of death we are in life’. In God we live eternally.

In other words, by union with Christ, our resurrection life has already begun; and our mortality is daily being overlaid by and transfigured into the eternal life of Christ. And this points forward to the day when at last we shall be like Him, seeing Him as He is, and rejoicing in His presence forever.

(James S. Steward, *River of Life*, pp. 68, 69.)

**THE MORE YOU RECEIVE FROM A GENEROUS GOD, THE MORE THERE
IS YET TO RECEIVE – INEXHAUSTIBLE HEAVENLY GIFTS OF GRACE!**

Faith is the settled, unwavering trust in the one true God whom “we have come to know

in Jesus Christ.” When we see him face to face, we shall not abandon that trust, but deepen it. Hope is the settled unwavering confidence that this God will not leave us or forsake us, but will always have more in store for us than we could ask or think. I do not imagine for a minute that in the coming age we shall arrive at a point where we shall have experienced everything the new world has to offer, and will become bored (as is imagined by some scornful contemporary visions of “heaven”). In contrast, because I believe that the God we know in Jesus is the God of utterly generous, out flowing love, I believe that there will be no end to the new creation of this God, and that within the new age itself there will always be more to hope for more to work for, more to celebrate.

(N.T. Wright, *After You Believe*, pg. 203.)



THE WONDERFUL “EARTHLY LOVES” ARE A FAINT REFLECTION OF THE UNLIMITED, UNCONDITIONAL, EVERLASTING LOVE OF HEAVEN!

But still, what about life after death? When we live in communion with God, when we belong to God’s own household, there is no longer any “before” or “after”. Death is no longer the dividing line. Death has lost its power over those who belong to God, because God is the God of the living, not of the dead. Once we have tasted the joy and peace that come from being embraced by God’s love, we know that all is well and will be well. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus says, “I have overcome the power of death...come and dwell with me and know that where I am your God is”.

When eternal life is our clear goal, it is not a distant goal. It is a goal that can be reached in the present moment. When our heart understands this divine truth, we are living the spiritual.

The great spiritual challenge is to discover, over time, that the limited, conditional, and temporal love we receive from parents, husband, wives, children, teachers, colleagues, and friends is a reflection of the unlimited, unconditional, and everlasting love of God. Whenever we can make that huge leap of faith, we will know that death is no longer the end but the gateway of the Divine Love.

- Here and Now -

(Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing*, pp. 185-189.)

HARD TO IMAGINE

I am hard-pressed between the two having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. (Philippians 1:23)

Whenever my wife, Martie, and I get ready to go on vacation, we like to read about our destination, study the maps, and anticipate the joy of finally arriving at the place we've dreamed about for so long.

For those of us who know Jesus Christ, we have an incredible destination ahead of us – heaven. But I find it interesting that a lot of us don't seem to be very excited about getting there. Why is that? Maybe it's because we don't understand heaven. We talk about streets of gold and gates of pearl, but what is it really like? What is there to look forward to?

I think the most profound description of heaven is found in Paul's to "depart and be with Christ" is "far better" (Phil 1:23). It is what I told my 8-year-old grandson when he asked what heaven is like. I started by asking him, "What is the most exciting thing in your life?" He told me about his computer game and other fun things he likes to do, and then I told him that heaven is far better. He thought for a minute, and then said, "Papa, that's hard to imagine."

What is that you look forward to in life? What really excites you? Whatever it is, although it's hard to imagine, heaven will be far better! - Joe Stowell

-To be in His presence! A glorious thought
So awesome I cannot conceive;
I'll bow down and worship the Lord on His throne
And add to the praise He'll receive-

("The more you look forward to heaven, the less you'll desire on earth"; *Our Daily Bread*, April 2011)



THE UNFATHOMABLE GOD-PREPARED PLACE FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE CHRIST OF THE AGES!

Heaven – described as a glorious city, and likened to pure gold and clear glass. Heaven – God's dwelling place prepared for those earthlings who love and who serve Christ, a place of holiness and beauty and unity and perfection and joy. Heaven – a place where

there are no tears of sorrow and grief, and no sickness or pain or death. A place where there is no need for the sun or the moon, for Christ Himself is the source of all light. In heaven, there is no night. There is no aging. No separation from those we love. Heaven – a place where the focus of all is on Christ alone. A place where there is no competition or comparison among jealous-ridden persons, all of whom are seeking selfish glory and praise and applause. A place where all serve each other with holy love and gladness. A place of perfect harmony and unity where ‘all is for each, and each is for all’. Serving each other without the physical limitations of a human body. Heaven – a place of joyful singing and happy serving and constant learning. A place where all the saints will learn from one another and all will learn forever from the ‘Master Teacher’ Himself – the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven – a place where each will become more like God forever – without, of course, ever actually becoming gods. The excitement of eternal growth in knowledge and in holy wisdom and understanding! No longer seeing reality as if peering through a hazy glass, but instead seeing reality with our spiritual eyes as a result of being given a ‘spiritual body’. Heaven – a place where we will no longer walk by faith, but a place where we shall behold Christ, face to face in all His glory!

Death for the believer is like going from the basement of the house to the top story of the house. Death allows the Christian to reach his destination. Death for the Christian is like crossing the “finish line” after a long marathon run.

Death is not a loss for the believer; death is the doorway into eternal life in heaven. Paul wrote, “For me to live in Christ and to die is gain!” Christians are only pilgrims on this planet. Dying allows the believer to “go home”! John 14:1-3 reads *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”*

-By Ron Christian-



IS THE ‘ETERNAL LIFE’ OF THE EARTHLY BELIEVER THE SAME AS THE ‘ETERNAL LIFE’ IN HEAVEN?

If the new spirit is formed in men here, if you and I may have eternal life abiding in us, clogged, hampered, and blinded, indeed, by the constraints of the poor body that we live in, and yet genuine and vital even here, and if death be nothing but the breaking down of the body to let the spirit free, then how clear it is! The word of summons comes and the soul leaps to answer it. The eternal life in us answers to the eternal life beyond the grave,

recognizes it, flees to its own. There is no violence of transfer. It is a continuation of the one same life. The grave is only the moat around the inner castle of the King, across which they who have long been His loving and loyal retainers on the farther side enter in, sure of a welcome to the heart of His hospitality. Far above any morbid or affected, unnatural, unhuman pretense of a wish for death there towers this calm Christian confidence, ready to die, yet glad to stay here until the time comes; knowing that death will be release, and yet finding life happy and rich with the power of the resurrection already present in it; counting both worlds God's worlds, and so neither despising this nor dreading the other. That is the Christian light on the dark river and the fields beyond, that streams forth only from the opened door of Jesus' tomb.

(Phillips Brooks, *Sermons For The Church Year*, pg.279.)



THE EVERGREEN TREE REMINDED ME OF EVERLASTING LIFE!

I was both sad and glad as I entered the hospital room of Beulah Pilcher. I was glad to be in the presence of one of the most godly persons I had ever known. As an older member of the Church that I pastored, I had long admired her godly wisdom and her sweet temperament and her wise words and her special skills and her lifetime of service with her minister husband. She had been a widow for several years; and her husband died before I became her pastor. Yes, as I entered that hospital room, I was glad when I thought of the many times that she and I had worshipped together, and when I thought of the joyous fellowship I had enjoyed with her and with the several other widows in the weekly "Cottage Prayer Meeting". When I went to her mobile home, I greatly enjoyed listening to her stories from the past, times when she and her dedicated husband (a minister) saw God work miracles in the lives of persons that they reached out to. Yes, lots of reasons for gladness when entering her hospital room.

But, I also had reason for sadness! I had ambivalent feelings, before entering that hospital room! I had a certain "dread" come over me. I knew that (again) when I entered that room, and stood beside her bed, that I would be looking into the face of a woman who would (in spite of the drugs she had been given) be in the agony of pain! Slowly dying of that very dreadful disease – cancer! I don't actually remember now (since it has been several years since her agonizing death), but I think it took several weeks (if not months) before her agony (suffering) finally ceased! Death was such a "welcome friend" for her! During her bout with cancer, she had been ready to die for many months, for she knew her Lord so well! Why then did it take so long for her to die? Why did she have to suffer so greatly, and for so long? If God was not the "source" (cause) of this suffering, then was God trying to teach this godly child of His some important lesson? How was

this terrible suffering, being endured by a beautiful human being, consistent with God's love?

Why have some persons (Christians and non-Christians) had a rather "easy or comfortable exit" from this life, and other Christians (like Beulah Pilcher), and many other Christians, have had a painful time, during the long dying process? Only God can answer that difficult question! I personally believe that God is the "Great Compensator" in eternity! He will reward each person in eternity, according to the quality of his/her life (good works of faith) that he/she lived on earth. There will be differing "degrees of rewards", given by God to persons in heaven!

When we arrived at the cemetery, I noticed how well kept it was and I noticed that there were slight hills as well as flat parts in this ancient burial place. At the brief graveside service, as usual, I spoke the "simple words" of Scripture and some exhortation, and then I prayed the 'closing prayer', and, of course, I tried to say a few words of comfort to the few loved ones who were surrounding the casket which would soon be lowered into the ground (done, of course, after all had departed from the cemetery). One very large tree, located very close to Beulah's burial plot, caught my eye. In fact, the sight of this tree stirred my heart and my soul! It was a tall (old) Evergreen Tree! "Of all the trees that God created" (I thought to myself) "this tree symbolizes eternal life!" It is "ever-green", never losing its leaves! Beulah's body would rest right beside the great evergreen tree! How significant!

Beulah Pilcher's soul (spirit) is everlasting! She will live with God forever! She will never lose her true identity – her true self! She is with her Lord forever! No more sickness! No more pain! No more death! Perfect life! Perfect health! Everlasting joy! Everlasting fruitfulness!

-By Ron Christian-



TIME FOR PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

"Loving Heavenly Father, You are the One who, because of your Son's Sacrifice, are able and willing to forgive all my sins (the sins I remember and the sins I don't remember)! The greatest price (the substitutionary death of the Sinless One), was paid for my redemption and salvation! The gift of Salvation to humanity is the most valuable (and costly) gift in the Universe!

"Thank You, O God, for your gift of forgiveness! I am FREE from the 'bondage of sin' –

Free from guilt because I have confessed my sins to You, and because I have placed my faith (trust) in your Son as my only Savior!

“I have acknowledged that there is no one and nothing (including the Church) that can offer me forgiveness from my shameful sinning except Jesus Christ. Only You, O God, through Your Spirit can give assurance to me that my name has been written in the ‘Book of Life’!

Yes, I thank you for my gift from You, and my present assurance that I have been given eternal life from You (because I have sincerely ‘met your conditions’). Then, why am I wondering (with fear) if my sins are going to be held against me at the ‘Last Judgment’? For time and eternity, I desire to believe in Your Promise!”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

If you honestly confess your sins to Christ and forsake your old ways of life, then you can be assured that God will not remember your sins against you.

-By Ron Christian-



DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR GLORIOUS ABODE IN HEAVEN?

Christian, look up and take comfort. Jesus has prepared a place for you, and they that follow Him shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hands. Look forward to that glorious abode He has provided; look forward in faith, for it is yours. O Christian brethren, think what a glorious meeting that shall be. There we shall see the saints of old, of whom we have so often read; there we shall see those holy ministers whose faith and patience we have admired; there we shall see one another around the throne of our common Savior, and be parted and separated no more. There we shall labor and toil no more, for the days of mourning shall be ended.

John Charles Ryle, *Classic Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, Sermon, Heaven pg. 45.



