



Heaven

or



Hell

“WILL THERE BE MANY, FEW, OR NO ONE, IN HELL?”

Of course, only God knows who will be saved in the end, how many persons, 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 demonstrates that the “wideness of God’s love” is indeed very wide!)

The fact that God’s light (of truth) shines, and with varying degrees of brightness, upon every person, at all times and under all circumstances, and the fact that God works in the conscience of every person (who has an innate sense of ‘right and wrong’), and the fact that God is “not willing that anyone should perish”, and the fact that God’s Spirit (short of coercion) is powerfully influencing everyone to repent of sin and to turn in faith to the Creator God – these are some of the realities about God’s character and merciful actions which cause me to rejoice that I will (by God’s keeping grace) someday enjoy the presence of countless multitudes of persons who were ushered into heaven ‘on the merits of Christ alone’, even though these multitudes of persons were not fortunate enough on earth to hear about Christ and to make a personal and knowledgeable volitional commitment to Him as Savior. They were saved, not because they had proper or full knowledge of Christ on earth, but because their hearts responded to the “Light of Truth” (which was “Christ Concealed”), as they received God’s Truth through “General Revelation nature, Conscience, partial truth in various non-Christian Religions, etc.). It is not the accuracy of head knowledge, but the receptivity of the heart to the “light of God” (even if that “light” is very incomplete), that determines the ultimate destiny of the human soul – and only God, in the end, will be the Judge of each personal spiritual condition!

However, is there clearer “Biblical Grounds” for believing that, in the End, most (if not the overwhelming majority) of people will be “Saved” – and enjoy the glories of heaven (which was God’s intention at the time He created the human race)?

John Stott, a long-time pastor and a highly respected Biblical scholar, preacher, writer, and evangelist, in his extensive commentary on the Book of Romans, shares most wonderful insights on the “Wideness of God’s Mercy” (when he expounds the meaning of Romans 5:12-21). “Romans 5:12-21 gives us solid grounds for confidence that a very large number will be saved and that the scope of Christ’ redeeming work although not universal, will be extremely extensive. Although, Adam’s disobedience led to universal sin and death, there has been a lavish extravagance about the grace of Christ, in both quality and quantity, which was entirely absent from Adam and all his works. The work of Christ will in the end be seen to be much more effective than the work of Adam; that Christ will raise to life many more than Adam will be dragged to death; and that God’s grace will flow in more abundant blessings than the consequences of Adam’s sin. He (Paul) is

affirming that Christ's work is superior to Adam's not only in the nature of his action and achievement, but in the degree of its success." (Romans, God's Good News for the World; pgs. 159-161)

One highly respected theologian/writer of a bygone day, but whose writings are still read with great profit (Charles H. Hodge – The greatest theologian of the 19th century) affirms his belief in the "Wideness of God's Mercy". With conviction, he writes, "The number of the saved shall doubtless greatly exceed the number of the lost. We have reason to believe that the lost shall bear to the saved no greater proportion than the inmates of a prison do to the mass of the community." (Ibid; pg. 161)

Fulton Sheen, the highly respected T.V. and radio speaker too 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. Either all kindnesses are done explicitly or implicitly in His name, or they are refused explicitly or implicitly in His name. 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." (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 abode (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 multitude 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 were 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'. Some 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' come not 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, who 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).

My life was drastically changed – resulting in a great desire to pray, to read, and to memorize the Bible. (The next few years following my conversion, I spent hundreds of hours alone, memorizing large portions of the New Testament, and praying and meditating, in a quiet environment near an old creek on an old rock; God changed my desires radically, and I was no longer a dull and purposeless individual). Therefore, I believe heaven will be inhabited, not only by the well-informed and deeply spiritual evangelicals, but also by the compassionate persons who are saved (even if they would be unable to properly describe the 'how' and the 'when' of their genuine connection with God). Whether we know a lot (theologically) with our HEADS or

not, the only persons who will enter the 'pearly gates' of heaven are those whose HEARTS are tender and compassionate.

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 (fountainhead) 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). But 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.

"There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians through 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 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." (Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis; pgs. 63, 164; 1952; Macmillan Company)

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 Machem, 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!

There are certain "foundation stones" upon which the entire superstructure of salvation rests. Namely: (1) God loves every person whom He has created, even though all are creatures of a "fallen race". (2) God wants to save every human being from the "bondage of sin", in life and after this earthly life. (3) Jesus alone provides salvation for the human race, through His atoning death and His powerful resurrection. (4) Every person (sinner) is "savable", that is, capable of being saved by Christ – all because of God's gift to every person of "prevenient grace" – the grace that "goes before" to prepare every human being for the convicting and convincing works of the Spirit, which are prerequisites to a person being saved. (5) The Holy Spirit gives the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to every human being, but each human being (a God-created "free moral agent") is capable of either accepting or of rejecting God's gift of saving grace.

God has a "perfect will", namely, the salvation of every human being. God has no "mysterious, divine decree" by which He decided (elected before the "foundation of the world") to save a select number of hu-

mans and consequently to damn the remainder of humans in His creation! Such explanation of "God's pre-destination" is both unbiblical and blasphemous and is an outrage against both God's justice and His love!

In light of everything that has previously been 'discussed' in this short paper, is it possible to give any definitive and Biblically based answer to the lead question (title of this paper). "Are there many, or few, or no one in Hell?" This question, I suppose, has been debated endlessly through the ages of Christianity, but it appears from a careful study (especially Romans 5, carefully expounded by the famous John R.W. Stott) of Biblical passages that the grace of God is so great and the persuasive (not coercive). Influence of the Holy Spirit is so great, that the vast majority of human beings (in the end) will finally be in heaven! Only God knows, obviously, but the focus in the Scriptures is not on sin but on God's grace. "Where sin abounds, grace super abounds." What we humans lost in the 'first Adam', we more than gain in the 'second Adam' (Jesus Christ).

The Bible does not explicitly teach that there will be no human in hell, but the Bible clearly teaches that it is not God's will that any human being should perish in hell. God is doing everything He can (short of coercion) to keep every person out of hell, His grace is much stronger than sin. Christ's victory over Satan is offered to every human being. We may share in Christ's victory – the victory of His resurrection. Satan is a defeated foe, and someday he will be a totally vanquished foe (in the Lake of Fire). Hell was not prepared for human beings, but only for Satan and his demons.

Even though we cannot dogmatically and Biblically declare that no human being will ever go to hell, we (as loving Christians) can at least HOPE that, finally, God's grace shall in some way persuade all humans (in the end) to surrender to God's love and, thus be rescued from eternal destruction. God is so merciful that I believe, as long as there is human breath in a person (and any kind of rationality, consciously, or unconsciously), the blessed and merciful Spirit of God offers forgiveness and eternal life to a dying sinner. Again, (as I like to repeat) "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance." I am sure that, like the dying thief on his cross, near to Jesus' cross, who was 'saved' in the last moments, there have been multitudes of dying sinners who have found mercy and forgiveness in their last hours, because they 'con-fessed their sins' in contrition and surrender. Even though the 'life' of the thief was 'lost', nevertheless his 'soul' was saved for eternity! Christ loves the 'foulest' of sinners, and died to save them. Christ died for all persons – 'up-and-out-sinners' and also 'down-and-out-sinners'! There is 'level ground' at the 'foot of the Cross of Christ'! God loves all, and Jesus died for all, and everyone is capable (by God's grace) of being saved!

What about those loving (saintly) persons throughout history, who have strongly HOPED that, in the end, no one would be in hell? Is it wrong (unbiblical) for such persons to hope and to pray that, because of

God's very powerful grace (persuasive wooing), ALL humans will finally yield to God's love and grace and mercy – and thus be saved from the horrible destiny of hell?

The "Church Doctor Catherine of Siena" (1347-1380) writes, "If I were wholly inflamed with the fire of divine love, would I not then, with a burning heart, beseech my Creator, the truly merciful One, to show mercy to All my brethren (fellow humans)? How could I ever reconcile myself, Lord, to the prospect that a single one of those whom, like me, you have created in your image and likeness, should become lost and slip from your hands? No, in absolutely no case do I want to see a single one of my brethren (fellow humans) met with ruin, not even a single one of those who, through their like birth, are one with me by nature and by grace. I want them all to be wrested from the grasp of the ancient enemy, so that they all become yours to the honor and greater glorification of your name."

Hans Urs Von Balthasar (a prolific writer) was considered one of the very greatest Christian theologians of the 20th century. In his insightful book entitled "Dare We Hope 'That All Men Be Saved'", he struggles a lot with the issue of eternal punishment (seemingly taught at times in the New Testament), and the issue of widespread (if not even universal)) salvation of mankind (which seems to have a serious 'backing' by many other New Testament Scriptures). How can these two seemingly, 'different sets of Scriptures' (that on one hand, speak of eternal punishment, and, on the other hand, speak of possible universal salvation) be reconciled? No place, of course, for dogmatism on this crucial issue (regarding eternal punishment), but this 'deep' and thoughtful theologian believes there is at least "Some Strong Hope That Most, If Not All, Persons Will Some Way Finally Be Saved For Heaven!"

This tension (between eternal punishment and ultimate universal salvation) is real in the New Testament. A very great scholar and writer (Karl Rahner) notes, "We have to preserve alongside one another. The power of God's general will for salvation, the redemption of all men through Christ, "The Duty to Hope for the Salvation of All Men", and the principle of the real possibility of becoming eternally lost."

Notes Hermann-Josef Lauter, "Will it really be all men who allow themselves to be reconciled? No theology or prophecy can answer this question. But love hopes all things. (I Corinthians 13:7) It cannot do otherwise than to hope for the reconciliation of all men in Christ. Such unlimited hope is, from the Christian standpoint, not only permitted but commanded."

The Holy Spirit cannot coerce (force) persons (sinners) to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for salvation, but the Spirit nevertheless has great persuasive influence in His convicting and in His convincing powers and sinners. I believe the Bible teaches that the Spirit cannot, finally, override and overpower the will of sinners. In the end, Christ will have to say to God-rejecters, to the rebellious and the unrepentant ones – "Not my will, but thine be done" (as C. S. Lewis points out). No one can really understand the mystery of the human will – why some choose wisely to respond to Christ's love and offer of life, and why others

choose foolishly to refuse Christ's offer of eternal life. However, the Spirit wills that all repent, and the Spirit uses great influence (and reason) to try to persuade ALL sinners to surrender to Christ. "Come, let us reason together", saith the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be made pure and white as snow. Your sins can be hid in the 'sea of God's forgetfulness'".

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, showing the nature, the reality, the horror, and the consequences of sin. Seeing what sin and Satan do to a person should be very convincing to sinners that it does not pay to live in sin. Simple reason should compel a hell-bound person to turn to Christ, who alone can forgive, reconcile, and impart abundant life! Why would anyone want to be a "double loser" instead of a "double winner"? To live in sin may give temporary pleasure, but soon sin results in a miserable life – a life that eventually leads to greater misery after physical death! Though Christians have their trials and their temptations and their sorrows in this mortal life (and sometimes have even the inflictions of unexplainable tragedies, similar perhaps to the afflictions of the ancient Job), a Christian is nevertheless promised an abundant life on this earth, followed by an indescribable life of joy after physical death! This observation of the way of the sinner compared with the way of the godly person, should be a strong incentive for all sinners to run to the arms of the all-loving and all-merciful Savior, who died for all and who desires all to be saved.

The reasoning and loving and influential God draws us to the Savior for salvation – draws us, not irresistibly, but nevertheless, strongly. As Balthazar notes, God strongly appeals to our human free will, using man's God-given ability to reason. "Tentatively, we can say this: that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of absolute freedom, allows us to see, within our Free Spirit, what our own true freedom would be, that is, by confronting us with our self, with our own highest possibility. We would not be able just to say 'Yes' to ourselves; also, the meaningfulness of such a 'Yes' and the desire for it are set before us, indeed, inspired in us. Do you really want to exist forevermore in contradiction with yourself?" (Dare We Hope "That All Me Be Saved"? Pg. 209)

The Spirit will do everything He can - using all the influence of love, and fear, and justice that is possible – to bring every person to the "foot of the Cross of Christ" for forgiveness and for glorious salvation! But the Spirit, in the final analysis, cannot use brute force or coercion to compel any person to accept Christ's offer of eternal life! It is the fool, among fools, who would refuse the tender voice of Christ, and who would coldly turn his back, in unbelief, away from the One, who died for the sins of the entire world, and who is the Essence of Holy Love! If any person finally decides in the end to spurn the boundless love and mercy of God and the multiple invitations from the Spirit to enjoy eternal life - thus making it his choice to dwell in the pits of Hell – then one thing is sure: the Holy Trinity will be the 'chief mourner' for that 'wretched person'!

There is, according to Jesus' standards for His followers (disciples), a 'high cost' in serving Christ (self-denial and active obedience to Christ), but there is a 'higher cost' in not serving Christ (loss of personhood,

loss of fullest potential, loss of significance and meaning, etc.). Why would anyone want sorrow instead of joy, loneliness instead of fellowship, discord instead of peace, heartbreak instead of healing, frustration instead of fulfillment, weakness instead of strength, and inferiority instead of confidence? Shame instead of dignity, self-despising instead of self-respect, poverty instead of prosperity, despair instead of hope, self-centeredness instead of Christ-centeredness, confusion instead of clarity, ignorance instead of wisdom, doubt instead of assurance, sacrilege instead of sanctity? Boredom instead of creativity, division instead of unity, cruelty instead of kindness, hard-heartedness instead of tender heartedness, double-mindedness instead of single-mindedness, chaos instead of order, hate instead of love, grudge-bearing instead of forgiveness, indifference instead of compassion, sorrow instead of joy, wickedness instead of righteousness, lust instead of moral purity, death instead of life?