WILL THERE BE ‘POSITIONING’, ‘COMPETITION’, ‘COMPARISONS’, OR ONLY HUMILITY, IN HEAVEN?

There are mansions in heaven, especially suited to each of us. There is no lack in

heaven. Our every need will be supplied, our every desire will be fulfilled, and our every capacity will be developed. There is no overcrowding in heaven, and there is a special room that God has ready for each of the earth's inhabitants.

There is neither positioning nor deprivation in heaven! There will be perfect enjoyment of each other, and no one will get on another person's 'nerves'. We will never get tired of each other! We will spend some of our 'time' exploring the mysteries and the wonders of each other's personality, and each other's amazing gifts and talents and abilities!

No jealousy as we are absorbed in learning about each other! Total dignity and no shame in the feelings that we have of ourselves and of one another. No class consciousness and no racial discrimination. "All for each and each for all"!

Absolutely no self-absorption and no self-centeredness, but total self-giving and others-orientation. Humility without humiliation, and dignity without pride! Total fellowship and total communion and total preoccupation with the worship of the King of kings – the Lord Jesus Christ! Singing with the holy angels the chorus of eternal praise to the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed for the redemption of the fallen world!

All heavenly citizens will well know that they are not worthy of the least of God's favor! That they are in heaven only because of the 'finished work of Christ'! None will feel worthy of Christ's favor, but all will glory in the wonder of Christ's favor!

-By Ron Christian-



DOES YOUR INNER HEART EXPECT A 'FULLER LIFE' WHICH ONLY HEAVEN CAN FULFILL?

The noblest human natures are built thus, with such a consciousness of their own capacity, with such a feeling of eternity, with such an assurance of the richness of living, that all the best which they enjoy and see and are, becomes suggestive and prophetic. Perfectly satisfied with it for the present, the moment that you shut down the curtain on it and said, "That is all," the color would be gone, the exhilaration and splendor would have vanished. But let the life be filled with the spirit of the springtime. Let the voice in its heart always keep saying to it, "You are to go on filling yourself with vitality and joy, day after day, month after month, and then cometh the end, then cometh the end;" and then it is not a cessation of life but fuller life which the heart expects. The end which comes to the promise of springtime shall be the luxuriance of summer!

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the World*, pg. 364.)



WHAT SORT OF A PLACE SHALL HEAVEN BE?

What sort of a place shall heaven be? Heaven shall be a place of perfect rest and peace. They that dwell there have no more conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; their warfare is accomplished, and their fight is fought; at length they may lay aside the armor of God, at last they may say to the sword of the Spirit, "Rest and be still." They watch no longer, for they have no spiritual enemies to fear; they fast and mortify the flesh no longer, for they have no vile earthy body to keep under; they pray no more, for they have no evil to pray against. There the wicked must cease from troubling; there sin and temptation are forever shut out; the gates are better barred than those of Eden, and the devil shall enter in no more. O Christian brethren, rouse and take comfort; surely this shall be indeed a blessed rest. There shall be no need of means of grace, for we shall have the end to which they are meant to lead; there shall be no need of sacraments, we shall have the substance they are appointed to keep in mind; there faith shall be swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty, and prayer in praise, and sorrow in joy. Now is the school time, the season of the lesson and the rod, then will be the eternal holiday. Now we must endure hardness and press on faint yet pursuing, then we shall sit down at ease, for the Canaanite shall be expelled forever from the land. Now we are tossed upon a stormy sea, then we shall be safe in harbor. Now we have to plow and sow, there we shall reap the harvest; now we have the labor, but then the wages; now we have the battle, but then the victory and reward. Now we must bear the cross, but then we shall receive the crown. Now we are journeying through the wilderness, but then we shall be at home. O Christian brethren, well may the Bible tell you, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they rest from their labor." Surely you must feel that witness is true.

(John Charles Ryle, *Classic Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, Sermon Heaven, pg. 37.)



I CAN SEE HER LIPS QUIVER AND QUIVER AND QUIVER!

Each person, of course, is unique, and that uniqueness is sometimes seen even in the way a 'saint' of God expresses herself/himself in the giving of a 'public testimony'. As a pastor, I often allowed lots of time for believers to share their personal testimony (often during Sunday Evening Services). Almost without exception, during an extended half-hour 'Testimony Service', Ollie Vondy would rise to her feet (and when she did, there

was a spirit of respect and awe throughout the congregation – everyone considered her almost ‘a mouthpiece for God’). Her testimonies were so fervent, so ‘dear’, and so ‘direct’, filled with ‘sweetness’ and with ‘blessing towards others’, and with ‘glorification of her blessed Savior’! She overflowed with gratitude for what God had done for her – saving her and keeping her and giving her (a humble servant) so very much! Then she would tell everyone present how very much she loved them, how very precious each one was to her and that they all were like her spiritual children! I can see her yet (even though many years separate me from those ‘Testimony Services’). I say, I can see her yet raise her little arm, as she testified. Then, I can see the tears trickle down her soft and aging cheeks! And, (here is the ‘unique feature’), I can see ‘her lips quiver and quiver and quiver’ as she testified! This woman, wrapped in God’s love! “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.” A love-filled, Spirit-anointed ‘Saint’ of God!

When the time came for Ollie Vondy to die (October, 1991), she (as far as I know) died an ‘easy’ death! As I recall the past, Ollie Vondy had just come home from a trip to California (where she visited a daughter), and when she got to her home, she noticed a ‘growth’ in her upper body. The doctor confirmed that she had cancer. She went to a nursing home (for one month before she died). When I visited her in the nursing home, she carried on a ‘normal conversation’, and she did not appear to be in pain. Friends and family enjoyed her conversations, until the very ‘end’. She died in peace and full of joy and gratitude! Just before her death, she could hardly wait to ‘go to her heavenly home’, to see her Savior, and the heavenly saints! A victorious woman – in life and in death!

A parishioner (and one of my ‘inner circle friends’ – and my ‘spiritual mother’) gone! Gone from earth, but very much present with the One who caused her lips to ‘quiver’ and ‘quiver’, when she testified before her ‘spiritual children’ on earth! Yes, I loved her deeply, but God’s love for her is infinitely greater!

-By Ron Christian-



IS THE CELESTIAL REALM FAR MORE ‘REAL’ THAN THE TERRESTIAL REALM?

If around this instability of human life is wrapped the great permanence of the life of God; if no end comes which is not in His sight truly a beginning; nay, if the whole element of time is so lost in His eternity that not the beginning and the ending of experiences but their spiritual relations to our growing characters is everything, - then is there not light upon it all? To value everything which comes to me, and yet to know that

not its form but its spiritual essence is really valuable, therefore to hasten while I have it to get out of it what it has to give me, and to even rejoice that some day in the loss of its formal presence I shall be able to make myself completely sure of the possession of its spirit, - that is the true attitude of the soul toward every good thing that God gives, - health, friends, wealth, learning, life. But that true attitude the soul cannot keep toward them all unless they all mean God, come by His gift, and are instinct with His spiritual intention.

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the Word*, pg. 369.)



ARE YOU THANKFUL THAT YOUR ‘MORTAL LIFE’ DOES NOT LAST FOREVER?

How many things there are of which we say, “I thank God I may do this, but I thank God also that the time will come when I shall stop doing this and do it no longer.” The business in which we engage to earn our bread, the slight associations and partnerships which we make for special purposes with our fellow-men, the journeys which we undertake, the schools in which we spend our years of study, the houses which we build to live in, – all these are of this sort. They are good and welcome because they are but for a while. Our mortal life, that too we are thankful for, but thankful also that it shall not last forever. But all this satisfaction in the temporariness comes only from its being enfolded and embraced within the eternity of the eternal. There must be something which does not pass away, something to which comes no end. The soul and its character, God and His love and glory, – it is because within these as the ends of life all other things are enfolded as the means of life, that we can be reconciled to, nay, even can rejoice in the knowledge that the means must cease when they shall have made their contribution to the end which must endure forever.

But to know no everlasting end or purpose, to have nothing but the means to rest on, to see them slipping out of our grasp and leaving nothing permanent behind, – that is terrible!

(Phillips Brooks, *The Light of the World*, pg. 370.) (Emphasis added.)



I PRAISE GOD FOR THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN SOMEDAY!

Heaven – described as a glorious city, a place that is likened to pure gold and clear glass.

Heaven – God’s dwelling place which is prepared for those earthlings who love and who serve the living Christ. Heaven – a place whose environment is filled with God’s holiness, and God’s beauty, and God’s unity, and God’s perfection, and God’s unspeakable joy!

Heaven – a place where there are no tears of sorrow or grief, a place where there is no sickness or pain or death. No funerals in heaven! And no aging and no growing old and decrepit! A place where there is no sun and no moon, for Christ Himself is the source of all light! In heaven, there is no night!

There are no arguments between family members ‘up there’ in ‘glory land’! No separations from those we love. No marriage, it is true, but the love relationship enjoyed between spouses on earth will be greatly enhanced in heaven! Heaven – a place where the focus of all will be on Christ alone! Heaven is a place where there is no competition and no comparisons between jealous-ridden persons.

Heaven is a place where all serve each other with holy love and with gladness. Heaven is a place of perfect harmony and unity, where ‘all are for each, and each is for all.’ Serving each other without the physical imitations of a human body.

Heaven – a place of joyful singing and happy serving and constant learning. A place where all the saints will learn from one another, and all will learn forever from the ‘Master Teacher’ Himself – the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven – a place where each will become more like God forever – without, of course, ever actually becoming gods.

The excitement of eternal growth in knowledge and in holy wisdom and understanding! No longer seeing reality as if peering through a hazy glass, but, instead, seeing reality with our spiritual eyes as a result of being given a ‘spiritual body’. Heaven – a place where we will no longer walk by faith, but a place where we shall behold Christ, face to face in all His glory!

Death for the believer is like going from the basement of the house to the top story of the house. When a person is ‘saved’, he receives (according to scripture) ‘eternal life’ – the very moment when Christ comes into his heart. Therefore, death does not introduce a believer to any other type of life, than the life which the believer is already enjoying on this ‘earthly plain’!

Death simply introduces a believer to a closer relationship with Christ, to the same type of life that the believer has been enjoying, from the very moment the believer (the repentant sinner) accepted Christ into his life.

-By Ron Christian-



CHRIST HAS BROUGHT 'DEATH' TO OUR 'DEATH' – FOREVER!

Thus in resurrection He abolished death, made it null and void, made it of no effect. He demonstrated for all time the fact that there is a life that can and will master death eventually, even on the physical plane.

There stands, not death, king of terrors, but Christ, the King of love, and He has abolished death. Death is unemployed, idle. Christ has taken his place.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *Death Abolished, The Westminster Pulpit*, pp. 106, 108.)



A ONE-LEGGED MAN OF GOD WHOSE ANTICIPATION OF HEAVEN WAS GROWING!

One Scripture, which Forrest Doner requested to be read at his funeral, is this: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25, 26) Forrest Doner lived for Christ and died in Christ, and he is now with Christ. He will never die. He enjoys eternal life.

But Forrest Doner was not so heavenly-minded that he was of no earthly good. He lived for two worlds, the world of time, and the world of eternity. He was deeply involved in life and in relationships. He loved people and he loved his work. He was a skilled accountant and bookkeeper. He admired educated people and believed one should do his best in the profession he chose on earth. He spoke with admiration concerning the successes of his son and daughter-in-law. He was a business professional and did well in his work. He was interested in the world of men, always maintaining an interest in the political and economic trends of the modern world. He subscribed to various politically orientated magazines, etc. He enjoyed life and he was not an escapist. He was a loyal American and prayed often for the leaders of our nations. He wrote political-type letters and talked about possible solutions to world problems. But he always saw the ultimate solution in Jesus Christ.