Simple reason would say that, to turn down Christ's offer of an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter, would be the height of foolishness – the greatest tragedy possible! Christ requires certain steps in order for a human being to be saved: (1) Grand Awakening, (2) Grand Repentance, (3) Grand Confession, (4) Grand Surrender, (5) Grand Faith and Trust, (6) Grand Restitution (asking forgiveness of others that you have wronged), and (7) Grand Obedience as a true disciple of God.

Yes, there are seven steps that must be taken (decisively in some cases, and over a longer period of time in other cases), but, because the "price" is never too great for a person in order for him to receive a whole new life, a person (sinner) must experience the "godly sorrow" before that glorious new life can be found. There is some "pain" involved in becoming born again, but that "pain" is productive and that "pain" issues forth in new life, whereas the "pain" of sin leads to destruction and death! James (the brother of Jesus), talking about the necessity of sincere repentance, uses vivid language in his short letter: "Weep and howl over your sins, in a spirit of true repentance – rather than being light-hearted ("laughing" about your sins!) There is an abundant life coming for the sinner who "pays the price" of genuine repentance, and who has a humble spirit – "a broken and a contrite heart". Putting one's faith (trust) in Christ will eventually bring a new confidence, dignity, and joy to the Christ-follower.

The "pain" of repentance, (as well as the various other kinds of "pain" connected with the other steps in one's movement towards God), will eventually and sometimes rather quickly be over. Instead of feeling the 'necessary pain' that is involved in becoming a true Christian, there will be in its place a glorious pleasure and freedom and joy and peace, and so much more! Jesus said, "I am come that ye might have life, and have it more abundantly." Yes, there are many kinds of afflictions and adversities that a Christian experiences during his/her lifelong journey towards heaven. Jesus did not deny this reality. He said that, "In the world ye shall have many tribulations, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." Amidst trials, Christ shares His victory with His followers. He promised that He would never leave us, nor forsake us, dur-

ing life's pilgrimage. He said that His grace (strength) was sufficient for every loss and every grief and all heartbreaks and all adversities and temptations.

Yes, we have (as believers) a cross to bear, but Jesus said He would give us power to cope, to endure, and to overcome. He promised to give us strength for each day, wisdom for every decision, joy amidst all our tears, fellowship amidst our loneliness, and endurance for every trial and loss. He said His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light". He promised a great reward for those who faithfully follow Him until the end of life. "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life." I think it was Paul who wrote, "It has not entered into the mind of man, what God hath prepared for those who love Him." Heaven (as God's reward for those who truly love Him) will be more wonderful than the mind of man can imagine! God has not promised His followers (children) that life would always be 'easy', but He did promise that His grace (strength) would be sufficient for every one of the trials, test, and temptations, which Christ-followers would confront.

There is an old song that my wife's grandfather liked often to have sung during the worship services (or prayer meetings) at the little country Church where he worshiped in the sand hills of Nebraska, for several decades. He lost his wife when he was middle-aged, and he was a widower for many years. He knew what hardship was, but he was (because of God's grace) one of the most vital and happy Christians that anyone could know. A few of the words of that old song (his favorite song), are as follows:

*"God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, life without pain."*

*"God hath not promised smooth roads
And wide; flower-strewn pathways."*

Refrain:

*"But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way."*

With all of these offers from the loving Savior, why would anyone want to say 'No' to Him? Who wants to choose evil rather than good, death rather than life, misery rather than joy, and happiness and contentment and excitement and creativity and significance? Who wants to choose the bondage (slavery) of Satan rather than the glorious freedom found in Christ alone?

Joshua (Old Testament leader who took Moses' place after the latter died) said to all of the Israelites (some of whom were engaged in terrible idolatry): "Choose you this day whom ye will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent” and be saved for time and for eternity! God loves all! Jesus died for all! The Holy Spirit calls all to repentance! The gift of “prevenient grace” has been given to all, making all persons savable! “Today is the day of salvation; now is the accepted time.” As one famous Christian declared, (Corrie ten Boon): “There is no pit so deep but what His love goes deeper yet.” Or, we could similarly say, “There is no sin stain so deep, but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet.” If Paul said of himself that Christ wonderfully saved him, and he called himself the ‘chiefest of sinners’, should we not conclude that Christ is able to save any other sinner? It cannot be reiterated enough: “Where sin abounds, grace super abounds!”

God is able to save to the uttermost, because Christ’s uttermost sacrifice on His Cross satisfies the justice of God. Because of Christ’s ‘finished work’ on the Cross of Calvary, God is now (forever) reconciled unto the entire human race! God’s arms of reconciliation and forgiveness are extended widely, to receive ‘whosoever will come’. God hates sin, but He is not angry with any sinner. He strongly pleads with every sinner to receive the gift of a new life – abundant life here and heavenly life hereafter. He does not want one single person to perish, to lose out on God’s Grand Offer of total life in Christ! Whether it is the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit who is making strong overtures of love toward lost persons, it is obvious throughout both the Old and New Testaments that the Trinity desires all to accept the offer of salvation.

Says God to the lost ones, through the prophet Isaiah, “Say there! Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink – even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine and milk – it’s all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for groceries that do you no good? Listen and I will tell you where to get good food that fattens up the soul! Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake. I am ready to make an everlasting covenant with you, to give you all unfailing mercies and love that I had for King David.” (Isaiah 55:1-3, Living Bible)

Jesus cared deeply for the souls of lost persons. He wanted to comfort, to heal, and to save all persons. He said, “Come to me and I will give you rest – all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke – for it fits perfectly – and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens.” (Matthew 11:28-39, Living Bible)

Some of the very last words from the Holy Bible are dedicated to God’s invitation to all persons to come to God for eternal life! “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ Let each one who hears them say the same, ‘Come’. Let the thirsty one come – anyone who wants to; let him come and drink the Water of Life without charge.” (Revelation 22:11, Living Bible)

When the burden of guilt (caused by sin) is so heavy it is almost unbearable to carry, day-in-day-out, is there any solution, any relief, any possibility of change? No, there is no solution except God Himself! Even before the ‘finished work’ of Christ on the Cross, God provided (in mercy) forgiveness to those who truly re-

pented and who turned humbly to God in faith and surrender (all because of the eventual atonement for all sins, made possible only through Christ's work on the Cross). "O people of Israel, you are saying: 'Our sins are heavy upon us; we pine away with guilt. How can we live?' Tell them: As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; I desire that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live. Turn, turn from your wickedness; for why will you die, O Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:10-11)

In God and in God alone is there the salvation of the human soul! Says God (emphatically) through His prophet Isaiah, "Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other." (Isaiah 45:22)

Christ persistently 'knocks' on the heart's door of every human being, waiting for a positive response from each person, desiring to enter the heart and home of every soul. But when Jesus enters the human heart (home), He intends to be, not a mere 'guest', but instead the Lord of the heart of that person. He wants the 'title deed'. Why? Because He created, each person and He purchased each person – at the high cost of His own atoning blood! By right of creation and by right of His atoning death, Christ has the right of total Lordship of all human beings! So, when you hear Him knocking at your heart's door, gladly and humbly answer that knock and invite Christ into your life to be the Lord of all! Says Jesus, "Look! I have been standing at the door and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and he with me." (Revelation 3:2))

Several times, we have noted in the paper that it is God's desire to seek and to save the lost ones – not a portion of predestinated humanity, but every single person (sinner without exception). Paul the Apostle wrote about the universal provision of Christ's salvation, many times. He believed that all could be saved – even himself 'the chiefest of sinners'! Wrote Paul: "This is good and pleases God our Savior, for he longs for ALL to be saved and to understand this truth: That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for ALL mankind." (1 Timothy 2:3-5, Living Bible)

One thing is certain: God wants heaven to be greatly populated by "redeemed sinners", and He wants hell to be empty of all human beings, for "hell was only prepared for the devil and his demons" – "Not for God's Human Creatures!" God is doing everything, short of coercion, to "Keep Every Human Being out OfHell!" Are we, His followers, doing the same?

Ron Christian 



***“IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE
ARE
MANY MANSIONS!”***

Someone said, "DEATH is the most democratic institution on earth. It comes to all men regardless of color, education, wealth, or rank. It allows no discrimination, tolerates no exception. The morality rate of mankind is the same the world over: one death per person." (Fred Duehner)

Not only is death the one universal fact of life, but death is the one fact of life that forces every person to make a choice!

A choice between what? Death compels everyone to choose between faith and despair. "Either we despair, or we believe. There is no middle course, no razor-edge of non-committal on which to balance precariously." (Whale) "The man who has no faith in God is likely to say the same thing as the man of the world, who said regarding death: "The wise man is remembered no longer than the fool, for, as the passing days multiply, all will be forgotten. Alas, wise man and fool die the same death.' So I came to hate life, since everything that was done here under the sun was a trouble to me; for all is emptiness and chasing the wind." (Ecclesiastes 2:16-18)

The atheist, Bertrand Russell, said, "That no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave. That all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins." (Quoted by Stewart in "The Gates of New Life"; pg. 29)

"Only he who believes in God wins the victory over despair. Only the infinite mercy of the Eternal Love, incarnate, suffering, dying, rising from the dead, is big enough for the tragedy of human existence." (Whale)

The Christian with strong faith in God knows that death does not end it all, but that the perish-ability of death will someday be swallowed up in the imperishability of eternal life. With the Apostle Paul, the true Christian declares, "This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality. And when our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of Scripture will come true: 'Death is swallowed up; victory is won.' 'O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin; and sin gains its power from the law; but, God be praised, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15:53-57)

Death will inevitably cause you to say one of two things, either "All is emptiness and chasing after wind, or "God be praised, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Death compels everyone to choose between faith and despair.

The person of faith is the one who believes that there is glorious life after death. Christians believe not only in the resurrection of the personality of the believer, but also in the resurrection of the body of the believer. Let us look at the teaching of God's Word regarding the resurrection of the Body, or "Life after Death".

"Don't be Troubled in Your heart", said Jesus. (John 14) How often these circumstances tend to trouble us! The thought of separation from loved ones trouble us, just as the thought troubled the disciples. Sorrow is legitimate for Christians, for feelings are a real part of being human. When we shed tears, Jesus sheds tears with us.

However, when we believe, put trust in Jesus, our sorrows are soothed, our broken hearts are mended and our voids of loneliness are filled.

What is the basis of our comfort in sorrow?

Contemplation of our Heavenly Father! The Father has a mansion ready for us and we need not fear. There is a place for us!

Where we feel at home, not alone, a feeling of belonging, (like we felt when, as a child, we put total trust in our earthly father's provision.) There will be nothing strange about heaven!

Where there is plenty abundance. 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 fulfilled, and our every capacity developed. No overcrowding in heaven, there is room for all! There is neither positioning nor deprivation! There we will have total fellowship with one another! There will be no isolation or loneliness in heaven! To a far greater extent than is true of the fellowship between loving family members in the best of earthly homes, there will be deep and blessed fellowship in heaven with loved ones who have gone on before us, and will come after us. It is our 'Father's House' where we will dwell, and this speaks of intimate and warm fellowship and sharing, no competition but fullest cooperation.

The Heavenly Father loves all His heavenly children equally, never favoring one above another. I believe, however, that because of varying moral capabilities among the heavenly children, there will be varying degrees of responsibility in heaven. In addition, while mutual care for one another will be the normal loving relationship between heavenly children, it is entirely conceivable that there will be (as it were) more mature heavenly children caring for less mature heavenly children. This is only conjecture, but a conjecture that makes sense when one realizes that the saints in heaven will have differing degrees of moral capacity. Capacities that are developed differently on earth, but are experienced differently in heaven.

Heaven is more than a mere state of being; also, heaven is not a materialistic place as we think of 'places' on earth. But, this Scripture (John 14) seems to teach that Heaven is a localized place, a place where all will be known and recognized, a place of sweet and conscious fellowship, a place where redeemed spirits have been embodied with a new and resurrected body like as to their resurrection Lord. A place also where there is unspeakable joy, relaxation, total health, and at times hilarious laughter! Remember, Jesus had a sense of humor on earth, and we are God-like creatures with the ability to laugh! We will have spiritual, localized, and recognizable bodies that are similar, if not identical, to the body of the Resurrected Lord! Heaven has a local habitation, and is a place in the great universe of God. Jesus Christ has at this moment a human body, glorified.

There are "many" mansions in heaven! This means that there is room for all in heaven. The Bible describes heaven as a place where there is an innumerable company of saints, and yet a place where there is room for all and where each inhabitant is treated tenderly and personally. No one is lonely, no one is 'lost in the crowd', no one is intimidated, and no one is, or will be, treated impersonally. Heaven is big enough to contain every earthly inhabitant, for it is God's will that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. It is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom of heaven to all persons, but only those whose repentance and faith are genuine will find a place in heaven.