Of great importance to Mr. Doner was his family. He loved his son deeply and cherished the memory of his deceased wife, who died over a decade ago. Mr. Doner was no

stranger to sorrow, having lost his younger son in a tragic accident several years ago. He experienced great pain at times, as a result of his war injuries. He was wounded in W.W.I, the day before the armistice was signed. He wasn't expected to live, but in spite of losing one leg, he lived an active life, even fishing in the mountains. He loved the out-of-doors. But Mr. Doner is now out of all his pains. The former things have passed away. Behold, all things are new and wonderful and beautiful. He is now enjoying perfect health and perfect joy, being reunited with family and friends and most of all, with His blessed Lord. He being dead physically still speaks to us – the ones living on earth. He would still recommend his Lord as Savior and Lord. He would still encourage us to be faithful to Christ and to the Church. He would tell us to be generous and loving and encouraging to others. He would tell us to pray and praise and work and hope and trust. There is no doubt that Mr. Doner has heard the greatest of all words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful in little. I will make you rule over much" (Jesus) May we so live that we too will hear those words.

(Note: Mr. Forrest Doner, in spite of his great physical pain, was a joyous, hope-filled, progressive, prayerful, generous, kind-hearted person – a true 'saint' of God, and he was one of my best friends – and counselors – when I was a very young pastor.)

-By Ron Christian-



WHAT WILL BE, AND WHAT WILL NOT BE – IN HEAVEN?

Nothing that defiles shall enter heaven. Nothing that is unclean, unholy, impure, unchaste, shall ever cast its black shadow athwart that world of love above. Heaven, then, is to be a holy place.

A busy place heaven is to be, without any weariness. Here we are wearied. Oh, the pressure of life's battle is such, the work to be done is such, the call is such, that the brain gets tired, the head bows with weariness, the limbs drag with burdens, and the spirit cries out its pain because of exhaustion. There shall be none of that in God's house above.

Oh, the children that shall be in that cloudless land! All of the blessed little fellows, who die before they can discern between right and wrong, before they can discriminate, before they can pass morally and personally on the question of the call of God to repentance and faith – all of them dying this side that line of personal accountability, every one, shall pass through the gates into the city of God.

Blessed be God, there will be many in heaven. I do not believe that hell shall have a majority at all, not at all, not at all. What a host, illimitable, immeasurable, shall be yonder in that blessed land! A populous place heaven is to be.

(George W. Truett, *The Door To Heaven, Classical Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, pp. 75, 76, 77, 78.)



TIME FOR A PERSONALIZED PRAYER!

“O Lord God Almighty, You who are both the Savior of all mankind and the final Judge of all mankind. I gladly accept your loving mercy while I live on earth – for the forgiveness of all my sins – in order that I may never have to reap your just wrath towards those with UNREPENTED sins at the ‘Great White Throne Judgment’ in eternity! I thank You, O merciful God, that You have made your ‘plan of Salvation’ clear enough so that even young persons can be saved and enjoy the assurance of ‘eternal life’. Simple as ‘A, B, C’!

“Starting with ‘C’. Confess my sins to You, holding nothing back, and telling You that I am deeply sorry for the wrongs I have committed. Next is ‘B’ – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust Him to save me, for only Christ died and rose again. Next is ‘A’ – Accept Jesus into my heart and life now and every day!

“As a result of meeting your conditions for Salvation, Dearest Savior, I have a ‘right’ to claim all of your many promises! You have promised to ‘Forgive me’, to ‘Heal and Restore me’, to ‘Transform’ me, to ‘Reconcile’ me to You and to my fellowmen, to ‘Enlighten’ me to Your eternal truths, to ‘Guide’ me in making wise decisions, to ‘Comfort’ me in sorrows, to ‘Strengthen’ me for life’s battles, and to ‘Prepare’ a place in heaven for me! What a gracious God! No fear of Judgment.”

TIME FOR A WARM AFFIRMATION!

He who is ready to die, is he who is ready to live! Christ’s saving arms are outstretched just for you today! “Feel His Embrace O Love Just For You!”

-By Ron Christian-



LOSING ALL ON EARTH TO GAIN ALL IN ETERNITY!

To die! - to shake off my weakness and to be girded with omnipotence. To die! - to leave my pangs, and pains, and fears, and woe, my feeble heart, my unbelief, my tremblings and my griefs, and leap into the divine bosom. To die! What have I to lose by Death? The tumult of the people and the strife of tongues. A joyous loss indeed! To the believer Death is gain, unalloyed gain. Do we leave our friends by Death? We shall see better friends, and more numerous up yonder, in the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Do we leave our house and comforts? "There is a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Do we lose our life? Ah no, we gain a better far; for remember that we die to live, and then we live to die no more. Without any fraction of loss, death to the believer is a glorious gain. It is greatly wise, then, for a Christian to talk with his last hours, because those last hours are the beginning of his glory. He leaves off to sin and begins to be perfect; he ceases to suffer and begins to be happy; he renounces all his poverty and shame, and begins to be rich and honored. Comfort, then, comfort, then, ye sorrowing and suffering Christians. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Say unto them your warfare is accomplished, your sin is pardoned, and you shall see your Lord's face without a veil between.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Remember Death, Spurgeon's Sermons*, pg. 133.)



GOING FROM THE 'LOWER FLOOR' TO THE 'TOP FLOOR'!

Christ within the believer is nothing less than 'eternal life' within the heart of a believer! When a believer is 'ushered into the presence of Christ in heaven' (when he dies), a believer enjoys a closer and a more intimate relationship with Christ!

When he leaves this 'earthly temple', and when he enters the 'portals of heaven', the believer continues (on a 'higher level') to enjoy the same quality of life that he had been enjoying, all along on earth.

He simply goes from the lower floor of the house (the earthly level, which has a high quality of life) to the top floor of the house (where that earthly life with Christ is continued and is enjoyed to a much greater degree in heaven!)

Death allows the Christian to reach his destination! Death for the Christian is like crossing the 'finish line' after a long marathon run.

Death signals the end to all of the tests and trials and temptations that accompanied the

long and hard 'race of life'!

Death signals the end of all the stresses and hardships of life, and is the gateway to peace and rest and health! "When I have gone the last mile of the way, I will rest at the end of the day. And I know there are joys that await me, when I have gone the last mile of the way!"

Death is not a loss for the believer; death, instead, is the way into eternal life in heaven. Paul wrote, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!*" Christians are only pilgrims on this planet. Dying allows the believer to 'go home'!

Jesus promised to give a beautiful home to His followers, when they die! "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*"

-By Ron Christian-



DOES DEATH FOREVER DESTROY ALL OF OUR HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS?

This fear of death still abides very largely, even among the children of God, the children of light. Perchance it is the last fear to be overcome in the heart of the trusting saint, as death is the last enemy to be overcome. We are conscious of the chill of it even though we live in the warmth of the risen Son of righteousness. There is a sense in which this fear haunts us and abides even after we have seen life and immortality brought to light in the gospel.

May we reverently ask the reasons of the fear? What fills the heart with fear in the presence of death, either our own death or that of our loved ones? First of all, let us remember that even if we believe man is immortal, it is still true that death is the passage from the familiar into the unfamiliar. We do not know what lies beyond; it is the journey whence no traveler returneth. We have all felt the terror of that as we have stood by the side of the loved one about to cross over. It is the leaving of the familiar and the reaching of the unfamiliar. It is the severing of associations, and the ending of fellowships. It is the interruption of plans and purposes, and the cessation of endeavor. These are the things which make men afraid. These are the reasons why man does so perpetually and so persistently fight against death.

Death need not be, nor ought to be, the passage from the familiar to the unfamiliar; Death is not the severing of association, the ending of fellowship; it is not the interruption of plan and purpose, and the cessation of endeavor; unless all these things are out of harmony with the ages and with the God of the ages, and the purpose of the ages.

He has made death of no effect. He has made death void, empty. He has emptied death of all that which filled the heart with fear.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *Death Abolished*, *The Westminster Pulpit*, pp. 103-105.)



WHEN WE HAVE GONE THE ‘LAST MILE OF THE WAY’ – OUR ETERNAL HOME!

When you place your faith in the Deathless One – Jesus Christ – you shall never die! Of course, your earthly body will die, your corruptible body will return to dust! But, the ‘real you’ – your spirit – will never die!

Jesus said, “*If a man keeps my saying he shall never see death.*” (John 8:5) “*Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.*” (John 11:16) Notes J.B. Phillips, “It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality.”

When we believe in Jesus – truly believe – our sorrows are soothed, our broken hearts are mended, and our void of loneliness is filled. Throughout our long spiritual pilgrimage on earth, God is preparing us for the last mile of our way, when our journey will finally be completed!

-By Ron Christian-



GLORIOUS INTRODUCTION TO HEAVEN!

The last moment is come. My soul is severed from my body. And where am I now – a naked, disembodied spirit? My soul, if thy hope be sound and real, thou art now where thou hast longed to be; thou art in the presence of thy Saviour and thy God. Thou art

now brother to the angels. Thou standest in the mid-blaze of the splendor of divinity. Thou seest Him, whom having not seen, thou hast loved; in whom believing, thou hast rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

(Charles Spurgeon, *Remember Death, Spurgeon's Sermons*, pg. 139.)



WILL THERE BE NEED FOR HUMAN RECONCILIATION IN HEAVEN?

The imperfections (from our earthly pilgrimage) that remain with us, when we go through the 'Gates of Heaven', these imperfections will all be eliminated in heaven (perhaps through a 'purging process', sometime in heaven, and probably accomplished by the kindly administration of our merciful Heavenly Father).

Relationships that were broken on earth will likely (and even necessarily) be mended and be reconciled in that heavenly dwelling place. Perfect peace and genuine understanding and wholehearted love – these are the 'natural ingredients' of Christ's heavenly home! Anything that is contrary to these qualities (in the character of a believer) must be rectified (reconciled) some time, if not on earth before the believer's death, then in heaven!

The Bible says that in heaven, '*All tears will be wiped away from our eyes*'! Truly! But, contrary to the belief that many have, I think that there is reason to believe that the tears in the eyes of some believers will only be wiped away 'in' heaven, only after the needed reconciliation with other (discordant) believers takes place!

What can be said about the alienation that some believers have, with their fellow believers (on this earth) – an alienation that was not resolved before the time of the believer's death? Will this same alienation automatically be 'removed' (resolved) at the moment of an alienated believer's physical death – or, on the other hand, will the unresolved differences between believers need to be resolved (after they die) in the heavenly home?

The process of reconciliation (by the nature of the concept) means that the two persons who are 'at odds' with one another, must humbly confess their sins to one another, must humbly ask for forgiveness, and must humbly seek understanding with the opposing party.

If the process of reconciliation is not entered into by the alienated (opposing) persons, on this earth, where else can that process of reconciliation take place, other than in

heaven?

God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of all heavenly citizens, but does God do this ‘wiping away’ at the point of the believer’s death, or at the point when alienated believers (alienated because of misunderstandings on earth), are hugging each other in heaven, as a result of their finally reconciling differences which were never resolved on earth!

-By Ron Christian-



WHAT BENEFITS DO I ENJOY BECAUSE OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION?

By that resurrection I know that my sins are forgiven. Blot out that historic resurrection and the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is a sigh of hope without foundation in fact upon which faith can fasten. By that resurrection I know that the Cross is the means by which my sins may be forgiven. That resurrection is the demonstration of the possibility of a holy life, for He who said, “I lay down My life, that I may take it again,” said “I lay down My life for the sheep.” In the energy of that communicated life we live that we may become holy. If He rose not, it is a false dream. By that resurrection there is assurance of the life beyond, and illumination thereof for all time.

(G. Campbell Morgan, *Death Abolished*, *The Westminster Pulpit*, pp. 101-102.)



DOES GOD ‘WILL’ THE DEATH OF EVERY PERSON?

As a pastor of one local church in Fort Collins for nearly 27 years, I officiated at the funeral services for many people – including several infants, young persons (including suicides), and middle-aged adults, as well as numerous elderly folks. I have no problem in suggesting that it was God’s “perfect will” to call home to Heaven many of the ‘saints’ of God who had lived long and productive lives. But I do have difficulty in believing that the deaths of infants and children and young adults are an expression of God’s “perfect will”. Yes, it is true that all things which happen (including thousands of deaths which result because of earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, wars, car accidents etc.) are ‘allowed’ by the God of Heaven, and thus these tragedies are subject to God’s so-called ‘Sovereign Will’.

Some well-meaning Christians – Christians who believe they are honoring the

“Sovereignty” of their living God – find themselves saying some very hurtful (and erroneous) things to broken-hearted parents of infants or young people who have tragically died by disease or by accident. Things like “Well, God wanted another ‘angel’ in heaven, so that is why God chose to take your baby.” How horrible and how heretical! I held a double funeral service for a young couple whose car was hit head-on by a drunk driver, and this young father and mother left behind several children to grieve the tragic loss of their loving Christian parents. Was it God’s “perfect will” for this couple to die on that sunny, Saturday afternoon, as they were enjoying a relaxing ride in the country (near Fort Collins), and who suddenly were killed as an oncoming vehicle (driven by a drunk driver) hit them head-on at the top of a hill on that country road? And what about the several children who died from one cause or another – from cancer or from some other ‘defect’ – whose parents I, as their pastor, tried hard to comfort in their bereavement? Would it have helped those sorrowing parents for me to have told them that they should not grieve too much, for the death of their children was a ‘manifestation of God’s mysterious, sovereign, and perfect will’? Was it God’s “perfect will” that my beloved, godly fifteen year-old niece died in 1981 from a seizure as she was happily riding on a roller coaster in an Amusement Park in Denver?

Notes well-known Bible scholar, William Barclay (who, himself, lost his only child at ‘sea’): “Quite clearly, Jesus did NOT think sickness and illness and untimely death the will of God. Quite clearly, Jesus thought them the reverse of the will of God. They were the very things that he had come to help and to overcome. . . . In the life to come God is seeing to it that the life cut off too soon is getting its chance to blossom and flourish, and the life involved in tragedy is finding its COMPENSATION. The eternal world is redressing the balance of the world of time.” Remember: The One who suffered the most on this planet (Jesus Christ), understands you ‘perfectly’ when you are suffering! “Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art.” Jesus sheds the sympathizing tear with you! Usually, there is some ‘mystery’ involved in all human suffering! As a finite person, you will always be lacking in your understanding of ‘Why’ tragic things happen. After you suffer a great loss, you have the ‘right’ to try to understand the ‘causes’, but ask ‘How?’ instead of ‘Why’. “How can I use this great loss to make me a better person (not a ‘bitter’ person), more tender and loving, and determined to ‘reach out to other suffering pilgrims’! Remember, even though your mind is confused and your heart is broken, ‘God is perfect love’ – and He will give you ‘new life and new peace’. Wait upon a loving God!

-By Ron Christian-



DO YOU LONG FOR THE ‘GLORY’ OF HEAVEN?

Concerning the ‘glory’ of heaven for which all true Christians ‘hunger and thirst’, the famous author C.S. Lewis writes:

“The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son – it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

“For glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.

“Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits, and also the healing of that old ache.

“We are to shine as the sun; we are to be given the morning star.

“We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

At present, we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in.

The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As St. Augustine said, the rapture of the saved soul will “flow over” into the glorified body.

(Portions from C.S. Lewis’ sermon entitled “*The Weight of Glory*”)



**WILL YOU ‘FEEL AT HOME’ OR WILL YOU ‘FEEL INTIMIDATED’ IN
HEAVEN?**

Heaven is a place where we feel 'at home', never alone, and never lonely! When we are in heaven, it will be awesome, most glorious, but, even though we will be 'awestruck' with amazement because of the beauty of heaven, we, nevertheless, will not feel like a 'stranger' there.

We will never feel 'out of place'. Rather, though we feel unworthy, we will feel that we are where we are supposed to be, were we truly 'belong'! We will not 'feel ill at ease'. We will feel 'comfortable'; feel like we are in a place where 'we belong'!

Even though we will sense that we are not 'worthy' to be in this indescribably beautiful place, and even though we will be 'lost in wonder, love, and praise', we, nevertheless, will feel 'right at home'.

Even though we will recognize that there are 'giants of the faith' (famous saints of the ages) in this dwelling place (and sometimes those saints may walk rather close to us), we, nevertheless, will not be intimidated by these 'giant Christians'!

In fact, we will desire to meet these unusual servants of Christ, and we will desire to thank these great leaders of the 'faith', for their amazing contributions to the cause of Christ, while they ministered so effectively on planet earth. We will likely wish some time to sit at the feet of these 'giant saints', to learn spiritual truths from their lips, truths that will help us in our continuing growth in our heavenly dwelling place.

-By Ron Christian-



AFTER DEATH WILL I BE THE SAME PERSONALITY AS I WAS ON EARTH?

Is it not evident, then, from this what it was that Jesus did for all the world, and what it was His desire to do for all of us, by His resurrection? First, by His life and death He had made the closest appeal that ever has been made to the human heart. He had taught man to love Him. He had called out the deepest and tenderest affection. With all this He passed down into the grave. We saw Him go in at the black door. We watched and waited after He had disappeared, till at last from a region that before had been to us like a land of ghosts, the region beyond the grave, the land of those who live again, we saw Him come out, still clothed with our affection, still bearing our hearts with Him. At once that strange land lost its ghostliness. He was there, not changed, but still such a one as we could love. His life there made it all real to us. We understood Him when He said, "I

ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.” They were ours as well as His. We knew them as ours by knowing them as His.

(Phillips Brooks, *Sermons for the Church Year*, pg. 275.)



WILL I FEEL LIKE ‘I HAVE COME HOME’ WHEN I GO TO HEAVEN?

I speak of that new sense of reality in the world beyond the grave which comes to all of us when for the first time we can thank of one who has been intimate in our interests as having gone there and sat down in the intimacy of its interests, which have heretofore been so foreign to us and so far away. Heaven has at once an association with us. We have a relation there. One name is known in its mysterious streets, and so its streets become less mysterious and remote to us. It is somewhat as when a mother in some little country village sends her boy to the great city, and at once feels familiar with the great city because somewhere, lost in among its hurrying thousands, her boy is there. His familiar life, transported to it, seems to make it familiar. She feels as if she knew all about it. She talks of it with a kind of affection, as if it were almost her home, because it is the home of one she loves. She catches every mention of it as if it were a message meant for her. To go there is the constant dream of her life, and she feels as if when she came there she would know at once the streets in which her heart has had its home so long. So when a dear friend dies and goes to heaven, heaven at once catches and naturalizes into itself all our love for him. We read about it as if we knew it, and when we think of going there ourselves we think of it as going home, because our heart has had its home there so long.

(Phillips Brooks, *Sermons for the Church Year*, pgs. 274-275.)



WILL YOUR OWN RESURRECTED BODY BE ‘PATTERNED’ AFTER CHRIST’S RESURRECTED BODY?

When loving friends buried the body of Jesus in Joseph’s tomb, it was the natural body subject to earthly limitations He received at His birth that the grave received. But the body He rose with was “a spiritual body” endowed with supernatural powers (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:31; John 20:19, 20). Yet it was a real body of “flesh and bones,” which could be seen and “handled” and which, although it required no food, could yet “eat” (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:20, 27; Acts 1:3, margin; 10:40, 41). Christ’s present glorified body bears the likeness of the transformed body of the believer (Philippians 3:20, 21

R.V.). Such a body, like unto His own, will be one “fitted to us, suitable for us and a perfect medium of sensation and action in the higher sphere.”

(Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible*, pg. 274.)



IS HEAVEN A PLACE WHERE THERE WILL BE ETERNAL GROWTH IN LEARNING?

Heaven is a place where there will be growth and more growth. Eternal growth! Progressively and joyously, we will become more and more like the One whom all heaven adores and magnifies – the Lord Jesus Christ!

Perhaps Christ (the Master Teacher) will assign a large number of teachers to us – to teach us, a little at a time, regarding the abundance of ‘truths’! The greatest truth of all will be the truths (mysteries) regarding the Holy Trinity! Truth about the character of our triune God will occupy our thoughts for all eternity!

-By Ron Christian-



WILL ONLY ‘REGENERATED PERSONS’ BE ‘SUITED’ FOR HEAVEN’S DWELLING?

This was not what Paul prayed for, and this is not what we want, then – not mere immortality. This opening of new prospects is no blessing unless there be promised some new capacity to fill them. The new world is no satisfying message unless there comes also some tidings of a new man who is to occupy it. The promise of resurrection finds its consummate satisfaction only in close union with the other promise of regeneration. The two must go together – the new world and the new man.

This, beyond all doubt, is the idea of Paul. Mere eternity of time, an endless renewal of the mere fact of life forever, would have been nothing to him – less to him than to almost any other man that ever lived – if there were connected with it no spiritual renewal, no infinity of spiritual life. He puts it all in one verse to the Romans: “That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” There is the whole power of the “resurrection” – a new man for the new world. In every respect in which Easter opens a new prospect before man it must open also a new character in man. Until it has done that, man has not really

“known its power.”

(Phillips Brooks, *Sermons for the Church Year*, pp. 272-273.)



DOES GOD INTEND TO JUDGE ME AFTER I DIE?

There are three characteristics of God, which are noteworthy. God is the one with Perfect Power (omnipotence), the one with Perfect Love (compassion), and the one with Perfect Knowledge (omniscience).

“One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he had done.” (Psalms 62:11-12)

God is strong to defend the helpless, to strengthen the weak, and to humble the proud. God’s power is never carelessly or selfishly used, however, for God’s power is controlled by God’s love. To have power without love (mercy and compassion) is to cause havoc and to destroy lives (Hitler had great power but with no compassion to control his power, and millions of innocent people were killed as a result). The thought of an all-powerful God with no love is most terrifying!

God’s power is always love in action, and love in action means both mercies for the repentant and just judgment for the unrepentant.

*“Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.” *Psalms 62:12)*

-By Ron Christian-



YOUR PHYSICAL BODY (AS A BELIEVER) IS UNDER THE “LAW OF CHRIST’S RECURRENCE”!