"There will be a great many occupants of the mansions in heaven that Christian men here on earth – the most catholic of them will be very much surprised to see them, and thousands will find their entrance there that never found their entrance into any communities of so called Christians here on earth." (Ibid; 268)

This is to say that there will be those in heaven, who never had the joy of hearing of the Christ, but who walked in the lesser lights of God revealed to them in nature or through the conscience, or even through inferior systems of religion. But all who walk in all the light of truth they receive nevertheless make it to heaven (and make it to heaven by the merits of Christ's righteous sacrifice) whether or not they have had opportunity personally to respond to the best and the only perfect light of God, which light is Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. All who make it to heaven make it to heaven because of Jesus Christ, whether or not they had opportunity to respond to Jesus Christ personally.

John Newton once said that if he ever entered heaven, he might probably meet three great wonders: (1) Finding some there whom he had supposed would not be there. (2) In not finding some there, whom he had expected would be there. (3) But, most of all in finding himself there." (Binney's Theological Commend; 147)

A chamber in the great (heavenly) Temple waits for each of us, and the question is, shall we occupy it, or shall we not?" (Ibid; 268)

Comforting are the words from the pen of Robert Murray McCheyne (highly respected minister of the early 19th century, who died a premature death at the age of 30): “Christ 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)

During my more than 25 yearlong pastorates in Fort Collins, Colorado, I had the privilege of knowing many saintly persons who left this earthly life with victory in their souls. I will never be the same, for having experienced fellowship with these loving persons. One person, Sharon Atwood, lost her heroic battle with cancer when she was only 55 years old. She was a radiant, beautiful, vivacious Christian lady that was deeply dedicated to her noble husband, and to her caring family members. She was one of the most liked persons in our small, but growing, local Church. Shortly before Sharon died of her devastating disease, she shared that she was troubled – not troubled because of any doubts regarding her sure entry into heaven, since she had deep faith in Christ as her Savior, but troubled because she wondered how, amidst the vast crowd in heaven, she would be able to find (to locate) her loved ones when she entered the “gates of heaven”. She was troubled and disturbed for several days before her “welcome death” (for she was suffering terribly). Then, as is always true of “God’s mercy and provision”, Sharon was given what might be called a “glorious vision” – a “vision of reassurance”.

God gave her an “overwhelming assurance that, as soon as she left this “earthly realm of existence” and entered the “land of glory”, she would be immediately greeted by all her loved ones who would welcome her to her “heavenly home.” She would not need to worry that she could not find her loved ones in heaven, amidst the throngs of sainted people. She would immediately feel at home in heaven. Her loved ones, who would be there to welcome her, alongside Jesus Himself, would first greet her! What glorious assurance was given to her, during her closing hours here on earth! Heaven is where we first meet our blessed Savior who will gather our dearest ones to us, to welcome us to our Heavenly Home.

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One of the most respected and best-known Catholic authors of the 19th century was Cardinal John Henry Newman. This perceptive writer shared the following brief crisp statements regarding his understanding of heaven. "If we live well, and die in the grace of God, we shall, all of us, hereafter be taken up by our Incarnate God to that place where angels dwell; that our bodies shall be raised from the dust, and be taken to heaven; that we shall be really united to God. That we shall be partakers of the Divine nature, that each of us, soul and body, shall be plunged into the abyss of glory which surrounds the Almighty. That we shall see Him, and share His blessedness, according to the text, 'Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'" (Meditations and Devotions by Cardinal John Henry Newman; pg. 128)

Heaven is described as a glorious city, and likened to pure gold and clear glass.

Heaven is 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 is a place where there are no tears of sorrow and grief, and no sickness or pain or death. A place where there is no sin, temptation, trials, or hard tests.

Heaven is 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 is 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 is 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 is a place where each will become more like God forever – without, of course, ever actually becoming gods. The excitement of eternal growth in knowledge, 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 is 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 is Christ, and to die is gain!" Christians are only pilgrims on the 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."

Placing your faith in the Deathless One – Jesus Christ – you shall never die! Of course, your body will die and return to dust, but you as a believer will never die! Said Jesus, "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." (The Newborn Christian; pg. 212)

Said the great 19th century evangelist D.L. Moody, "Someday you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment, I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. That which is born of flesh may die, that which is born of the Spirit will live forever." (Quoted in Angels by Billy Graham, pgs. 162, 163)

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, acknowledgement, 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 honor beyond all our merits, and also the healing of the 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’s sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory”)

Wrote Paul, “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 would not 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.” (2nd Corinthians 5:1-5, Living Bible)

God loves the human race, including the “least”, 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 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, the out rightly repulsive ones, the young adults, 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 (unrepeated) 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 co-

ercion) 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”). Those only will be in heaven who has, 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”)!

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! 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 also many more persons whose hearts are turned toward the Living God, seeking Him as best as they know with their very limited knowledge and with their narrow opportunities, spiritually speaking.

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”! But the “large crowd” surrounding the “Throne of God” in heaven will be “mammoth” (huge, awe-inspiring, overwhelming 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.’” (Revelation 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 “every nation, tribe, people, and language.” (Revelation 7:9), through the light that lightest 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”!

I believe that when (only by the grace and mercy of God) I become a participant in that vast crowd of “praising saints” in heaven, I shall come to know, throughout the “endless ages of eternity”, the millions of God's children, from every century and from every nation and tribe and people group. I believe that many

of them will be persons who learned about Jesus for the very first time, when they took their first “celestial breath” from heaven’s atmosphere! I believe that there will be many who will make heaven their eternal home, who put their trust in God, as God was revealed to them on earth (unfortunately) “Very faintly” (through “General Revelation” instead of through “Special Revelation”). But these persons, whose hearts were most responsive to these “lesser forms of divine Light” (Nature, Truth from non-Christian Religions, untrained Conscience, Ethical Teachings of Philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, the truth of God faintly revealed through all forms of worldly Beauty, etc.). These persons with “God-honoring and sincere hearts” (but without accurate head knowledge based on “Special Revelation”) – will be standing beside the more fortunate Christians who responded on earth rightly with both their heads (knowledge) and their hearts (emotions) to “Special Revelation” of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection! Both will be there – the persons who on earth were deprived of Special Revelation (but who responded sincerely with their little knowledge to a “General Revelation”), and those who were fortunate enough to know God’s “Special Revelation” (Incarnation) and to respond with both their head and heart to that greatest revelation! None will be excluded from heaven, simply because of ignorance. God only expects people on earth to respond to the “degree” of “light” which they have been given – whether it is the much lesser “light” of “General Revelation” (which is “Christ concealed”), or whether it is the greatest degree of “light” which is “Special Revelation” (which is “Christ clearly revealed”)!

All will be in heaven who on earth “walked in the light of truth” as God gave them light. Some will enter heaven, possessing so much more knowledge of Jesus than others who received so much less light on earth and who possessed little or no accurate knowledge of Jesus. What God will judge, in the end of human existence, for every person, are not the accuracy of mental knowledge about God, Man, Sin, and Jesus Christ and the intarsias of Salvation (atonement, justification, regeneration, sanctification, etc.). However, it will be the condition of the human heart (receptivity to the Holy Spirit’s multiple work of enlightenment, conviction, offer of forgiveness and new life, etc.).

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 lives responded to the “revealed Christ” of “Special Revelation”! Both the ‘privileged ones’, and the ‘much less privileged ones’, will be together in heaven!

No person, regardless of the amount and the accuracy of knowledge that he possesses of Christ, will find out when he gets to heaven, that he possesses very much knowledge regarding the Holy Trinity (the God of Eternity)! All inhabitants of heaven – regardless of how little or how much knowledge of Christ they possessed on earth – will find themselves thrilled with the amount of knowledge of God (mentally and experientially) that they will progressively receive throughout the “Endless ages of eternity”. There will be so much to learn about the infinite love of our eternal God, and God will not only teach us directly, but I believe He

will use all His heavenly citizens to “teach each other”! I believe, as Christians of the heavenly kingdom, we will all enjoy sharing and hearing each other’s personal stories of divinely – wrought transformation, which we all experienced on earth, as a result of God’s Light that came to us in unique ways.

If you felt ‘frustrated’ because, on earth, you as a believer had little opportunity (because you were a member of a tiny church in an obscure village, or because you were confined in a prison in Russia for your ‘Faith’), to share God’s mercy in your life and your unique testimony for Christ, well, in heaven you will have countless ages to “tell your story” to countless millions of the saints (who will also share their stories with you). Mutual rejoicing and mutual praise for Christ, the Wonderful and Merciful Savior!

Learning more and more about God, and yet never coming to an end in that learning experience – and all of this learning about God will result in more and greater worship of the “Holy Trinity of Love”!

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 or 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? Just 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).

If Christ has truly begun a good work in you, He will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus. Christ says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 1:8). “Whenever He begins, He will make an end. Whenever He builds a stone as the foundation, He will preserve it unshaken until the end. Only make sure that you are up on the foundation, that you are reconciled, that you have true peace with God. Then you may look across the mountains and rivers that are between you and that day, and say, “He is able to keep me from falling.” You have but two shallow brooks to pass through – sickness and death – and He has promised to meet you, to go with you, foot by foot. A few more tears, a few more temptations, in a few more agonizing prayers, a few more sacraments, and you will stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion!” (The Best of Robert Murray McCheyne; pgs. 172, 173)

“I am persuaded that we begin the next life where we leave off this one, and there will be an eternal growth in the Divine image, the finite forever approaching the growth in the Divine image, the finite forever approaching the infinite in character and life, but never becoming the Infinite. In that, growth in the Divine Image will be our eternal happiness. For our growth in the Divine Image will be our eternal happiness. For

we are happy only as we fulfill the laws of our being, and those laws demand growth and creation for their fulfillment. To sit down forever and rest might fit the life of a man of a tropical country who said, "God is good. He made the nights to sleep in and the days to rest in." But it wouldn't be the heaven of an alive man. For to be alive is to be alive to creation and development. God, the eternal Creator within us, would make us eternally creative.

We find, but we find that there is more to be found. Every experience becomes an exploration – for more." (Mastery; by E. Stanley Jones; pg. 39)

"If a man keep my saying he shall never see death'. (John 8:51) 'Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.' (John 11:26) 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.

"Jesus Christ hath abolished death', wrote Paul many years ago, but there have been very few since his day who appears to have believed it. The power of the dark old god, rooted no doubt in instinctive fear, is hard to shake, and a great many Christian writers, though possessing the brightest hopes of 'Life Hereafter' cannot, it seems, accept the abolition of death. 'The valley of the shadow', 'Death's gloomy portal', 'the bitter pains of death', and a thousand other expressions all bear witness to the fact that a vast number of Christians do not really believe what Christ said. Probably the greatest offender is John Bunyan, writing in his book, 'Pilgrim's Progress' of the icy river through which the pilgrims must pass before they reach the Celestial city. Thousands, possibly millions, must have been influenced in their impressionable years, by reading 'Pilgrim's Progress.' Yet the 'icy river' is entirely a product of Bunyan's own fears, and the New Testament will be searched in vain for the slightest endorsement of his idea. To 'sleep in Christ', 'to depart and be with Christ', 'to fall asleep' – these are the expressions the New Testament uses. It is high time the 'icy river', 'the gloomy portal', 'the bitter pains', and all the rest of the melancholy images were brought face to face with the fact: 'Jesus Christ hath abolished death'.

"The fact seems too many to be too good to be true. But if it does seem so, it is because we have not really accepted the revolutionary character of God's personal entry into the world. Once it dawns upon us that God (incredible as it may well sound) has actually identified Himself with Man. That He has taken the initiative in effecting the necessary Reconciliation of Man with Himself, and has shown the way by which little human personalities can begin to embark on that immense adventure of Living of which God is the Center, death - the discarding of a temporary machine adapted only for a temporary stage – may begin to seem negligible." (The Newborn Christian; Phillips; pgs. 212, 213)

Christians who die do not lose their identity in eternity. I believe that the believer's new body will be similar to Jesus' body after the resurrection, just prior to His ascension. A tangible body, yet a spiritual

body: a body not confined to limitations of the material world. When Jesus arose, He “was seen and known.” We, too in heaven will have our personal identity. We shall be known and recognizable. Notes Sam Shoemaker, “‘Because I live, ye shall live also’. He pioneered the way for us. His Resurrection made clear to us what Christian immortality is – not the vague wandering on of lonely and orphaned spirits, floating somewhere between earth and heaven – but the continuation of ourselves, in communion with Him and with one another. We are not a drop that falls into the sea of being and is lost in it, we are individual and responsible souls that return to their Creator. Christ’s Resurrection has immeasurably strengthened our faith in the resurrection of the human soul.” (Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 11; pg. 83)

Death is simply a bridge that spans the gulf between time and eternity. One who is a true believer in Christ goes over that bridge into the nearer presence of Christ. For all eternity, the believer will praise and glorify Christ. Heaven is a place of indescribable joy, as all the hosts of heaven join in corporate praise to God.

The apostle John had a vision of heaven: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9, 10)

Death for the Christian is the end to earth’s labors, and is the beginning to heaven’s eternal development and labor. Said Victor Hugo, “For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose, verse, history, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song – I have tried them all. But I feel I have not said the thousandth part of what is in me. When I go down to the grave I can say like so many others, ‘I have finished my day’s work’. But I cannot say, ‘I have finished my life’. My day’s work will begin again next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley, it is a thoroughfare. It closes on the twilight to open with the dawn.