Wrote E. Stanley Jones only a few days before he died at age 89: (In his diary): “Sometimes I find myself musing in this way: Dear old body – for the past nine decades we’ve walked the dusty roads together, we’ve flown across continents, and you’ve been uncomplaining even when I’ve put impossible loads upon you. Thank you for your faithful service, and now you say you’ll be faithful till death us do part. When that parting comes, I’ll look back at you and salute you and thank you, and I’ll say to you,

‘When I get my immortal body, I hope there will be a lot of you there incorporated.’ Thank you again, for everything.” (E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes*, Jan. 1973, pg. 149)

“I have often said that when the people stand around and say, ‘Well, Brother Stanley is gone,’ I want to be able to wink at them, and if I have enough strength I would like to laugh and say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ because, this will not be death. It will be a fuller life. I say this as a half joke, but I believe it will turn out to be reality. Because any person who is in Jesus is deathless, for he is under the principle and power of resurrection.” (Ibid. pg. 150)



CHRIST IS THE ‘FIRSTFRUITS’ OF ALL OTHERS WHO WILL ALSO ‘RISE’!

“We too shall rise.” It is the assurance of our immortality bound up with Christ’s, the certainty that because He rose we shall rise also, that makes the resurrection such a message of gladness to us all.

But is this all? Is this simple assurance of continued existence, that we are to rise from the dead and go on in some future state of existence – is this what Paul means by “the power of the resurrection”? It seems certainly evident enough that Paul meant more than this – that it was some great powerful change to be worked in and on him himself. On him – not merely on things about him. It was not simply that by Christ’s death and resurrection the tyranny of the old law of decay had been broken, so that instead of living seventy years his life was to stretch out into eternity and never to end. It was evident that the quality of the life itself was to be changed, that he was to be something new and different, and not that he was just to be the same old thing a little or a good deal longer, when he should know the power of the resurrection.

(Phillips Brooks, *Sermons for the Church Year*, pg. 271.)



The House I Lived In

I dreamed that I was growing old
(It may be it was not a dream),
I shivered in the frosty cold
And trembled in the summer beam;
It cost me many a bitter sigh, Until I knew, it was not I.

The house my Maker for me made
Received His likeness in its form;
His wisdom all its parts displayed,
His beauty clothed its chambers warm;
It is not so fair as years go by; What matter – for it is not I.

The lamp that lights its rooms burn low,
Its music sounds more dull of late,
And one – it may be friend or foe,
Knocks loudly often at its gate;
I tremble then – I scarce know why, - My house he claims, it is not I.

I am indeed a dweller there,
A winter and a summer guest;
Its rust and its decay I share,
But cannot look therein to rest.
I'm sure to leave it by and by – 'Tis but my house – it is not I.

I sometimes think, when lying down.
For the last time I lock the door,
And leave the home so long my own,
That I shall find it yet once more
So changed and fair I scarce shall know,
The house I lived in Long Ago.

(Author Unknown)



HOW CAN I BE ASSURED THAT I WILL LIVE IN HEAVEN?

The greatest weapon of Satan has always been death. When Christ arose from the dead, Jesus captured Satan's chief weapon! Wrote Paul (in I Corinthians 15:55, 56) "*Where, O Death is your victory? Where, O Death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (NIV)

There is within every person a desire to live forever. The very thought of death is repulsive to us. A well-known atheist in France confessed his most deep-seated urge: "I have in myself a great need of permanence. I mean a need of believing that there are products not subject to decay and degradation, works on which temporal changes have

no influence.” However, there is no permanence without faith in Jesus Christ. All is darkness, gloom and despair without personal faith in the Resurrected Christ.

By placing your faith in Jesus Christ and surrendering yourself to the lordship of Christ, you are assured of eternal life. You will not be eternally separated from God. The one who believes in Jesus Christ “is given eternal life...and shall never perish.” (John 11:26, Living Bible) *“And all who trust him – God’s Son – to save them have eternal life; those who don’t believe and obey him shall never see heaven, but the wrath of God remains upon them.” (John 3:36, Living Bible)*

Not only will you be given eternal life, but also you will be given a new resurrected body. Just as Christ arose from the dead, coming back to life in His glorious resurrected body, which was no longer subject to death, so believers too will be given a new and glorious resurrected body.

“But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back, all his people will become alive again.” (I Corinthians 15:20-23, Living Bible)

-By Ron Christian-



**SNAPSHOTS OF “HEAVEN”
OR
(THE OUTSKIRTS OF “HEAVEN”)**

**(“OUT-OF-BODY” EXPERIENCES OF CRYSTAL McVEA —
AND HER INSIGHTS AFTER HER RETURN TO EARTH,
FOLLOWING HER AMAZING EXPERIENCES —
ENCOUNTERS WITH ANGELS AND, MOST GLORIOUSLY,
WITH THE LORD OF HEAVEN!)**

THE LIGHT WAS WHERE I BELONGED – I KNEW I WAS HOME (HEAVEN)!

When I opened my eyes in heaven, I knew immediately where I was. In fact, in an instant, a complete knowledge of everything was given to me, almost like a download directly into the core of my being. I knew I had left my physical body and was now in a complete and perfect spirit form. But I also knew I was still “me” - the same Crystal who had existed on earth and just died in that hospital room. The “me” that had existed from the first moment God created me. In that moment, standing in the beautiful glow of heaven, I realized I was the most perfect version of myself – the eternal me, free of all the doubts, fears, and insecurities. I felt certain of how I fit into the vast and beautiful universe created by the same God Who breathed life into me.

In heaven, we get to meet our true selves for the first time.

I also felt something that I hadn’t felt on earth since the age of three – I felt clean. I was bathed in the most brilliant, beautiful light that could possibly exist – so white and pure and so cleansing that it is far beyond any earthly understanding we might have of light and brightness. Being in this light infused me with a sense of purity, cleanliness, and perfection, not to mention love, joy, and happiness. The light was something I could not only see but also feel. The light became a part of me, and I became a part of the light. The light was where I belonged – where we all belong.

I knew I was home.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 17-18)



IT WAS BRILLIANT AND BEAMING AND BEAUTIFULLY ILLUMINATING: I CALL IT A BRIGHTNESS!

When I came out of my sleep, and realized I was in spirit form, I was also immersed in what I call a brightness.

Many people who describe dying talk about finding themselves in a pool of light, but that description doesn’t cut it for me. For one thing, a pool suggests it was somehow confined, but in fact it was vast and endless, with no beginning and no end. For another, it wasn’t just a light – or at least not light as we know it. It was closest to the color we call white, but a trillion times whiter than the whitest white you’ve ever seen or could imagine. It was brilliant and beaming and beautifully illuminating, and that’s why I call

it a brightness. In the words of the apostle John in Revelation 21:23: “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”

But there was another dimension to it. There was also the sensation of cleanliness. It was a feeling of absolute purity and perfection, of something completely unblemished and unbroken, and being immersed in it filled me with the kind of peace and assurance I’d never known on Earth. It was like being bathed in love. It was a brightness I didn’t just see, but felt. And it felt familiar, like something I remembered, or even recognized.

The best way to put it is this: I was home.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pg.13)



COMFORTING PRESENCE OF “MY PERSONAL ANGELS, CULMINATING IN TOTAL WORSHIP OF MY MATCHLESS LIVING LORD!

I was instantly aware of two beings in front of me and to my left, and I knew right away who they were – they were angels.

But they weren’t just any angels – they were my angels.

I recognized them immediately. There was so much brightness coming off them that I couldn’t make out any features. But they weren’t shapeless blobs; they definitely had a form, which was roughly that of a human body: long and slender. The being on the right appeared a bit bigger than the one on the left. They didn’t move or hover or anything – they were just there.

And what I instantly felt for them was love.

A great, sweeping love for my angels overwhelmed me. It was like they were the best friends I could ever have, though the word *friend* doesn’t come close to describing them. The angels were my protectors, my teachers, my mentors, my heroes, my strength, my spirit, my heart, everything, all rolled into one. I felt like they had been a part of my existence and my journey forever – as if they had been by my side for every tear I ever cried, every decision I had ever made, every day I ever felt lonely, not only on Earth but through all eternity. I felt so unbelievably safe and free in their presence, so happy and fulfilled. I understood why they were there – to greet me upon my arrival and guide me back home. They were the best welcoming committee you could ask for.

What's more, I realized there was instant and complete communication between us. What do I mean by that? Imagine a button you can press; as soon as you press it, you know everything there is to know about someone, and they know everything about you. Or a password that, if you let me use it, gives me instant access to everything you've ever said or thought or felt or written or believed in your life: past, present, and future. Instantly, I would have a more complete understanding of you than is possible on Earth. Well, that is what this was like – a sensation that everything we were, everything that mattered, was passing freely between my angels and me, strengthening our profound connection and an eternal bond. There was no room whatsoever for secrets or shame or misunderstanding or anything negative.

There was just this wonderful, beautiful, nourishing sense of knowing.

I wish I could say I recognized them as people I previously knew on Earth, but I didn't. Many who have died describe seeing a favorite relative waiting for them in the beyond. They talk about the amazing joy of such a heavenly reunion. I would love to have been reunited with my precious Grandma Ernie, but I wasn't. I'm not saying that doesn't happen; it just wasn't part of my experience. Still, meeting my angels left me overflowing with joy. They never left my side, and I knew they never would.

In addition to my guardian angels, there was also a being on my right, and instantly I knew who this was, too. And I felt as if my spirit form just crumpled and fell before this being, as if – had I had a physical body – I'd fallen to my knees and raised my arms and bowed deeply in praise and worship.

Me! Crystal! The sinner and the skeptic, the one with all the questions!

Here in the presence of God.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 37-39)



HEAVEN TAUGHT ME THAT WE ALL HAVE GUARDINAN ANGELS (ALWAYS NEARBY)!

When I opened my eyes in heaven, I was also instantly aware that I was not alone.

There were two distinct beings in front of me, standing slightly to the left. They had

vaguely humanlike forms – long and slender. The one to the right was a bit taller than the one on the left. I couldn't make out any features, just a brilliant silhouette glowing with a beautiful golden light.

Instantly, I knew who they were – they were my angels.

And instantly, I was overwhelmed by love for them.

I knew that these two beings in front of me were my protectors, my teachers, my heroes, my best friends, my everything. They had been with me always and they would be with me forevermore. They were an inseparable part of my journey through existence, and now they were here to greet me as I arrived in heaven. And once again I didn't just see them – I *felt* them. I was infused by their love and compassion. A complete and instant communication passed between us. The fact that I ever felt lonely on earth seemed unfathomable, given what I now realized in heaven – that I had never, ever actually been alone, that my angels had been there with me for every step along the way and every tear of heartbreak and sadness. Our relationship was pure and perfect – no lies, no shame, no misunderstandings, no apologies. Just love – wonderful, healing, nourishing, beautiful love.

Heaven taught me that we all have guardian angels, and that they never, ever leave our side.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 18-19)



**I FELT AN ABSOLUTE AND TOTAL SURRENDER TO HIS GREATNESS –
COMPLETELY HUMBLLED IN HIS PRESENCE!**

No sooner was I aware of my angels than I became attuned to another great brightness. This brightness had no distinct form, no face or body, not even a shape – the best way I can describe it is to call it a blinding profusion of love. And just as the brilliant light of heaven made me realize instantly that I was home, this blinding abundance of love made me realize what was happening.

I was in the presence of God.

And in this moment I knew that I wasn't *meeting* God. I *recognized* God. My spirit already knew its Creator, the Father for Whom I had longed my whole life. I was filled with the deeply profound certainty that everything around me – the light, the brightness,

the angels, the communication – was a creation of God. I understood that God *is* everything. And I realized, with unsurpassable joy, that I was God’s creation, too. I felt the indescribable miracle of being intertwined with Him .I felt closer to God than I ever thought possible, and yet I felt the need to get even *closer*. I was completely humbled by His presence, and I felt an absolute and total surrender to His greatness.

Without hesitation, I collapsed in worship of Him. Not like I worshipped Him in church, by singing or mouthing the words to a prayer – no, I *truly* worshipped Him. I wished to devote every last fiber of my being to worshipping Him. And though on earth I had so many questions I wanted to ask God - “Where were You when I was abused?” “Why didn’t You protect me?” “Why do You let so many bad things happen to Your children?” - in heaven, outstretched before Him and in complete and utter awe of Him, I had only one simple question for God.

Why didn’t I do more for You?

In heaven, all my questions were answered without my even asking them. God’s plan was revealed to me to be perfect in every conceivable way. On earth I didn’t understand why bad things happen, but in heaven everything was absolutely clear. All that remained for me to do was to question why *I* hadn’t done more. My feelings of inadequacy and failure to live up to God’s glory were not negative feelings – in heaven, nothing is negative. They were just part of the complete surrender of myself to God. I didn’t feel regret, and I understood my question didn’t even have an answer. It wasn’t even really a question at all. It was simply a way for me to convey that God deserved so much more from me, because His love for me was so complete.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 19-20)



**EVEN WITHOUT A PHYSICAL BODY I KNEW THAT I WAS STILL ‘ME’ –
THE SAME ‘ME’ THAT HAD EXISTED ON EARTH!**

The instant I came out of my deep sleep, I was aware I no longer had a physical body. I had left it behind. I was now in spirit form. I never examined my form, I was just aware of it – just like we know that we have ten toes without having to see them. My spirit form was not a form as we know it, with defined edges and shapes, but it was still very much a form, and I was very much a presence.

And even without a physical body I knew that I was still “me”. The same me that had existed on Earth, the same me that had just told my mother I loved her before I died. At

the same time, though, I had the stunning realization that I was the “me” that had existed for all of eternity, long before my time on Earth.

Unlike on Earth, where I was plagued by doubts and fears, in heaven there was nothing but absolute certainty about who I was. This was a far more complete representation of my spirit and my heart and my being than was ever possible on Earth, a far deeper self-awareness than the collection of hopes and fears and dreams and scars that defined me during my life. I was flooded with self-knowledge, and all the junk that cluttered my identity on Earth instantly fell away, revealing, for the first time ever, the real me. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,” God says in Jeremiah 1:5. And now I knew myself.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pg. 12)



GOD’S RADIANCE WAS SOMETHING THAT OVERWHELMED EVERY SENSE I HAD!

There was another sensation – a sensation that I wasn’t just aware of God; I was feeling Him. His radiance wasn’t simply something I could observe; it was something that overwhelmed every sense I had. In heaven we don’t have just five senses; we have a ton of senses. Imagine a sense that allowed us to not only see light, but also to taste it. Imagine another sense that allowed us to touch and feel light. Imagine yet another sense that isn’t taste or touch but some new way to experience something, creating a more amazing and rewarding connection than any of our earthly senses allow.

That is what I experienced in the presence of God – a beautiful new way of receiving and sending love. I was completely infused by God’s brightness and His love, and I wanted to enter into His brightness and intertwine myself completely with it. I felt a miraculous closeness to God but wanted to feel even closer.

This was the Creator of the universe, and I was in His presence! The sheer ecstasy of it! The beauty of it, the joy and the grace, the way my spirit soared and my heart burst – how I wish I had the words to convey just how miraculous this was. It was the blessing of all blessings, and I knew that I was changed forever.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pg. 90)



WHAT I REALLY EXPERIENCED WAS THE UNDERSTANDING THAT EVERYTHING AROUND ME WAS OF GOD!

I was aware of my guardian angels on my left, and I instantly knew them and loved them and realized they'd always been by my side. But I was also aware of a being on my right, and instantly I knew who this was, too. And what overcame me was a profound, endless desire to praise and worship this being, for I knew immediately I was in the presence of God.

I have always referred to God as a *him*, and I guess I always will. But the being on my right was not a *him* or a *her*; it was just God. Nor did I make any distinction between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, as we sometimes do on Earth. They were all One – the One before me now. There was no distinct form, certainly no face or body, just a blinding profusion of brightness. I wasn't so much meeting God as I was recognizing Him. I already knew Him, and He knew me, I'd spent my life doubting His existence and disbelieving His love for me, but in that instant I knew God had always, always been there – right there with me.

And while I say God was on my right and I had the sensation of turning to my right toward Him, what I really experienced was the understanding that everything around me was of God. The light, the brightness, the angels, the communication – everything was a creation of God. I understood that I was a part of Him, and that's the moment I truly realized what being a creation of God truly means.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 89-90)



I WANTED TO PRAISE AND WORSHIP GOD, AND THAT IS ALL I WANTED TO DO!

In the very same instant that I saw and knew and recognized God, I immediately confessed that He was my Lord and worshipped Him with all my might. The Bible has a passage that says, “every tongue will confess and every knee shall bow,” and let me tell you, that's what this was like. A complete surrender to His greatness and an overpowering desire to praise and worship Him. On Earth, there were times during worship in church when my feet hurt or my kids were fussing, and I'd think, Are we almost done? But this was different, very different. With every fiber of my existence I wanted to praise and worship God, and that's all I wanted to do. And I wanted to do it forever. And I felt like I could do it forever. And so that's what I did, happily, joyously – I praised God.

What drove my praise was the intensity and immensity of my love for God. There is simply no other love remotely like it. When I was in His presence, I just had the feeling that I loved Him so, so much – more than I ever thought was possible. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,” Jesus said when asked which commandment was the most important, and that is how I felt – like I loved God with absolutely everything – everything – I had.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 90-91)



**IN HIS PRESENCE I ABSOLUTELY UNDERSTOOD THAT IN EVERY WAY
GOD’S PLAN IS PERFECT!**

And you know, back on Earth, I had so many questions for God. “If I ever meet Him,” I’d say, “I’m going to ask Him how He could let someone molest me when I was a child. How could He abide brutality against children or the suffering of starving people or cruelty toward the weak? How could He allow such evil to exist in the world?”

Why, I would ask Him, was he such a punishing God?

But in heaven, all those questions immediately evaporated. In His presence I absolutely understood that in every way God’s plan is perfect. Sheer, utter perfection. Does that mean I can now explain how a child being murdered fits into God’s plan? No. I understood it in heaven, but we aren’t meant to have that kind of understanding here on Earth. All I can tell you is that I know God’s plan is perfect. In His radiance, it all makes perfect, perfect sense.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pg.91)



**I KNEW INSTANTLY TAHT OUR GOD IS NOT A PUNISHING GOD; HE IS A
LOVING GOD!**

In heaven, alongside God, all the questions I had for Him no longer needed answers. How could He abide evil in this world? Why was He such a punishing God? In His presence, I knew in an instant that God’s plan for us is perfect, even when bad things happen and we don’t understand why.

But I did have one question as we know it; it was something that passed between us in that effortless, instant way. The same ease and fullness of communication I experienced with my angels was there with God, too. And because of that channel connecting us and allowing things to pass between us – and infusing me with more and more and more of His love – I felt humbled, and I felt compelled to address this shortcoming from my time on Earth. And I didn't just ask the question, like I might ask someone for the time – no, this was more of a profound and absolute surrendering of myself, a wrenching and overpowering admission of inadequacy. As if I were crying and throwing myself at His feet and pleading, with every fiber of my being, “Why? Why? Why didn't I do more for You? Why didn't I accomplish more in Your name? Why didn't I talk more about You? Why didn't I do what You asked me to do?”

It's not that I felt regret – regret is a negative emotion, and there is nothing negative in heaven – it's that I loved God so immensely I felt like He deserved so much more from me.

But God wouldn't allow me to feel bad about it. There is no feeling bad in heaven. There was no answer to my question, because there was no need for an answer. Despite what I had believed on Earth, I knew instantly that our God is not a punishing God. He is a loving God.

I realized I didn't just love God.
I realized He IS love.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 149-150)



I INSTANTLY KNEW WHAT THIS BRIGHTNESS WAS – IT WAS THE GATES OF HEAVEN!

Then the four of us – God, my two angels, and I – were moving down a tunnel. It was a magnificent passageway of blinding, swirling, shimmering brightness – brightness above me and on my sides. I have heard people who died talk about finding themselves in a tunnel, and I understand why they use that term – because, while it wasn't like any tunnel we have on Earth, it felt like the brightness was not only surrounding me but guiding me toward something. And at the end of the tunnel there was a burst of an even brighter light – more intense and more vivid and more golden and more beautiful than all the other brightness.

And I instantly knew what this brightness was.

It was the gates of heaven.

I was at the very entrance to heaven.

And then an understanding passed between God and me. The channel that connected us was always open and we were communicating constantly and intensely, but this was a purer communication, a more important message.

The instant I became aware of the gates of heaven, God said, “Once we get there, you cannot come back.”

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 150-151)



I KNEW THERE COULD BE NOTHING BETWEEN GOD AND ME!

I understood we were near the point of no return in my journey, and that filled me with such excitement and such expectation, I couldn't wait to get there.

But, in that same instant, I had a vision of my four children.

I'm not sure exactly how they appeared to me; all I know is they became part of my awareness. All four of them – JP, Sabyre, Micah, and Willow – so clearly came up in my mind, because I was nearing the point where I would not be able to go back and see them again on Earth.

But in the same instant that my children came to me, I also understood that they would be okay without me, that, like He does for all of us, God had a perfect plan for their lives. I would see them again soon enough, there in heaven. It wasn't like I had this big argument with myself about it, I knew what I wanted to do. “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,” it says in Matthew 10:37. “Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” I can remember hearing this scripture preached on Sunday mornings and thinking, I could never love anything more than my children. I simply couldn't fathom it. But in this perfect moment, a moment God created for me, I understood, and I was absolutely clear about my intentions. I knew there could be nothing between God and me. God comes first, and everything else is second. And so another understanding passed between us.

“I want to stay with You,” I said.

We moved through the tunnel, toward the glowing entranceway. There was no rush, no urgency, just a blissful sense of calm. I knew where I was going, and I was ecstatic.

But then I became aware of yet another presence in the tunnel, just ahead. And I knew it wasn’t meant for me to get the gates just yet.

You see, there was someone God wanted me to meet.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 151, 152)



**EVERYTIME SHE LAUGHED, MY SPIRIT ABSOLUTELY SWELLED WITH
LOVE AND PRIDE FOR HER!**

I moved with God and my angels through the tunnel, toward the glowing entranceway. I knew exactly where we were headed, and I believed I couldn’t possibly feel any more joy than I did. But then I became aware of yet another presence in the tunnel, just ahead. This was the person God had brought me to meet.

This presence was smaller than my angels and also much more distinct. This figure had a body, and a face, and arms and legs.

It was a child.

It was a little girl.

I had the sensation of locking in on her and soaking up everything about her. She was small and no more than three or four years old. She had a white bonnet on her head, and she was holding a small white basket – sort of like a wicker Easter basket. She wore a white frilly summer dress that had tinges of yellow, and this yellow was the first identifiable color I saw in heaven. But it wasn’t an ordinary yellow. These yellow tinges were beaming and sparkling like a prism, like they were reflecting the brilliant light around us and bouncing it back in an even more glorious way. The effect they created was just stunningly gorgeous, something I can’t even think about now without losing my breath.

The girl was skipping and prancing and laughing, just like little kids do on Earth. She was bending and dipping her basket into the brightness at her feet and filling it up like

she was filling it with water. She would dip the basket and scoop up the brightness and pour it out and do it again. And every time she dipped the basket and came up with it dripping this magical brightness, she laughed.