CONCLUSION:

“Our earthly bodies, the ones we have now that can die, must be transformed into heavenly bodies that cannot perish but will live forever. When this happens, then at last this Scripture will come true – ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’. O death, where then your victory? Where then your sting? For sin – the sting that causes death – will all be gone; and the law, which reveals our sins, will no longer be our judge. How we thank God for all this! It is He who makes us victorious through Jesus Christ our Lord! So, my dear brothers, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord’s work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted as it would be if there were no resurrection.” (I Corinthians 15:53-58, Living Bible)

Ron Christian 

WHAT ABOUT THE DEAD WHO DIE IN CHRIST?

*“No, not cold beneath the grasses,
All forgotten in the tomb;
Rather, in my Father’s mansion,
Living, in another room.”*

*“Living, like the one who loves me,
Like yon child with cheeks abloom,
Out of sight, at desk or schoolbook,
Busy in another room.”*

*“Nearer than the youth whom fortune
Beckons where the strange lands loom;
Just behind the hanging curtain,
Working in another room.”*

DYING WORDS

“The chariot has come, and I am ready to step in.” - Margaret Prior

“Eternity rolls up before me like a sea of glory.” - Jordan Antie

“How bright the room! How full of angels!” - Martha McCrackin

“I wish I had the power of writing; I would describe how pleasant it is to die.” – Dr. Cullen

“The sun is setting; mine is rising. I go from this bed to a crown. Farewell.” - S. B. Bangs

“Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus.” – John Arthur Lyth

“I am in perfect peace, resting alone on the Blood of Christ. I find this amply sufficient with which to enter the presence of God.” - Trotter

“Oh, that I could tell you what joy I possess! I am full of rapture. The Lord doth shine with such power upon my soul. He is come! He is come!” – Mrs. Mary Frances

(Quotes from Shoe-Leather Faith; by Garth and Merv Rosell; No. 141)



***“DOES THE NEW
TESTAMENT TEACH -
‘CONDITIONAL
ETERNAL SECURITY’?”***

During the early days of Christianity, when a bitter persecution was being waged against many Christians, Polycarp (the aged and godly bishop of Smyrna) was brought before the Roman proconsul who commanded him to deny Christ, saying, "Consider thyself, and have pity on thy own great age." The Roman proconsul urged Polycarp to 'swear by the fortune of Caesar'- to 'repent' that he was a follower of Christ. Said the proconsul to this aged and influential Christian bishop, "Swear and I will release thee; reproach Christ." With unflinching and steadfast faith in the living Christ, Polycarp gave his never-to-be-forgotten answer: "Eight and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, who hath saved me?" The proconsul again urged him, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar." Polycarp replied, "Since you still vainly strive to make me swear by the fortune of Caesar as you express it, affecting ignorance of my real character, bear me frankly declaring what I am - I am a Christian- and if you desire to learn the Christian doctrine, assign me a day, and you shall hear." Hereupon the proconsul said, "I have wild beasts; and I will expose you to them, unless you repent." Replied Polycarp: "Call for them, for repentance with us is a wicked thing, if it is to be change from the better to the worse, but a good thing if it is to be change from evil to good." Then the proconsul said; "I will tame thee with fire since you despise the wild beasts, unless you repent." Then said Polycarp, "You threaten me with fire, which burns for an hour, and is soon extinguished; but the fire of the future judgment, and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly, you are ignorant of. But why do you delay? Do whatever you please." After his persecutors had gathered wood for his burning, they next planned to fasten him to the stake, but Polycarp said; "Leave me as I am; for he who giveth me strength to sustain the fire, will enable me also, without your securing me with nails, to remain without flinching in the pile." His persecutors bound him without nailing him, and this courageous old man prayed: "O Father, I bless thee that thou hast counted me worthy to receive my portion among the number of martyrs." As soon as Polycarp had uttered the word "amen", the officers lighted the fire. It is then recorded: "The flame, forming the appearance of an arch, as the sail of a vessel filled with wind, surrounded, as with a wall, the body of the martyr; which was in the midst, not as burning flesh, but as gold and silver refining in the furnace." (Foxe's Book of Martyrs; pages 22-24)

Promises the Lord of the Church: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!" Polycarp left his burning flesh behind, to take his place at the feet of the Savior, along with all the Christian martyrs of the ages. The aged bishop of Smyrna enjoys the ever-enlarging company of those who have chosen to sacrifice their earthly lives for Christ, rather than denying their Lord. It is reported that there were more Christians who died for 'the Faith' in the twentieth century than in all the other centuries put together! Recently it was reported that there were more than 150,000 Christians who died because of their faith in Christ - in one year alone!

One of the great modern martyrs was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a key German figure who arose as a witness to Christian faithfulness against the evil onslaughts of Hitler during the Second World War. Because of his bold stand against the Nazi regime, he was imprisoned along with many other uncompromising believers among the "confessing Church" (of which Bonhoeffer was a 'key figure'). In the gray dawn of Sunday, April 9, 1945, just before the end of the War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer whispered to his fellow pris-

oners as he left his cell to be hanged on the Flossenburg gallows, "This is the end for me, the beginning of life."

As he awaited his own martyrdom in a Roman prison, the apostle Paul wrote the following words to Timothy, Paul's 'son in the Faith': "And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus - who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom- to preach the Word of God urgently at all times, whenever you get the chance, in season and out, when it is convenient and when it is not. Correct and rebuke your people when they need it, encourage them to do right, and all the time be feeding them patiently with God's Word. Stand steady, and do not be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Bring others to Christ. Leave nothing undone that you ought to do. I say this because I will not be around to help you very much longer. My time has almost run out. Very soon now, I will be on my way to heaven. I have fought long and hard for my Lord and through it all I have kept true to him. Now the time has come for me to stop fighting and rest. In heaven, a crown is waiting for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And not just to me, but to all those whose lives show that they are eagerly looking forward to his coming back again." (2nd Timothy 4:1- 8, Living Bible)

What is the 'key' to a truly successful life? Remaining True to the Lord Jesus, amidst all the changes and chances of life, amidst all the trials and tests and temptations and persecutions of daily living! Not only starting the race for Christ, but also finishing the race with Christ! Exhorted Paul to the Corinthian believers: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Perhaps I will never forget that period in my pastoral ministry when I purposed to preach a long series of messages on the great 'Faith Chapter' of the Bible- Hebrews 11. I prepared long and hard and believed that- as the weeks came and went and I came to the end of chapter 11 in my series of sermons - my congregation of attentive listeners was growing by 'leaps and bounds' spiritually in the 'Faith of Christ'- partly because of my 'great sermons' on Biblical Faith (faithfulness). As I finished the last message in that long series, I returned to my home after the Late Morning Worship Service, exuberant though weary because of preaching in both services. The telephone rang, and one of my parishioners - distraught, angry, and accusing - was on the 'other end of the line'. He said something like this to me: "My family and I are leaving your church!" I was dumb-founded! Here was a parishioner who (with his wife) became a believer because of a 'Home Bible Study', which I had conducted in his home a few

years before! Grappling for words, I finally was able to respond to his declaration. I said, "Why, what is wrong?" He said, "We're leaving the Church because you don't preach 'Faith!' I was not present at the Service this morning, but my wife told me that you declared in your message on Faith that it is not always God's will to heal a person! I believe that if one has enough 'Faith', God will always heal a believer. It is never God's will for one of His children to be sick! The only reason why Christians are sick is that they have not exercised enough 'Faith', that they have unconfessed sin in their lives, or that they have not been taught to 'bind Satan'. We can no longer be a member of a church that doesn't practice 'Faith!'" No amount of reasoning on my part, and no quotation of Scriptures (especially Hebrews 11:35b- 40 and 2 Corinthians 12:7- 10) could convince my angry friend that it is not always God's will to physically heal Christians. I pled with him not to leave our local church, where he had attended for several years. I reminded him that he had not even heard my sermon on 'Faith' earlier that day, and that he was reacting to information that was reported to him 'secondhand' by his wife. I told him my family felt 'close' to him and his family, and that I felt God led him into my life (after all, was it not I who took time 'to lead him and his wife to Christ?') I reminded him that some of the greatest 'saints' throughout history - persons of abounding 'faith' - were persons whom God had not willed to heal physically. Was not even the great apostle Paul- 'a giant' in the Faith- entitled with a 'thorn in the flesh'? When I mentioned Paul's 'thorn in the flesh', my now- estranged 'friend' launched into a 'verbal battle' with me, as he tried hard to convince me that Paul's 'thorn in the Flesh' was definitely not 'physical'. That conversation took place several years ago. I learned that a 'charismatic' friend, with whom he had been daily 'car- pooling' to work, shared with him some tapes on 'Faith' - tapes with a strong emphasis on the 'Name It- Claim It' brand of 'Faith'. Yes, that friend and his family left our local church and he never returned. As far as I know, for some time, he attended a large, independent, 'charismatic' church where "faith is preached", "prosperity is claimed", and "wonderful miracles regularly happen". After all these years (since he left the church), I occasionally see that former friend. We hold no bitterness towards each other, so it is rather easy to talk to one another and to express 'Christian love' to each other.

Allow me to share a few 'points' from the message on 'Faith', preached many years ago, to which my previously mentioned 'friend' reacted so strongly, resulting in his leaving my church. The following are a few 'quotes' from that message: Faith means trusting God regardless of whether or not our prayers to Him give us the results that we desire. Notes Paul Rees, "No faith is mature if it thinks only of answers to prayer that come in the form of escape from loss and sorrow and pain. If this shakes us and

threatens to turn confidence into cynicism, we should review the Bible's magnum opus on faith, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. True, it tells of those who 'through faith escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to fight the armies of the aliens' (verse 34). However, have you noticed the significance of a little phrase of two words that occurs twice- 'and others'? 'And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance. And others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword.'" (Hebrews 11:35- 37)

I continued in that sermon on 'Faith', preached several years ago, to which my 'friend' so negatively reacted: Problems come to the greatest Christians. Those in Hebrews 11:35- 38 remained faithful to God, even unto death, without judging God or holding God responsible for their difficulties. Remember, when faith and prayers do not remove the mountains, God intends to use the mountains to strengthen our spiritual 'muscles' while we are climbing over the mountains! The problems may cause many tears and bring many questions to mind. Nevertheless, remember, God never allows His children to shed 'needless tears'. God is a God of perfect love - He wants what is best for you. When my brother lost his 15 year old daughter so tragically and suddenly, on August 14, 1981, he said, the very night of her death, "God makes no mistakes." His faith in God did not prevent his daughter's terrible death, but my brother did not judge his God. His faith enabled him to believe in a good God, in spite of adverse circumstances. That is the greatest miracle of all! To believe, even when circumstances defy reason! Faith enables us to accept difficult circumstances, as God's gymnasium for character development! If faith seems to go unrewarded on this planet and in this life, there will be an ultimate reward granted to the persons of faith after this life (Hebrews 11:39, 40).

I continued that sermon on 'Faith' with great fervency, as I neared the climax of the message: Faith means being faithful to God and never judging God, regardless if the prayers of faith do not change the circumstances of the faithful one. The faithful one can be assured that faith will be ultimately rewarded in heaven and that God will be close to the faithful one during his pilgrimage on earth. "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never I will forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5, 6) If you are going through difficult times, keep your faith in God. He will not forsake you. He loves you. He is not removing your mountain or problems for a reason - a loving and redemptive reason.

Do not fall from God. Do not start judging God or become bitter towards God. "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to Persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But 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 10:35- 39)

John the Baptist's faith resulted in John being beheaded by a wicked king! His faith did not deliver him from adversity, but his faith did keep him true rather than denying the Master, and his faith ushered him into heaven with all the rewards that heaven alone can give to the man of faith! We too often see only today with today's problems, and we fail to see the ultimate victory promised to persons of Persevering Faith. God's purpose may be to deliver his children from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:16- 18), or it may be to allow His children to burn up in the fiery furnace. Either way, the man of faith is victorious! Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." The man of faith cannot lose! It may be God's will to change our circumstances, or it may be God's will that we simply remain faithful to God in the midst of our difficult circumstances. Perhaps the greatest heroes of faith are not those who saw mighty feats through their faith, but those who remained true to God even when their faith resulted in their persecution and eventual death (Hebrews 11:35- 38). Whatever the immediate result of faith, the ultimate victory always belongs to God's people of faith!

I then concluded my message on 'Faith' with these words: Faith can move a mighty mountain or faith can enable us to climb over our mountains! Faith can remove the darkness, or faith can give us a song during our nights. Faith, in brief, is faithfulness to God, whether or not circumstances change, whether or not we can understand the purposes in the present God- allowed circumstances. Faith does not judge God. Faith in God reassures one that God ultimately rewards all persons of faith- partially on earth and totally in heaven!

It was these above quoted words (and others like them) which I preached on that Sunday, at the conclusion of my long sermon series on 'Biblical Faith', which were the 'occasion' of my 'friend' to decide to 'leave my church' (and never return).

I continue to believe that 'faith in God' means 'faithfulness to God' - amidst all the challenges and troubles and losses of life. I continue to believe that it is 'persevering faith' in God and in God's wisdom and power and love which will 'carry' a believer throughout his life, until he passes through 'the pearly gates' of heaven!

Amidst all the severe trials of Paul's life, he was able confidently to declare (at the end of his courageous life): "That is why I am suffering here in jail and I am certainly not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to safely guard all that I have given him until the day of his return." (2nd Timothy 1:12, Living Bible)

Paul believed that divine enabling power was sufficient to keep every believer from falling away from God, in spite of the great suffering which believers are called to endure. Wrote Paul "And he (God) is able to keep you from slipping and falling away and to bring you, sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy." (Jude 1:25, Living Bible)

*"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 that 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, inequities, and injustices in the world are widespread, and the sorrows of life are deep, God's grace is 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." (2nd Thessalonians 3, 4, Living Bible) "No temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you cannot 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)

A few months ago, one of my newest friends wrote to me and asked if I would explain what I meant by my reference to the 'Perseverance of the Saints'. The following is my written reply to her request:

Dear

I have read considerably (and written quite a bit) on the subject of the 'Perseverance of the Saints' (as it is called in Christian Theology). Suffice it to say at this point (in this brief communication) that the Bible emphasizes at least three features (regarding Salvation): (1) Promises to be claimed, (2) Conditions to be met - in initially receiving salvation and in maintaining a vital saving relationship with God, (3) Warnings - addressed to truly saved persons- to be heeded (or 'traps' of sin to be avoided). The faithfulness of God and the 'keeping power' of God are NEVER to be questioned or doubted or debated, but the on-going faithfulness (obedience) of the believer is, of course, always to be 'questioned' (i.e., the Christian must, throughout his/her entire life, continue to 'abide' in the Son). The Lord declares, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." As long as a human (including a believer) has the capacity to choose (because of free will agency which God grants to all be-

lievers), there is always the possibility (if not the probability) that a believer could 'fall from grace' and go back into a life (practice) of willful sinning (called backsliding or apostasy). That is a 'horrible' thought, but the Bible definitely teaches (through the countless warnings to believers) that such is a 'possibility'. (Otherwise, the many warnings addressed to believers do not make 'any sense'.) I definitely believe in 'eternal security' for believers (but only for 'believers'- i.e., those persons who CONTINUE to believe and trust in Christ as their only Savior and who keep up to date in their confession of any sins in their lives). Therefore, I do not believe the Bible teaches UNCONDITIONAL (or 'automatic' or 'irrevocable') eternal security- but instead CONDITIONAL ETERNAL SECURITY. Of course, the Bible teaches that backslidden persons (who were one-time believers) can 'come back' to Christ in deep repentance and faith (trust), and thereby be wonderfully restored to both relationship and fellowship with Christ (1st John 1:7, 9 and 1st 2:1-2). However, it is possible for a believer to drift away from God through negligence (Hebrews 2:1-2) or through outright rebellion (continued disobedience) and eventually to sever his/her relationship with God (John 15 teaches that branches which no longer abide in Christ the Vine are eventually severed because they are withered and dead - and cast into the fire!). John 15 teaches that good branches are pruned (chastened and disciplined, etc. in order to produce even more fruit), but that fruitless branches (i.e., branches that no longer abide in obedience - no longer attached in vital union to the Vine) are cut off and destroyed. So, fruitful branches (which are vitally attached to the Vine) can become barren, severed, and destroyed branches! A fearful possibility, but hopefully not a high probability. I want to emphasize the importance of abiding in Christ and maintaining faithfulness (in response to God's constant faithfulness and keeping power). I want to emphasize the importance of a life of continuing abiding in the Son - finding 'staying power' in living the Christian life to the very end. There are many, many other Scriptures (nearly a hundred Scriptures altogether in the New Testament) which deal with 'conditional eternal security'. Again,

the grace of God or the keeping power of God or the forgiving love of God - none of these truths are questioned at all.

The only thing that is always open for 'change for the worst' is the free will of man/woman (including the will of believers). God treats believers with the greatest of dignity by allowing believers (Christians) to daily exercise a positive volition (saying 'yes' with one's will to God's daily call to 'deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me'). None of what I have said is intended to 'take away the peace and security and confidence' of true believers, but with the multitude of Promises in God's Word, there are also Conditions listed (for the fulfillment of those God-given Promises), as well as many Warnings addressed to Christians. Always remember: 'the faithfulness of God cannot cover for or take the place of the unfaithfulness of man' (even a Christian). A believer needs never 'fall from Grace', for God is able to keep him unto the end - and preserve him unto eternal life (glory!) - But a Christian must take, not only the Promises of God seriously, but must also seriously accept the Conditions and the Warnings of the Holy Scriptures. It is this 'Biblical balance', which I am 'after'. Thanks for letting me briefly share this aspect of Biblical insight with you. God bless you richly as you victoriously live for your wonderful Master.

With Christian Love,

Ron Christian 

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 of about two hundred of brethren were present, and our Savior 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 au-

dience 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 drinks 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 evils, 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. Meter 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, brighter than the sun in its meridian brilliance, spoke 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; pgs. 24, 25)

I believe in the "power of positive thinking", but I also believe there is (rarely) such a thing as the "positive power of negative thinking". There is the 'dark side' of truth, as well as the 'bright side' of truth. Jesus came to earth to seek and to save the lost ones.

His ministry was one of positive affirmation and great comfort. He declared, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give thee rest." (Matthew 11:28) To the broken-hearted, Jesus always offered healing, and to the contrite in

spirit, Jesus always offered forgiveness and peace. But Jesus did not only come to 'comfort the disturbed'; He came also to 'disturb the comfortable'. Witness this truth as you read the many "woes" which Jesus pronounced against the hypocritical Jewish leaders (as recorded in Matthew 23). The fact that there are many Warnings to be heeded and many Conditions to be met (as well as many Promises to be claimed) speaks to the fact that there is 'negative' truth as well as 'positive' truth, revealed in the New Testament.

There is the 'positive' truth which declares that all sinners who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved from their sins (i.e., they are no longer in a state of 'condemnation and guilt' before Almighty God). There is the 'negative' truth, which declares that any believer who falls into a life of sinning (apostasy) loses both his fellowship and his relationship with Almighty God, and such a person will be eternally lost if he refuses to repent and if he rejects God's offer of forgiveness and restoration and peace and reconciliation.

It has often been said: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Spiritually speaking, it is far better for a believer never to fall into sin (i.e., into a state of backsliding), than for a believer to backslide and have to go through the painful (and often time-consuming) process of repentance and restitution and reconciliation. It is also often said: "To be forewarned is to be forearmed."

Spiritually speaking it is wise to be aware of dangers, snares, and perils, which threaten to defeat and destroy his spiritual life, than to be ignorant of such snares and to be off-guard, unprepared, and unarmed when Satan attacks! To think about the 'wiles of the devil' and 'the weakness of the human flesh' and the 'warnings against apostasy' may all seem to be 'very negative'. But this kind of 'negative thinking' is also very wise and definitely 'Biblical thinking'. It might seem 'more positive' to entertain thoughts of a believer's 'unconditional' ('irrevocable') 'eternal security' (i.e., that it is 'impossible' for a true believer ever to 'lose his relationship with God'), but such false reasoning (and 'false security') is both unwise and unbiblical!

In my rather thorough examination of the New Testament's teaching on the 'perseverance of the believer' (and the related doctrine of the 'security of the believer'), I discovered that there are many 'perils' (snares) which every earnest believer must avoid, during his earthly pilgrimage. In summary form, the following are some of those 'perils' (snares) which every believer must avoid if he is to live a victorious Christian life: (1) Unforgiving spirit; (2) Deception by false teachings or by evil spirits; (3) Spiritual neglect and procrastination (spiritual 'drifting' or gradual hardening or 'Luke

warmness'); (4) *Spiritual carelessness and shallowness (lack of vigilance)*; (5) *Yielding to temptation, leading to backsliding or apostasy*; (6) *Preoccupation with worldly interests and with the pursuit of material possessions and earthly riches*; (7) *Faithlessness and lack of spiritual endurance (disobedience and unbelief and bitterness)*; (8) *Shallow attitude towards 'sin' and towards 'grace' (Antinomianism)*; (9) *Insensitivity to and neglect of the spiritual 'Means of Grace'*; (10) *Offense by fellow believers*; (11) *Attitude of ingratitude, grumbling, and division*; (12) *Self-confidence and pride*; (13) *Resort to religious performance instead of embracing God's grace alone (leading to Legalism)*; (14) *Discouragement and despair during trials and persecutions, and hardening one's heart during God's chastisements (losing of 'heart')*; (15) *Rejection of the 'dictates' of the Conscience*; (16) *Temporal irresponsibility to one's Dependents (family and relatives)*; (17) *Spiritual 'profession' without spiritual 'performance' (lack of 'Good Deeds' and 'Good Conduct')*.

William Barclay notes that Jesus Himself emphasized the 'perseverance of believers' in His teaching. Says Barclay, "Jesus declared that entry to the Kingdom can never be automatic, and that it is the result and the reward of a struggle. 'Keep on striving to enter', said Jesus. (Luke 13:24) The word that is used for 'striving' is the word from which the English word 'agony' is derived. The struggle to enter in must be so intense that it can be described as an agony of soul and spirit. We run a certain danger. It is easy to think that, once we have become members of the church by profession, we have reached the end of the road, that then we can, as it were, sit back like those who have arrived and who have achieved their goal. There is no such finality in the Christian life. A man must ever be going forward or necessarily he is going backward. The Christian way is like a climb up a mountain pathway towards a peak! Which will never be reached in this world. It was said of two gallant climbers who died on Mount Everest, 'When last seen they were going strong for the top.' It was inscribed on the grave of an Alpine guide who had died on the mountainside, 'He died climbing.' For the Christian life is ever an upward and an onward way." (Daily Study Bible; Luke; William Barclay; pgs. 188, 189)

What is the 'secret' to maintaining a life of faithfulness and perseverance in the Christian life? Is it not being daily filled with the Holy Spirit, whose ministry is to 'shed abroad the love of God' in the heart of every believer? He who has a passionate love for Christ is he who remains close to the "heart of God", amidst all the changes and chances of life, amidst all the "ups and downs" of life, amidst all the successes and failures of life, amidst all the joys and sorrows of life. Love keeps him close to the heart of God, and love for others makes the believer's trials and losses bearable. A

love-filled person "values the real", for love sees beyond the temporary to the eternal! Wholehearted love for God keeps one 'trucking' in life, keeps one 'in the saddle', keeps one from 'throwing in the towel' and quitting! "Men have wondered what kept John Wesley in the saddle for fifty-three years 'contesting the three kingdoms for Christ' they have wondered what kept David Livingstone in the jungle of Africa for thirty-three years, and Peter Claver tending the poor slaves at Cartagena for thirty-eight. None of these men retired. Death alone ended their labors. It is not in normal nature to love like that; it is a 'given' love. They had sought it and received it from God and they were consumed by its scorching flame." (Daily Readings; William Sangster; pg. 134)

There is a "strange reasoning" among some earnest believers who consider themselves "Calvinist" (in terms of their theological 'persuasion'). Some 'Calvinists' believe that a backslidden believer (who is 'out of fellowship' with the Lord, but who, nevertheless, 'maintains relationship' with the Lord because he is among the 'chosen' of God) will go to heaven even if he dies while he is 'living in sin'. These persons believe that such a 'backslidden believer' will be ushered into heaven, regardless of how many unconfessed sins he has at the time of his physical death ("for he who was once saved in the past is always saved forever" irrevocably, regardless of the sins he commits subsequent to his initial conversion). Even though this appears to be a rather widespread belief among many 'Calvinist-oriented' teachers, it is doubtful (when reading from the actual writings of John Calvin) that John Calvin himself would declare that a man living in sin when he dies was ever a 'true believer' (an 'elect one'). John Calvin believed that the only ultimate 'proof that a person was among the 'elect of God' was the final perseverance in the faith of Christ of the person who claimed to be among God's 'elect'. Perseverance in the faith meant, to Calvin, faithfulness to Christ and Christ's ways. Wrote Calvin, "For God is said to give us to the Son so that each may know himself an heir of the heavenly kingdom So Long As He Abides in Christ, apart from whom death and destruction beset us on every side." (Quoted in 'Elect In the Son'; Robert Shank; pg. 216) Calvin seems to be saying that only the person (professing Christian) who truly abides in Christ to the end of life will enjoy heaven as his inheritance. This (among other similar statements by Calvin) would seem to refute anyone who claims assurance that he will go to heaven, while he is, at the same time, deliberately practicing sin and refusing genuinely to repent of his sins.

Notes Robert Shank, "Despite his erroneous definition of election, Calvin was on solid ground in his ultimate conclusion that valid assurance of election and salvation is impossible apart from conscious, deliberate perseverance in faith." (Elect in the Son; pg. 215) The 'classical' Calvinist theology - popularly taught today - believes that

those whom God 'elected' to eternal salvation will inevitably persevere in the Faith to the end of life.

The 'elect' (chosen) ones must ultimately be saved in heaven, because (according to this theology) God chose them "before the foundation of the world" to be members of Christ's chosen followers. And yet, even some Calvinist teachers and writers, when they honestly study the Holy Scriptures directly (without undue influence from their Calvinist presuppositions) acknowledge that perseverance to the end in the Christian life is NOT inevitable! John Eadie, a Calvinist scholar, writes, "While the perseverance of the saints is a prominent doctrine of Scripture and a perennial source of consolation, it is not inconsistent with exhortations to permanence of faith and warnings of the sad results of deviation and apostasy. He who stops short in the race, and does not reach the goal, cannot obtain the prize. He who abandons the refuge into which he fled for a season is swept away when the hurricane breaks upon him. The loss of faith is the knell of hope." (Quoted in 'Elect In the Son'; Robert Shank; pg. 214)

Strangely enough, this Calvinist scholar believes that a one-time believer can "fall from grace" (or, as he says "abandon the refuge into which he fled for a season" or has a "loss of faith"), and as a result "be swept away when the hurricane breaks upon him" and experience the "knell of hope".