Every time she laughed, my spirit absolutely swelled with love and pride for her. I wanted to watch this little girl play for the rest of eternity. I wanted to run up to her and take her in my arms and tell her how much I loved her. The love just kept building, endless and radiating waves of love so deep and so intense and so unstoppable I truly, truly believed my soul was going to explode and I was going to cease to exist. And all the while the little girl just kept dipping her basket and scooping up light and laughing like little girls do. It touched me so deeply, it was more than I could bear. I prepared myself to burst, to shatter into a million pieces, because I knew I couldn't possibly contain all the love I felt for this child.

And then God lifted this feeling from me.

It was almost as if I had been wearing some kind of magic glasses that suddenly He took off of me. And I knew it was God who lifted this feeling, because as soon as it was lifted, I looked back at the child and immediately understood who the child was.

The little girl with the golden basket was me.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 163-164)



**I KNEW GOD WAS ALLOWING ME TO SEE MYSELF AS HE SAW ME! -
THAT GOD HAD ALWAYS LOVED ME!**

And then another understanding passed between God and me, and I knew this is what He'd been trying to show me all my life. He'd been trying to show me how very much He loved me.

I knew God was allowing me to see myself as He saw me. And in His eyes I was absolutely perfect creation, and I always would be. All the things that happened to me on Earth, all the bad decisions that caused me to hate myself – none of it mattered. I had believed God couldn't possibly love me, not after what had been done to me, not after what I had done. But this belief was a lie, and God blasted the lie by showing me the intensity of His love for me.

Seeing the child was the most profound and powerful thing that ever happened to me,

because it did something I didn't think was possible.

It made me whole.

In that moment, chains that had bound me all my life fell away. Chains of shame and secrets and lies and pain. Chains too heavy for anyone or anything to free me from on Earth. Chains that simply dropped away in the presence of the truth.

This was the key sensation – that the truth of all truths had been revealed to me. I was imbued with this penetrating understanding that God had always loved me, like He loves all His children. And so, for the first time ever, I was filled with love for myself. How could I not love myself? I was God's perfect creation!

What's more, God chose to show me myself at the age of three. This was not a random age. I was three years old when the abuse began. That was the turning point in my life, the point where my innocence was taken from me. Though I had many happy times as a child and many moments of love and goodness, the truth is that from the age of three on I was trapped in a life of shame and secrets, of self-doubt and self-hatred – of believing I didn't deserve God's love, of believing God had abandoned me.

So God took me back to when I was three years old, and He freed me from that lie. All those dark and difficult years, every crisis and heartbreak that made me turn away from Him – all of it, every bit of it, was washed clean by the awareness that God's love for me is boundless. Burdens I had been shouldering for decades were lifted. Seeing myself through God's eyes made me whole and set me free.

Yet even as I was filled with God's love, I knew I was experiencing only a tiny, minuscule grain of it. God's love is so big and so vast and so powerful, we can only contain a small part. That tiny grain of God's love filled me so completely that I couldn't imagine being anywhere else but with Him.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 164-166)



THE LAST AND MOST POWERFUL THING GOD SAID TO ME – ‘TELL THEM WHAT YOU CAN REMEMBER’!

Then I heard something in a way I hadn't heard anything else in heaven. It wasn't like the pure communication that had passed between God and me. It was a word, spoken by a voice.

“Crystal.”

It was my mother’s voice. She was calling my name. The sound was so sharp and so abrupt that I knew she was screaming.

“Crystal! Crystal!”

For the first time I had the sensation of stopping – like the feeling of seeing a car coming at you and freezing in your tracks. And in that instant I realized my mother didn’t know where I was. She didn’t know I was okay. I felt sorry for what she had to be going through. The truth is, I hadn’t thought at all about my hospital room. I didn’t hover above my bed or see everyone clustered around me or anything like that. I had no connection to anything that was happening in that room or on Earth. Even the vision of my children wasn’t earthly; it was an awareness, like everything else I was experiencing in heaven. But that all changed when I heard my mother yell my name. All of a sudden I knew I had to let her know where I was.

“I need to tell my mother I’m okay,” I said.

And God responded. “The choice is up to you.”

I didn’t want to leave God. I didn’t want to go anywhere. I just wanted to let my mother know I was okay. I had the sensation of turning around and, for the first time, focusing on what was beneath me. It was a floor of what looked like shimmering water crystals, shining like a billion perfect diamonds. I could not see through it, but I knew that my mother’s voice was coming from somewhere beneath it. As I turned away from the entrance to heaven, there was another communication from God – the last and most powerful thing He said to me.

“Tell them what you can remember.”

“I’m going to remember everything,” I answered. “I will be right back.”

I focused my full attention on the water crystals again, and in that instant I knew I was back in my human body.

And that’s when I opened my eyes.

(Crystal McVea, *Waking Up In Heaven*, pp. 166-167)



THEN I OPENED MY EYES AGAIN, AND I WAS BACK IN MY HOSPITAL ROOM

Then I heard a voice I instantly recognized.

“Crystal!” I heard. “Crystal!”

It was my mother calling to me from the hospital room back on earth. The sound was so sharp and so abrupt that I knew she was screaming.

For the first time in heaven, I had the sensation of stopping – of something halted. My mother didn’t know where I was, or that I was safe. No one on earth did. And this insight began to crowd out the rest of the perfect and beautiful awareness I had been filled with in heaven. I understood that I needed to go back and tell my mother where I was and that I was okay. And as I communicated this to God, I understood His response, which was, “The choice is up to you.”

I had to choose. I could either continue down the beautiful tunnel and into my eternity, or I could turn back toward my earthly life. For the first time I looked below me, and I saw the very floor of heaven, like an endless blanket of shimmering water crystals, brilliant like a billion perfect diamonds, a sea of glowing, transparent glass. I became aware of what lay beneath the floor – my earthly home. I knew that beneath me a team of doctors was frantically working to restart my body, and I knew my mother was crying in a corner of the room, begging me not to leave her. Her love for me and her prayers for my return made my spirit long to comfort her. I made my choice, and I slowly turned away from the gates of heaven. And as I focused on the floor, another communication passed between God and me, the most powerful one yet.

“Tell them what you can remember.”

“I’m going to remember everything.” I called back to Him over my shoulder. “I will be right back.”

And then I opened my eyes again, and I was back in my hospital room.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 24-25)

IT (DEATH) IS QUICK AND IT DOESN'T HURT, AND IT IS MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE!

Note: Just a few minutes before Crystal McVea appeared on live national television (to share her experience of her 'out-of-body' encounters in heaven), the 'make-up artist', who was doing the 'final preparations' for Crystal, evidenced great personal emotional pain. Crystal soon learned that this very needy lady was filled with fear and doubts regarding life in general and especially regarding her impending death (she had terminal cancer). The following is a reduced account of Crystal's conversation with this lady, regarding 'faith in God' and regarding physical death:

The makeup artist drew in a deep breath and pushed on. "I'm a good person," she said, tears streaking her face. "I have cancer and the doctors say there is nothing they can do. I'm a good person. I am a good person. I never did anything wrong. So what kind of God...what kind of God..?"

She trailed off and dissolved into herself, broken and furious. She had said everything she had the strength to say.

"I get it," I finally said. "I've asked 'What kind of God...?' for more than thirty years. I understand. But here is what I know."

And I told her about my time in heaven.

"What I can say is that there is a very real place with a very real God Who loves us with a very real love," I said. "Although at times we cannot understand His plan, He showed me that He uses *all* things for His good."

I was talking quickly now, because there was so much to say. "The questions that you have here on earth," I went on, "will be explained the instant you meet Him in heaven. But by then they won't matter. Because in that place, all that matters is how much He loves us and how much we love Him."

The profoundness of the moment filled me with emotion, and I began to choke up, too. When I finished talking, we were both silent for what seemed like a long time. Finally, the makeup artist spoke.

"Tell me what it's going to be like," She said in a whisper. "Tell me what it's going to be like to die."

I took her hand in mine.

“When the time comes,” I said, “the veil will slowly open. It is like holding your breath for a split second and diving into the water. It is quick and it doesn’t hurt at all and it is beautiful, more beautiful than you can imagine, and you are never alone, not even for a moment. He is with you through it all. The Lord doesn’t wait for us in heaven. He escorts us to heaven. The transition is instant. The moment you close your eyes here on earth will be the exact moment that you open them in heaven. There is no fear and there is no pain. You are never alone. He is with you through it all.”

The makeup artist squeezed my hand and wiped away her tears.

“I’m scared,” she said, “I’m not ready. There is more I want to do here.”

“Don’t be afraid,” I told her. “There is nothing to be afraid of.”

Then I asked her if I could pray with her.

She came toward me and wrapped her arms around me, putting her head on my chest. I held her frail body tightly, and together we prayed. We prayed for healing, and we prayed that God might take away her fears. We stayed like that for a while, two strangers in a tiny makeup room in a TV studio in New York City. We stayed like that and we prayed and we cried, together.

And then I said, “No matter which one of us goes first, let’s make a promise that we will meet at those beautiful gates with God one day.”



BEING IN HEAVEN HAD COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED ME. I WAS A BRAND NEW PERSON!

One major change after I came back from heaven was that I no longer carried a lot of the emotional baggage I’d been lugging around for years. All my old grudges and grievances went away – I just didn’t feel mad at anyone anymore. There was one person in particular who had been a real problem for my family and me in the months before I went to heaven, and now that I was back, I wasn’t even angry at them anymore. This person owed us a significant amount of money, and we were caught up in a lawsuit to get our funds back. Out of the blue, I told Virgil I wanted to drop the lawsuit.

“I know we’re never getting that money back, and that’s okay,” I said. “We have to pray for them.”

Now, forgiving a large debt – and letting go of old grievances – was simply not like the old Crystal. I was a bit of a pit bull when it came to fighting for what I believed was right. I tended not to let things go – I was keen to settle them. Yet there I was, saying good-bye to the money our family needed and feeling genuine compassion for a person I’d previously wanted to shake by the throat.

There were other things I wanted to let go, including all of my stuff. Before heaven, I had been extremely sentimental about objects, and I cherished them as prized possessions. Afterward, that all went away. I felt zero attachment to any material thing. I was so determined to overhaul my life that I proposed to Virgil we give away our home to someone who needed it more than we did.

“Well,” Virgil said with a smile, “we need our house, too.”

Not much later, Virgil came into our bedroom and found me knee deep in a pile of our clothes and shoes I wanted to give away. I saved two outfits for each of us. They were hanging in the closet. That poor, sweet man and what he had to deal with.

“Yeah,” Virgil said as he picked up the clothes and hung them back in the closet, “We kind of need these too.”

Still, I was undaunted. If you happened to be my friend at that time, it was the perfect opportunity to come around my house and take anything you liked. My friend Kara would often jokingly say things like, “On a scale of one to ten, just how attached are you to your car?” or “Is God telling you to give me any money?” But I was serious. I was ready to give it all away – every last thing. When I walked to the gates of heaven, I sure wasn’t pulling a rolling suitcase behind me. In my time with God we never talked about my new car or how big my house was. The balance in my checking account or how many pairs of shoes I owned didn’t matter. What I took was something far more precious, and it didn’t have a price tag – I took memories and lessons and adventures and triumphs, and most of all, I took love.

In that moment with God, the only thing that mattered was not what I had but what I had given.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 47-49)



GOD’S “EXQUISITE AND PERFECT PLAN” FOR YOU – ABUNDANT LIFE

ON EARTH AND ETERNAL LIFE (EVENTUALLY) IN HEAVEN!