This teaching by this respected Calvinist scholar does not sound like the typical Calvinist who adamantly contends for "unconditional eternal security" ("once saved, always saved" doctrine). According to this Calvinist scholar, the believer who "stops short in the race and does not reach the goal" cannot, at the same time, retain his Christian hope for eternal security!

Comments Robert Shank (regarding some earnest Calvinist scholars):"When men get close to the Scriptures, they often get far from their theology. Eadie has it right: much is suspended on Perseverance, according to the Scripture - all theology to the contrary notwithstanding." ('Elect in the Son'; Robert Shank; pg. 214) Fortunately, there are even many Calvinists who seriously disagree that so-called "backslidden believers" who die while they are living a life of sin, have Biblically based assurance that they will safely enter heaven! The doctrine of 'unconditional eternal security', based on 'unconditional particular election' of specific persons, is totally unscriptural, and (thank God) there are even Calvinist scholars (because of their direct study of the Scriptures) who are seriously questioning this erroneous doctrine!

Some sincere believers who declare with great conviction that "it is impossible for a true believer ever to ultimately fall away from God and finally be eternally lost", quote John 10:28-29 as the Scriptural 'proof'. Said Jesus, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else, so no one can kidnap them from me." (Living Bible)

Indeed, this is one of the most thrilling and comforting Promises ever given to Christians. But, those who sincerely quote these verses as 'proof' of the 'eternal security of the believer' fail to quote the previous verse - John 10:27 - which state the Condition for the fulfillment of the Promise. To whom does Jesus promise 'eternal life' and 'protection from harm' (security)? These promises are given Only to Sheep. And who are Christ's 'Sheep'? John 10:27 answers that question: "My sheep recognize my voice, I know them, and they follow me". Only those who hear the voice of the Shepherd, who know the voice of the Shepherd, and who follow (obey) the Shepherd can justly claim 'security' and 'protection'. Can a one-time believer who no longer hears or knows the voice of the Shepherd, and who no longer follows (obeys) the Shepherd, claim 'security' and 'protection' from the Shepherd? A person who does not presently meet the conditions cannot claim the promises! He, who refuses to accept the responsibilities of being a 'sheep', cannot presently enjoy the benefits, which the Shepherd has to offer!

An internationally respected New Testament scholar, I. Howard Marshall, gives the following fitting and Biblically balanced summary to this important subject of "Perseverance of the Believer". He notes, "The believer is not told that he is one of the elect and therefore cannot fall away, nor is there any particular character of his faith which indicates that he is the kind of person who cannot fall away. He is simply told to continue in obedience, faith, and to trust in the God who will keep him from falling.

He perseveres by persevering. Perseverance is not some particular quality of faith or something to be added to faith, but the fact that faith continues. To speak of the need to develop endurance, as the New Testament does, is the same thing as saying that one must continue to believe despite every temptation to disbelieve.

"Such persevering faith is faith in God through Jesus Christ and is at all times a response to His grace. It is faith in the God who keeps, establishes, and strengthens believers, committal of oneself to His Lordship and His care. But such committal does not mean that the believer no longer needs to watch lest he stumble and fall. He must still beware of temptation. The fact that he can still fall into sin shows that he is not pre-

served miraculously by God from falling, although God is able to keep those who trust in Him from falling and never refuses His grace to those who seek it. God's power enables men to battle against temptation, but does not relieve them from temptation or from the necessity to fight against it. The way to victory is by constant submission to God.

"Alongside the imperatives stand the promises. We do not need to fear in the midst of temptation, for we know that if we trust in God, His power will preserve us. When the believer puts his trust in God, he is entitled to be confident. The New Testament most certainly teaches that God strengthens the faith of the believer so that he may withstand temptation; He does not forget those who trust in him. Hence, while the New Testament knows the possibility of failure to persevere, it also knows the fact of growth in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ so that the Christian can attain to a confidence, which lifts him above the fear of falling away. It is perhaps in this idea of growth and development in faith that the key to the problem is to be found. Faith is something, which grows and becomes stronger and consequently more removed from the fear of failing. And yet this does not mean that the assurance of perseverance is for a spiritual elite; it is for the weakest believer who is prepared to cry, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.'

"In short, we cannot go beyond the teaching of the New Testament which places side by side the possibility of failure to persevere and the greater possibility of a confidence in God and a continuing faith which, as it is sustained by God, is preserved from the fear of falling away. There is a confidence, which can grow and deepen, and hence the possibility of the faith that God will preserve us for His heavenly kingdom. It is possible, therefore, to maintain the confidence of the believer without committing ourselves to a watertight logical system of irresistible grace and unconditional election to final salvation, and at the same time to give a realistic meaning to the warnings of the New Testament.

"We can say firmly that, while it is possible for a Christian to fail to persevere after a genuine experience of salvation, yet, with all the promises of a faithful God to sustain those who trust in Him, the main emphasis of the New Testament is on confidence and assurance of final salvation." ('Kept By the Power of God'; I. Howard Marshall; pgs. 208- 210)

WEAK AND HELPLESS

*Son of God, thy blessing grant;
Still supply my every want;
Tree of life, thine influence shed;
From thy fullness, I am fed.*

*Tenderest branch, alas! Am I,
Wither without thee and die;
Weak as helpless infancy;
O confirm my soul in thee!*

*Unsustained by thee, I fall;
Send the help for which I call;
Weaker than a bruised reed,
Help I every moment need.*

*All my hopes on thee depend;
Love me, save me to the end;
Give me persevering grace;
Take the everlasting praise.
(Charles Wesley)*

Adam Clarke, a contemporary of the famous John Wesley, was the greatest Wesleyan/Armenian theologian of his time. The following constitute excerpts from his article, simply titled "Apostasy", continued in the book simply titled "Christian Theology" (pgs. 360- 367):

"God uniformly treats man as a free agent; and on the principle the whole of divine revelation is constructed as is also the doctrine of future rewards and punishments."

"If a man be incapable of willing God and willing evil, he is incapable of being saved as a rational being; and if he acts only under an overwhelming compulsion, he is as incapable of being damned."

"The power to will and the power to act must necessarily come from God, who is the Author both of the soul and the body, and of all their powers and energies; but the act of volition and the act of working come from the man. God gives power to will: man wills through that power; God gives power to act and man acts through that power. Without the power to will, man can will nothing; without the power to work, man can do nothing. God neither wills for man, nor works in man's stead, but he furnishes him with power to do both; he is, therefore, accountable to God for these powers."

“Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.” “It is not for want of holy resolutions and heavenly influences that men are not saved, but through their own unsteadiness; they do not persevere, they forget the necessity of continuing in prayer, and thus the Holy Spirit is grieved, departs from them, and leaves them in their own darkness and hardness of heart. When we consider the heavenly influences, which many receive who draw back to perdition, and the good fruits, which, for a time, they bore, it is blasphemy to say, they had no genuine or redeeming feature. They had it, they showed it, and they trifled with it, and sinned against it; and therefore are lost.”

“What a comfortable thought it is to the followers of Christ, that them but by the permission of their heavenly Father, and that he will not suffer any of neither men nor demons can act against those who trust in him to be tried above what they are able to bear, and will make the trail end in their greater salvation, and in his glory!”

“Slothfulness is natural to man; it requires much training to induce him to labor for his daily bread: if God should miraculously send it, he will wonder and eat it; and that is the whole. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate,” is an ungracious word to many; they profess to trust in God’s mercy, but labor not to enter that rest. God will not reverse his purpose to meet their slothfulness: they alone who overcome shall sit with Jesus on his throne. Reader, “take unto thee the whole armor of God, that thou mayest be able to stand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.” And remember that he only who endures to the end shall be saved.”

“He that is self- confident is already half fallen. He, who professes to believe that God will absolutely keep him from falling finally, and neglects watching unto prayer, is not in a safer state. He who lives by the moment, walks in the light, and maintains his communion with God, is in no danger of apostasy.”

“He who changes from opinion to opinion, and from one sector party to another, is never to be depended on; there is much reason to believe that such a person is either mentally weak, or has never been rationally and divinely convinced of the truth.”

“Every believer in Christ is in danger of apostasy while any remains of the evil heart of unbelief are found in him. God has promised to purify the heart and the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. It is, therefore, the highest wisdom of genuine Christians to look to God for the complete purification of their souls; this they cannot have too soon, and for this they cannot be too much in earnest.”

“As a preventive of backsliding and apostasy, the apostle recommends mutual exhortation. No Christian should live for himself alone; he should consider his fellow Christian as a member of the same body, and feel for him accordingly, and love, succor, and protect him. When this is carefully attended to in religious society, Satan finds it very difficult to make an inroad on the Church; but when coldness, distance and want of brotherly love take place, Satan can attack each singly and, by successive victories over individuals, soon make an easy conquest of the whole.”

“Here (2nd Peter; 2) is a sad proof of the possibility of falling from grace, and from very high degrees of it too. These had escaped from the contagion that was in the world; they had had true repentance, and cast up “their sour-sweet morsel of sin.” They had been washed from all their filthiness and this must have been through the blood of the Lamb; yet, after all, they went back, got entangled with their old sins, swallowed down their formerly rejected lusts, and reswallowed in the mire of corruption. It is no wonder that God should say, “The latter end is worse with them than the beginning:” reason and nature say, “It must be so;” and divine justice says, “It ought to be so;” and the person himself must confess that it is right that it should be so. But how dreadful is this state! How dangerous, when the person has abandoned himself to his old sins! Yet it is not said that it is impossible for him to return to his Maker; though his case be deplorable, it is not utterly hopeless; the leper may yet be made clean, and the dead may be raised. Reader is thy backsliding a grief and burden to thee! Then thou art not far from the kingdom of God; believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.

“A soul cut off from the flock of God is in an awful state! His outward defense is departed from him; and, being no longer accountable to any for his conduct, he generally plunges into unprecedented depths of iniquity, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Reader, art thou without the pale of God’s Church! Remember, it is written “Them that are without, God judgeth.”

“In a state of probation, everything may change. While we are in life, we may stand or fall. Our standing in the faith depends on our union with God; and that depends on our watching unto prayer, and continuing to possess that faith that worketh by love. The highest saint under heaven can stand no longer, than he depends upon God, and continues in the obedience of faith. He that ceases to do so will fall into sin and get a darkened understanding and a hardened heart, and he may continue in this state till God come to take away his soul. Therefore, let him who most assuredly standeth take heed lest he fall, not only partially, but finally.”

One of the greatest (most respected) Biblical expositors of all times, Alexander Maclaren had the following to note about the importance of maintaining one's personal faith in Christ. He definitely believed in "Conditional Eternal Security".

"The Gradual Extinction of God's Light in the Soul! Our Lamps Are Gone Out." Matthew 25:8.

Let us take the lesson. There is nothing in our religious emotions, which has any guarantee of perpetuity in it, except upon certain conditions. We may live, and our life may ebb. We may trust, and our trust may tremble into unbelief we may obey, and our obedience may be broken by the mutinous risings of self-will. We may walk in the paths of righteousness, and our feet may falter and turn aside. There is certainty of the dying out of all communicated life, unless the channel of communication with the life from which it was first kindled be kept constantly clear. The lamp may be "a burning and a shining light," or, more accurately translating the phrase of our Lord, "a light kindled and" (therefore) "shining," but it will only be light "for a season," unless it is fed from that from which it was first set alight" and that is, from God Himself

"Our lamps are going out." A slow process that! The flame does not all die into darkness in a minute. There are stages in the process. The white portion of the flame becomes smaller and the blue part extends; then the flame flickers, and finally shudders itself, as it were, oft the wick. Then nothing remains but a charred red line along the top; then that line breaks up into little points, and one after another, these twinkle out, and then all is black, and the lamp is gone out. And so, slowly, like the ebbing away of the tide, like the reluctant long-protracted dying of summer days, like the dropping of the blood from some fatal wound, by degrees the process of extinction creeps, creeps, creeps on, and the lamp that was going is finally gone out.

The infinite mercy of God is not mere weak indulgence, which so deals with a man's failures and sins as to convey the impression that these are of no moment whatsoever. And the severity which said, "No! Such work is not fit for such hands until the heart has been 'broken and healed,' are of a piece with the severity, which is love. Thou want a God that forgavest them, and didst visit them for their inventions." Let us learn the difference between a weak charity, which loves too foolishly, and therefore too selfishly, to let a man inherit the fruit of his doings, and the large mercy which knows how to take the bitterness out of the chastisement, and yet knows how to chastise." (Taken From "Music for the Soul" by Alexander Maclaren "Keeping In Step With The Holy Spirit!")

Sweet. It only lasted a moment, but that moment should be described as sweet. To really appreciate this milestone, I need to travel back to 1988. The most disturbing decision my wife and I made was choosing to buy a new car after our current vehicle was on its death bed. The ad to which we responded claimed a guaranteed trade-in amount whether one had to push, pull, or tow the car in. Unknown to each other, Vicki and I were lifting silent prayers. All we wanted God to do was deliver us safely into the car lot. We did not care if the car fell apart at the dealership; we just wanted to get there and get rid of that old lemon.

God more than answered our prayers. Not only did we arrive safely, we were allotted more for our old car than we expected. We purchased a smaller car, but one with a solid reputation. As we drove out of the lot with our brand new Honda Civic, I noticed that the odometer was equipped with an extra space. Older model cars, when they turned over 100,000 miles would simply read zero again. I was struck by the confidence of the manufacturer to place that additional column on the odometer.

This week, our car turned 150,000 miles old. Sweet! I have never owned a car, which has traveled so well. We plan to keep this car for many years to come. To what do I attribute this taste of triumph? First, to a car well built, second, to keeping an eye on routine maintenance, and third, to fair driving habits.

Nothing is new under the sun: these three principles apply to all areas of life. What you care for will take care of you. For instance, how is your spiritual walk: is God taking care of you? Of course, perhaps He is only dealing with you as well as you are taking care of what He has entrusted to you.

Here is how to get a lot of mileage out of your relationship with God: First, realize that you are well built. As the little child said, God don't make junk. Second, have routine maintenance checks. Is your faith running in time with the Spirit? Have you been renewed by the oil of His faithfulness? Do you recharge your spiritual battery in worship and praise? And third, is your lifestyle in harmony with God's Word? Are you cruising within the vast boundaries of God's grace, or are you speeding through the dark alleys of temptations? When you take care of the things of God, He will take care of you.

"Lord, am I guilty of not maintaining the faith You have given to me? Have I misused Your grace? Forgive me, Father, for not paying closer attention to our relationship. Check my spirit, fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and renew joy as I worship and praise Your name. Through Christ. Amen

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: *“A relationship with God is mutual. God will keep His Word if we maintain our faith in Him. Depend upon the Holy Spirit to keep your relationship fresh.” - Thomas Duckworth*

Ron Christian 

PROMISES

CONDITIONS

WARNINGS

Hebrews 1:1-14

Jesus is creator and sustainer of universe (1:1, 2). Heir of God (1:1) Incarnate manifestation of God's glory (1:3, atoning sacrifice for sin (1:3), resurrected and exalted Son (1:3).

Jesus is superior to the angels in every way. (1:5-14) (Warranted by Scriptural support), as demonstrated by His everlasting reign (1:8) by His creative power (1:10), by His everlasting person (1:11), by His immutability (1:12), by His victorious kingly reign (1:13), angels are servants of the redeemed (1:14).

Message was transmitted by angels. (2:2)

The message was "declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him." (2:3)

Hebrews 2:1-4

"We must pay closer attention to what we have heard". (2:1)

Page 51 of 207

... Possible to "drift away" from the message believers have heard.

"ITEMIZATION OF THE 'SNARES' WHICH CAN CAUSE A BELIEVER TO FALL FROM GRACE."

1. ***Unforgiving Spirit***
Matthew 18:21-35

2. ***Deception by False Teachings or Evil Spirits***
Matthew 24:4, 5, 11-13, 23-26 ***1 Timothy 1:3-6***
Luke 11:24-28 ***1 Timothy 4:1***
I Corinthians 10:20 ***1 Timothy 6:20, 21***
Colossians 2:8, 18, 19

3. ***Spiritual Neglect and Procrastination (Spiritual Drifting, Gradual Hardening, or Luke warmness.)***
Matthew 25:1-13 ***Hebrews: 7-11, 13, 15***
Hebrews 2:1-3 ***Revelations 3:15, 16, 17***

4. ***Spiritual Carelessness and Shallowness (Lack of Vigilance)***
Luke 8:12, 13 ***II Peter 3:17***
Hebrews 4:1, 11

5. ***Spiritual Carelessness and Shallowness (Lack of Vigilance)***
I John 5:16 ***James 1:14, 15, 16***
I Corinthians 6:7-9 ***James 5:15, 20***
II Corinthians 12:2-13:5 ***Jude 4, 6, 7, 8-10, 12, 24***
Philippians 3:18-19 ***Revelations 2: 18-26***
I Thessalonians 3-5 ***Revelations 3:5, 8-12***
I Timothy 5:11-15
Hebrews 6:4-9
Hebrews 10:28-29
Hebrews 12:16, 17, 25-29

6. ***Preoccupation by Worldly Interests and Pursuits and Riches***
Luke 8:14 ***1st John 2:15, 16, 17***
I Timothy 5:6 ***Revelations 3:4***
I Timothy 6:9-12

7. ***Faithlessness and Lack of Spiritual Endurance (Disobedience, Unbelief, and Bitterness.***
Luke 12:42-48 ***Hebrews 3:12, 19***
John 15:1-7 ***Hebrews 4:6, 11***
John 6:66-71 ***Hebrews 6:10-20***
John 8:31, 32, 51 ***Hebrews 10:23, 36, 39***

Acts 11:21-23

Acts 14:21-22

Romans 11:20-22

1st Corinthians 9:23-27

1st Corinthians 10:22

II Corinthians 11:2-4

Galatians 6:9

Philippians 2:12

Colossians 1:23

2nd Timothy 2:12

Hebrews 11:13

Ezekiel 33:10-16

Hebrews 12:1

1st John 2:17, 25, 28

Jude 5

Revelation 2:7, 10, 11, 17

Revelation 3:5, 10, 12

Revelation 21:7, 8

8. *Shallow attitude towards Sin and towards Grace (Antinomianism)*

Romans 6:11-23

Romans 8:12-14, 17

Galatians 6:7, 8

Hebrews 10:26, 27

1st Peter: 1:5-11

Jude: 4

9. *Refusal of or Insensitivity to the Spiritual Means of Grace*

John 13:8

Hebrews 10:22-25

1st Corinthians 11:27-32

10. *Offense by Fellow Believers*

Romans 13:15-23

11. *Attitude of Ingratitude, Grumbling, and Division*

1st Corinthians 10:10

Philippians 2:14

12. *Self-Confidence and Pride*

I Corinthians 10:11, 12

13. *Resort to Religious Performance Instead of Grace (Legalism)*

Galatians 5:1-4

1st Timothy 1:3-6

14. *Discouragement and Despair during Trials and Persecutions, or Chastening. (Lose Heart)*

1st Thessalonians 3:3, 4

1st Peter 1:7

Hebrews 10:32-34; 12:11

15. *Rejection of the Dictates of the Conscience*

1st Timothy 1:19, 20

1st Timothy 4:2

16. *Temporal Irresponsibility to Dependents*

1st Timothy 5:8

17. *Spiritual Profession without Spiritual Performance (Lack of Good Deeds and Good Deeds and Good Conduct)*

James 2:14-26

2nd 1:6-10

“DOES THE BIBLE TEACH CONDITIONAL ETERNAL SECURITY?”

“The cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seemingly healthy, full heads.” (Genesis 41:4-7)

This dream should be a warning to each of us. Yet, it is possible for the best years of our life, the best experiences we have enjoyed, the best victories we have won, and the best service we have rendered, to be swallowed up by times of failure, defeat, dishonor, and uselessness in God’s kingdom. Some people whose lives offered exceptional promise and achievements have come to such an end. It is certainly terrible to imagine, but it is true. “Yet it is never necessary.”

Samuel Dickey Gordon once said that the only safe assurance against such a tragedy is to have a “fresh touch with God daily – or even hourly”. My blessed, fruitful, and victorious experiences of yesterday have no lingering value to me today. In fact, they can be “swallowed up” or reversed by today’s failures, unless I see them as incentives to spur me on to even better and richer experiences today.

Maintaining this “fresh touch with God”, by abiding in Christ, will be the only thing to keep the “ugly and gaunt...cows” and the “thin heads of grain” from consuming my life. (From Message for the Morning Watch)

¹ “Son of man, say to the Israelites, ‘this is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of [a] them. How then can we live?”’ Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’ “Therefore, son of man, say to your people, ‘If someone who is righteous disobeys, that person’s former righteousness will count for nothing. And if someone who is wicked repents, that person’s former wickedness will not bring condemnation. The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live even though they were formerly righteous.’ If I tell a righteous person that they will surely live, but then they trust in their righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered; they will die for the evil they have done. And if I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ but they then turn away from their sin and do what is just and right— if they give back what they took in pledge for a loan, return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil—that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them. They have done what is just and right; they will surely live. “Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ But it is their way that is not just. If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, they will die for it.

And if a wicked person turns away from their wickedness and does, what is just and right, they will live by doing so. Yet you Israelites say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to your own ways." (Ezekiel 33:10-20)

Read Ezekiel 18:21-32 for further understanding of the possibility of the recovery of the wicked person to righteousness and the possibility the degree backsliding into sin of the once righteous persons.

Like the thief on the cross beside Jesus, who called upon Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His Kingdom, there will be multitudes of "death bed repentant" in heaven! Only those who repent of their sins and who exercise saving path will get to enter the "pearly gates"! God is not willing that any should perish, but there is only one "passport" to heaven – and that is true repentance and the exercise of faith in God (as best one understands Him). It is either "repent or perish" – and the wicked one who, at the last minute, repents will gain entrance into Heaven! His life will be 'lost', but his soul will be 'saved'!

According to the 33rd Chapter of Ezekiel, it is the spiritual state of one's soul when he dies that determines that soul's eternal destiny. Even though the majority of a man's life has been lived in righteousness, if that righteous man is overpowered by insidious temptations (and if he consistently fails to avail himself of the graciously offered keeping power of the Holy Spirit, and thus yields himself to a pattern of deliberate sinning), then that once-righteous man will be finally lost eternally! On the other hand, if a man who has most of his life lived a very wicked life (like the 'thief on the cross'), comes to a place in his life when he is "stopped in his tracks" with a "grand awakening by the Holy Spirit" which results in deep repentance and the exercise of simple (sincere) "saving faith" (like, again, the 'thief on the cross'). Then God will graciously and thoroughly 'save' that wicked man – and, if this man "keeps the faith", Jesus will welcome that once wicked man into the eternal paradise (the same as the 'thief' was welcomed by Jesus into paradise!).

Yes, as you probably are 'disturbed' by this Ezekiel passage (33:10-20), I too 'feel' disturbance when I think of the possibility of myself (who have tried to live for God most of my life) finally (in the end when I die) being lost from God and never seeing heaven! But, even though I personally believe that it is highly unlikely that a long-time Christian would "turn his back on God" towards the latter part of his life, I have to say that, even though such a tragedy is not 'probable', nevertheless such a tragedy is "possible"! Why? Because every Christian, until the end of his human life on this planet, has the continuing gift (a "frightening gift") of "Free Will"!

Because Satan attempts, through temptation, to destroy the faith of every Christian, every Christian must continue (until the end of his mortal life) "to watch and to pray", for the Adversary (though defeated by Christ's death and resurrection) is "still on the loose". He wants to defeat, to discourage, to divide, to devour every believer (especially those believers who have lived the longest for Christ)! At any stage of the

Christian life, there is need to guard against the lusts of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life! How easy it is for a long-time believer to begin to take pride in his moral, spiritual, and ecclesiastical achievements! And, even so-called mature Christians, can be “off their guard” and begin to “think more highly of themselves than they ought to think”.

Mature Christians are capable of “falling into sins”, and it is possible (not probable) that a mature-type believer could “drift away” into all kinds of sins! Let me tell you of one such very sad example of a mature Christian who fell into sin! I believe he repented and that he was restored to a vital faith in Christ, before he was tragically killed in a car accident (just a few years ago). This man appeared to me to be a very mature person, for he had been a long-time pastor, then a conference superintendent, and finally a denominational Bishop! But, even though I do not know the “vivid details” regarding his “horrible fall”, this now-retired Bishop lost his “ministerial credentials” (as far as I know) – because of his “sexual immorality”! Again, I must say, I believe that this man (Bishop) was repentant, and that he entered heaven (as a forgiven man) when (shortly after his spiritual disaster) he was “ushered into eternity” through a “head on car collision”. “BUT, IF SUCH A “FINE MINISTER” (Head of a holiness denomination) could dreadfully “fall into sin” (as he did), what is to say that any other believer could not fall into some type of sin (lust, pornography, pride, adultery, envy, resentment, bitterness, greed, slander, dishonesty, irreverence, and others)?

It is wonderful to have a personal assurance of one’s salvation, (for the Spirit does witness to our human spirit that we are sons and daughters of our loving Heavenly Fathers)! But there is no total and absolute assurance of our salvation until we arrive in Heaven (where it is impossible to “fall from grace” – praise God!) We must, on earth, guard against “drifting away from God”. (Hebrews 2) “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Hebrews 2) There is the peril of pride, and the peril of fleshly lusts (both of which we just briefly noted). There is also the peril of worldliness, (becoming fascinated and enamored with ‘things’ and ‘possessions’ and ‘worldly pleasures’). Of course, Christianity (more than any other religion, values the material world that God created and that Christ – the Incarnate One – sanctified by His bodily presence on earth for 33 years). Christianity does not condemn the ownership of houses and lands and gadgets and possessions – IF a believer does not worship the “material realm”! “Things” all belong to God, and Christians are simply stewards of “things” – to use all “things” like houses and lands and cars to serve one’s fellowman and to honor God and to moderately enjoy themselves! But, nevertheless, there is a temptation to make a “god” out of things, and, in the process, to focus on “things” rather than to use “things” for one’s own self moderately, and to use “things” generously to enhance the lives of other needy persons, and thus gladly to bring glory and honor to the “Owner of all things”! A keen sense of stewardship must always be maintained by sincere Christians, whether they have little of this world’s “goods”, or they have much of the world’s “good”! In the material world in which every Christian lives, there is a continuing temptation to be-

come “worldly minded” (i.e., to change one’s focus from worshipping the Creator of Matter, to worshipping matter itself!).