In heaven, I had no questions for God because all knowledge was given to me in that moment. But back here on earth, in this life, I had not been allowed to retain all that God had told me. That left me with plenty of questions of my own.

In the five years since I returned from heaven, however, my understanding of my time there has changed. Just as the lessons I learned in heaven have helped me live a better life on earth, my experiences here during those five years have helped illuminate my understanding of heaven.

For one thing, people have pointed out to me that I was not in fact in heaven because I did not pass through the gates. The truth is, I never actually even saw gates – what I saw was a brilliant profusion of love and life dancing together and beckoning me to come closer. And I understood that if I walked into this light, I would be in my forever home. And even though I didn't walk into the light, I still call the place where I was "heaven". I call it heaven because I don't know what else I could call it. To me, being with my angels and with God, and being wrapped in such incredible love, was, in fact, heaven.

When I returned, I was delighted to learn I was not the only person who had experienced this majestic place. Don Piper, the pastor who was dead for an hour and a half before being revived, talks about it in his book *90 Minutes in Heaven*. He, too, made it through the tunnel and right up to the gates, but like me he didn't pass through them. And like me he understood that if he had passed through the gates, he wouldn't have been able to come back to earth.

Why do some people go up to the gates but not pass through?

In the five years since I've been back, I've come to understand that God uses us all in different ways. He has a *purpose* for us that is specific to who we are. My purpose, and Don's purpose, involved coming back to earth. But others are permitted to enter those beautiful gates and run into the arms of the Lord. When someone we love dies, it is painful beyond words, but only for us, not them. The truth is, we are not really losing them – and one day we will see them again.

I believe this is why God sends some people back – to share the message that heaven is real and He loves us and He is waiting for us in our final home.

At the same time, God wants us to live full and joyful lives right here, right now. Our time on earth is as much a part of our journey as our time in heaven. The love we create and share here matters – it matters *greatly*. As beautiful and desirable as heaven is, I

wouldn't have wanted to miss any of the life I've lived here.

Heaven is real, but so is our life on earth – and they are both a part of God's exquisite and perfect plan for each of us.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 91-93)



JUST THE ACT OF TALKING ABOUT HEAVEN CAN EASE FEARS AND BRING SOME MEASURE OF COMFORT (TO SORROWING ONES)!

For a long time I wasn't sure why God sent me back from heaven. But it was becoming clear to me that one of the reasons was to share my experience of heaven with people who are nearing the end of their lives on earth.

We are all human, and even the most faithful among us might feel alone and afraid as we prepare to meet our Creator. Just the act of talking about heaven – of affirming its existence and imagining its glories – can ease those fears and bring some measure of comfort in that time. I was beginning to realize that was something I could help with, because, after all, I *loved* talking about heaven. I would probably do it 24/7 if I could. That God would use me in some small way to help bring solace to those who needed it was incredibly humbling. It filled me with a sense of purpose, as well as a sense of awe at how God uses us all in different ways to share His love with the world.

The truth is, I don't know why some people get cancer and die, and others don't. But what I do know, and what I can say for sure, is that God knows our sadness. God knows every single one of our tears. "You keep track of all my sorrows," the psalmist in 56:8 wrote. "You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book" (NLT).

God is there with us in our suffering, and one day He will take it all away.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain," it says in Revelation 21:4. "All these things will be gone forever."

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 105-107)



IF HEAVEN IS SO WONDERFUL, WHY AM I SO SAD (RATHER THAN BEING

GLAD) WHEN MY ‘LOVED ONES’ DIE?

Why do I cling so desperately to the living, if letting them go means they’ll be in their true and glorious home?

Because the passage to heaven is indescribably wondrous, but for the people left behind, it’s filled with heartache and pain.

I can see the irony of someone who’s been to heaven praying to keep others out of it, at least for a while longer. But the fact is, no matter how much I can’t wait to get back to heaven, it is *not* okay when I lose someone I love. I am comforted by my knowledge of where they’ve gone, but I still grieve their loss, and I still feel great heartbreak, and I still get mad because I can’t call them to share a joke or email them a funny photo. Yes, of course, I *want* them to go to heaven, I *want* them to feel what I felt.

Just not yet.

This is one of the things I’ve had to grapple with – and still grapple with – since coming back from heaven: Why do I get distraught when people close to me pass? Shouldn’t I feel gleeful? Why is it so hard to let them go?

I know it might not make much sense, but I figure it’s because I am human. And yes, I’ll admit it, I’m selfish. Life is so very precious, and I really like hugging people, and when I can’t do that with someone anymore, it hurts.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 117-118)



THE MOMENT I EXPERIENCED GOD’S LOVE IN HEAVEN, I KNEW IT WAS THE MOST POWERFUL THING I HAD EVER FELT!

One of the greatest things I took away from my time in heaven was an awareness of the inconceivable, limitless amount of love that God radiates for us all. The moment I experienced God’s love in heaven, I knew it was truly the most powerful thing I’d ever felt – and ever would feel.

Jesus knew that kind of love. He gave that kind of love, and He taught that kind of love. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,” He instructs in Luke 10:27. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” How could I love God but not love the very people He created, regardless of

our differences? Jesus didn't say to love our neighbors only if they believe the same things we do. His instruction was to love our neighbors *whoever* they are.

When I think about the neighbors who are intertwined in my life, it is impossible not to see the beauty within each one of them. I have friends who are Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist. Some don't believe in anything at all. I have gay friends and straight friends and friends of every race and nationality. I have friends who are judgmental, friends who are judges. I have friends who are doctors, aid workers, and missionaries, and others who are felons, addicts, and prostitutes. I have friends who serve in our military, friends who are homeless, and friends who are millionaires. The thought of not having a single one of these friends in my life makes me impossibly sad. We may all be very different, but one common factor remains.

We were all created by the very same God.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 126-127)



MY TIME IN HEAVEN TAUGHT ME THAT GOD'S LOVE IS NOT A PASSIVE, THEORETICAL THING!

When I was in heaven, I crumpled before God and asked Him, "Why didn't I do more for You?" And in the five years since I came back, I have learned there are millions of ways we can all "do more" for God. Some of these ways are gigantic and dramatic – like moving to a war-torn country to spread God's love. But other ways are smaller and simpler – like writing a note of love and compassion and slipping it into a gift bag for a homeless person.

It is important we remember that *all* of the actions in this wide spectrum of "doing more" are beautiful, meaningful, and impactful. The big ones and the little ones – *all* of them are ways God uses us to spread His love. Yes, sometimes God's calling sends people to battlefields halfway around the world. Sometimes God calls us into battles right where we are.

Introducing people to Christ happens through love, not condemnation or accusations or judgment. Salvation for all of us comes through grace. My time in heaven taught me that God's love is not a passive, theoretical thing. God's love is tangible. We feel it when we put the needs of others before our own, when we tuck our babies into bed – even when we help pick lice out of the hair of sweet children huddled together in a friend's living room. God's love happens all around us, to us, and through us.

God's love is an *action*.

And today, my time on earth is teaching me all the remarkable ways through which we can share that love with others.

A world that desperately needs us to love *first*.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 157, 159)



ARE YOU LEARNING (SENSITIVELY) TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL (DIRECTION) WHEN HE PRECIOUSLY "SPEAKS" TO YOU?

Before I went to heaven, I questioned God all the time. Because my life was so hard and nothing ever seemed to change for the better, I believed God wasn't listening to me or didn't care about me. My prayers felt like a one-way phone conversation, with me desperately wailing on one end, and silence on the other.

But in heaven I learned God is *always* listening. I learned He is with us every day, particularly in the dark and troubling times. This doesn't mean He will answer all our prayers the way we would like them answered. But He hears them all, and the pathway for communication between us is always open. I just tended to mistake a "no" answer as silence on God's end.

The absolute certainty I gained in heaven – that God hears us always – has made me much more attentive to what God might say in return.

And what I've come to understand is that God doesn't communicate with me through thunder and lightning. In my life, there are no booming voices, no burning bush. I realize now that God communicated with me in a series of small and beautiful ways. Of course, I didn't pick up on them all. I wasn't always paying attention. I laugh at the thought that, after trying to get my attention for so many years, God must have finally turned to my angels and said, "This one just doesn't get it. I'm literally going to have to let her die to teach her how to live."

And once God had my attention, He never, ever lost it.

For me, a nudge is simply a sudden instinct that overcomes me. It's an urge, a feeling, an idea that pops into my head. The way I know a certain nudge is from God is when it

urges me to do something I usually don't want to do. For instance, there have been times when I'll be at a restaurant with Virgil and the kids, and I'll be just about to dig into my dinner when I get a nudge to tell the person sitting next to us how very much God loves them. Now, interrupting someone who is having dinner – and letting my own food get cold – is not something I want to do. In fact, I really dislike doing it. But because the nudge is so strong, and because it's something I don't want to do, I know it is a nudge from God. And so I do it.

Or, I should say, I do it most of the time. I try to do everything God tells me, but I'm certainly no saint. Sometimes I let a nudge pass. But what I've learned is that when I don't do something God asks, He doesn't stop asking.

God doesn't sing to me, but His gentle urging is relentless. It doesn't subside until I do what He asked.

Another way God speaks to me is through my dreams. Three years before I died, I had a particularly powerful dream about my brother, Jayson. At that time, Jayson was struggling in his life. Like me, he was headstrong. Everything we'd gone through as kids had left us battered and scarred. Only instead of turning to food or long work hours to treat the despair, he drank. He was drinking too much and his faith in God was under assault. Yet in the dream, I saw my brother standing on a big stage in church, singing and leading people in worship of God. I had never seen people worship God like that before, yet there my brother was, arms raised and head thrown back, singing at the top of his lungs. The dream didn't make much sense, but I never forgot it, and over the years it brought me comfort. I held out hope that even if God wasn't going to save me, one day He would save my brother. And one day he did.

My brother gave his life to Christ in a jail cell and never looked back. He sought God, straightened up his affairs, and a few years later married the love of his life – a preacher's daughter named Melissa. Jayson has been known to get up on the stage of her family's church and lead others in the beautiful worship of God.

Ever since then, I've tried to pay very close attention to my dreams.

Beyond the nudges and the dreams, sometimes God just plants a tiny seed in my spirit. I don't always understand it at first, but over time it grows and grows and soon it overwhelms me. It starts out as the subtlest way God communicates with me. But it can also be the most powerful.

I think of it as a whisper straight to my heart.

Believe me, I get it when people say, “God, can You hear me? Are You listening?” I asked those very questions for most of my life. But now I understand that God is *always* listening, and it’s up to us to open our ears and open our hearts so we can hear Him when He answers.

Pay attention to your dreams. Be aware of the nudges. Listen for the small, still voice inside you. Because what you are hearing just may be a whisper from God.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pp. 163-165)

**AMIDST YOUR MANY JOYS AND SORROWS, ACCEPT YOUR EARTHLY
“CALLING”, WHILE YOU AWAIT YOUR FINAL CONSUMMATION IN
HEAVEN!**

When I died I learned that heaven is our true home. But that doesn’t mean our time on earth doesn’t have meaning – far from it. I faced the prospect of death head-on when I nearly lost my son in the motorcycle accident. I dealt with it again when my mother was in her horrendous car accident. And each time, I prayed harder than I’d ever prayed before, and what I prayed for was *life*. More *life*. I want my loved ones to be alive and with me here on earth.

Even though I went to heaven and felt indescribable joy and peace, I still want to be alive right here, on this imperfect planet.

Because, I now understand, we can find God and heaven here, too.

(Crystal McVea, *Chasing Heaven*, pg. 208)