Paul had many faithful companions and partners “in the Faith”, and he often names some of them in his various New Testament letters (epistles). But one such companion (very faithful at one time) apparently got his “eyes” off Christ’s work, and he put his “gaze” instead on the “things of this temporal world”! Paul says, “Demas, in love with this present world, hath forsaken me!” A backslider who forsook Paul and the “Work of the Kingdom”! How sad! How very sad! Did Demas every “get back to the Lord”? No one knows!

Even one of the close friends of the famous evangelist, Billy Graham, departed from “the Faith”. This young man was highly gifted in Gospel (evangelistic) preaching, and (like Graham) he was in great demand as a speaker! But something “tripped up” this promising young preacher! I don’t know all the details surrounding his “fall from grace and Christian belief”, but it is my understanding that this young evangelist (highly talented) allowed himself to become disillusioned regarding the faith of Christianity because of his serious doubts that he nourished regarding the “Problem of Human Suffering”! Doubts, which he failed adequately to deal with, drove him away from preaching the simple (but powerful) message of Christ and Salvation! He finally decisively left the “fold of God and His people”. He became so cynical regarding Christianity, that this one-true effective evangelist and now backslider agnostic (perhaps atheist) ridiculed Christianity and eventually he even wrote books that sought to repudiate the faith of Christians! Compassionate-minded Billy Graham tried to “reach out in love” to this apostate person, but apparently he and no one else was able to persuade him to “return to the Father’s house”!

As we have mentioned, many perils threaten to destroy the ‘faith’ of believers (perils such as pride, lust, worldliness, doubt). These perils are real, and they must be avoided! I believe that the longer one is a believer and the closer one’s “walk” is with God, the less likely is it that such a believer will be enticed by temptation and “fall from grace”! However, as long as there is such a thing as ‘free will’, there is always a possibility of sinning! This human life is a life of probation, but God is able to keep the believer until the end of his journey!

“...for if, after they have escaped the corrupting ways of the world through a full knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they again become entangled in them and are conquered by them, then their last condition is worse than their former one. For it would have been better for them never to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command committed to their trust. In them is verified the truth of the proverb, “A sow that has washed herself goes back to wallow in the mire.” (11th Peter 2:20-22, Williams’ Translation)

Only God can be the final Judge of every person, in time and in eternity, but while it is forbidden by Jesus for any of His followers to “judge” (i.e., to declare the final outcome of another person’s soul), it is permitted (and encouraged) by Jesus for His followers to “test the fruit” of those around them. Jesus said Christians are right to be ‘fruit inspectors’!

And it is important to note, that believing in Jesus is a progressive, continuing relationship of love, not a one-time-only experience. Those who are presently living in sin are sinners, even if their previous experience with God was truly “Christian” (characterized by “godly traits and virtues”). It is one’s present, up-to-date experience that determines one’s relationship with God. When a Christian’s occasional sins are faced and confessed to God (1st John 1:9; 2:1), then that “failed Christian” is quickly restored to fellowship with God. However, when a believer in Christ continues deliberately to sin, the day comes when he not only loses his fellowship with God, but his very relationship with God is forfeited! Eternal life is not some kind of “deposit” that a person receives at conversion, a “deposit” (gift) that is irrevocable and unconditional. It is the person who believes in Christ and continues to believe in Christ, who is saved for time and eternity! “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!” God’s promise is to persevering believers! Eternal life is a relationship of love with the Savior, and (as in a human relationship of love) the love of a believer for his God must be nurtured and maintained for an entire lifetime! A believer who chooses no longer to commune with God in prayer, and who chooses no longer to allow his God to speak to him through the Bible, and who chooses no longer to obey God’s commands, and who chooses no longer to humble himself to learn from his fellow believers (both in positive guidance and in gentle rebuke), and who chooses to “close his heart of compassion” to suffering persons (and who decides instead selfishly to spend his money to “indulge his own desires”) – I say, such a Christian (just described) has “sold his birthright for a pot of stew”! Such a Christian is well on his way to “forsaking the faith of his ancestors”! Such a Christian is fast losing his precious relationship with God! He is in a “backslidden state!”

It is tragically true that any believer has the capacity of making “shipwreck of his faith.” There are multiple perils that Christians must avoid – the “lust of the eyes”, the “lust for money”, and “the pride of life” (to name a few)! “So the man who thinks he stands securely must be on the lookout not to fall.” (1st Corinthians 10:12) “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit of man indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!” This verse does not say that the flesh is wicked, but it is weak! The flesh (which represents “innocent desires” like the “sex desire”) can become the “bridgehead for sin” (that is, the “entrance for sin” into your life). For instance, the God-given “sexual desires” are meant to be the “holy directives” to lead you to a beautiful, chaste, God-centered wife, but if the “sex drive” is not disciplined and surrendered to the Creator of that “sex drive”, then this beautiful wholesome drive will be the “entrance of sin” into your life! What was intended to be a beautiful God-given gift will turn out to be the instrument that leads to misery and ugliness!

Probably the most basic Biblically taught truth regarding the unique creation of humans, is the truth (a glorious yet sobering truth) that God created humans with “Free Will”. God did not want “robots”; God wanted creatures (made in His own “image”) created with the capacity to enjoy the Creator in a deep loving relationship! And there is no such thing as a meaningful loving relationship without the capacity of choice (i.e., “Free Will”). You cannot “force” someone to love you; another person must freely choose to love you!

And the greatest exercise of human “Free choice” is the exercise of a sinner (by the enabling grace of God) choosing to repent and to believe in Jesus as his/her Savior and Lord! But, what is important to understand (from the Bible’s perspective) is this: a person’s initial choice (by God’s grace) to believe in Christ as personal Savior, must be affirmed and maintained throughout one’s entire earthly life!

“Be thou faithful unto her until death us do part” is the commitment of an earnest groom, when he takes his marriage vows. But one who initially enters into a “saving relationship” with God, must determine (by God’s grace) to be faithful to God for his entire lifetime!

But, we all know (sadly) that a large number of couples become divorced (because of lack of faithfulness, in one way or another). And, in all honesty, (as the Scriptures indicate, John 15; 2 Peter 2:20-22), we have to sadly acknowledge that there are some believers who “turn back from following their Lord”! Unfaithful to their Lord! Backsliding and apostasy are words that describe a spiritual reality that is most sad (tragic)! God can “keep” every believer from “falling away”, but not even God can “force straying Christians” to make the right choices!

The Holy Spirit, who strongly warns straying Christians to “guard against temptations”, and to “rush back to the caring arms of the Good Shepherd” – this blessed Holy Spirit can (tragically) be “grieved”; He can be “quenched” or “resisted”! There is no human behavior (by a believer or by a non-believer) that is more dangerous or more soul-destroying than the behavior of “resisting or ignoring the powerful and the tender Holy Spirit!” The Spirit does everything, just short of coercion, to draw a “drifting believer” back to the blessed Savior. The Spirit knows clearly where the path of sinning will lead to – namely, to an earthly life of misery, and eventually (unless there is true repentance in the heart of the drifting Christian) to an eternal destruction, a destruction too horrible to imagine.

God’s faithfulness to me cannot avail for my own unfaithfulness! God’s faithfulness is established (i.e., God will never leave me, nor forsake me)! But, as long as I am a “free will agent” on this earth (in a state of testing, probation, and character building for heaven), my faithfulness to God is always “in question”! In heaven, my faithfulness to God (i.e., my faithfulness, made possible by my effort and by God’s sustaining

grace) will be “sealed forever”! No temptation; No testing; No trials - in Heaven! No more probation in Heaven! God will have tested my faithfulness to Him (and to my fellow-human beings) long enough on earth! The sweetest words in the Universe (for humans) will be those words from the lips of the Tri-une God when he shall give His glorious evaluation for His “faithful child”: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!”

A heavenly (eternal) reward given for a godly life and for “staying true’ to the Living God on the probationary planet! A godly life is one that seeks God’s will! When a believer realizes he has not fully done God’s will (because of his mistakes or even because of his sins), he quickly “pleads the blood of Jesus Christ” as his “atoning sacrifice”. He claims God’s forgiveness in humility and in repentance, and he then continues with his life of faithfulness – seeking to carry out God’s will for his little (but significant) human life. God rewards persons (believers) who “keep up-to-date” in their love relationship with Him (i.e., persons who keep “short accounts with God” – confessing sins quickly when believers become aware that they have “missed the mark” in their actions, in their attitudes). Only those persons get to hear God’s “Well Done” at the end of their lives, who have maintained a growing “love relationship with God!”

This means that such a person continues to believe in Jesus until the time of his physical death. This means that such a person continually casts all of his admitted frequent failures and his occasional sins into the “cleansing stream of Jesus’ powerful blood”! “The blood, the blood, O hallelujah it cleanses me!” Let the precious blood constantly cover you! Then you will have no need to worry that your name will ever be “erased from the Book of Life”! Daily confession (of shortcomings or even of occasional sins) and daily cleansing of your entire life (mind, emotion and will) gives you an up-to-date assurance that you are in a vital “love relationship” with the Tri-une God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and that you are ready any time to receive your Lord’s call to that “Heavenly Shore” where there will be to be peace and joy and love in a much larger measure than anything you have ever known on earth, ever in your closest times of fellowship with your matchless Savior and your tender Holy Spirit and your Kind Heavenly Father! Daily communion with God will prepare you for heavenly communion – a communion which could come at any time (even at an unexpected time)! Staying close to God gives you strength for life’s trials and temptations and tests, and it is the best “antidote” against spiritual drifting or dangerous backsliding. Your God is able to keep you, if you are willing to be kept. His power is limitless, if you have a wholehearted willingness!

“SECURITY FOR BELIEVERS SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON ‘PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS’!”

There are scores of New Testament Scriptures which encourage Christians to 'persevere in the Faith' (i.e., not to succumb to temptations and other pressures in life, but to remain true to the Lord until 'the end of life').

Even though the theme of Christology (the doctrine of the 'person and nature of Christ') is a great theme of the Book of Hebrews, the primary theme of Hebrews is 'Perseverance of the Saints' (i.e., 'let us hold fast'). Notes Robert Shank (regarding the proper understanding of the theme of the Book of Hebrews): "The phrase 'let us go on' appears but once (Hebrews 6:1). 'Let us go on', he writes, 'unto perfection'. The writer may have reference to his intention to proceed to the advanced development of the doctrine of Christ to which he proposes to lead them in the course of his letter. Or it may be a call to his readers to advance from spiritual infancy in which he found them (Hebrews 5:11-13) toward the maturity (vs.) which is possible for all who will grasp it. Actually, both things are within the writer's purpose. Certainly, it is his intention to proceed toward the fuller development of his Christology. But the presentation of his Christology is not an end in itself. The principal burden of the letter is not 'let us go on', but 'let us hold fast'. In contrast with the exhortation 'let us go on unto perfection', which occurs but once, the exhortation 'let us hold fast our confession' occurs twice:(Hebrews 4:14; 10:23) and the epistle abounds with cognate exhortations: 'if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end' (3:6); 'if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end' (3:14); 'lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God' (3:12); 'lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin' (3:13); 'lest at any time we should slip away' (2:1; 'if we neglect so great salvation' (2:3); 'harden not your hearts' (3:8,15); 'lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (4:11); 'show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end' (6:11); 'let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith' (10:22); 'cast not away therefore your confidence' (10:35); 'for ye have need of patience, that... ye might receive the promise' (10:36); 'the just shall live by faith: but if he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him' (10:38) ;lest ye be wearied and faint' (12:3); 'despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of him' (12:5); 'be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live' (12:9); 'lest that which is lame be turned out of the way' (12:13); 'lest any man fail of the grace of God' (12:15); 'lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who sold his birthright' (12:16); 'if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven' (12:25); 'be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines' (13:9); 'let us keep going forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach' (13:13).

Any emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews on going on toward spiritual maturity is secondary. The burden of the writer's 'word of exhortation', is that his readers 'hold fast the confession of their hope' in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and 'the Source of eternal salvation unto all who obey Him.'" (Life in the Son; Robert Shank; pgs. 231-234)

The highly respected writer (from the early 20th century), James Denney, in his well-known book 'The Death of Christ', believed the main thrust of the Book of Hebrews was 'conservation of the Faith'. He writes, "The author (of Hebrews) was not an evangelist so much as a pastor, and it is not the initiation of Christianity, but its conservation, with which he deals throughout" The internationally-known New Testament scholar, William Barclay, agrees. He writes: "When we sum it all up, we can say that Hebrews is a letter written by a great teacher, written by a man whom we would call a professor, to a little group or college of Christians in Rome. He was their teacher; at the moment he was separated from them; he was afraid that they were drifting away from the faith; and so he wrote this letter to them."

When studying the New Testament, it is helpful to look at larger sections of Scripture with three thoughts in mind: (1) Promises to be claimed, (2) Conditions to be met, (3) Warnings to be heeded. With these three ideas in mind, let us briefly 'scan' some of the relevant New Testament passages, all of which deal with the important subject of the 'perseverance of believers' and the 'security of believers'. Space will not permit the quotation of many Scriptures, but I will attempt a brief summary of the 'key' points in several of the New Testament passages.

In Matthew 18:21-25, God promises total forgiveness of one's total 'debt' to God, provided that one is willing to forgive those who have sinned against him. A lack of mercy and forgiveness of others incites the wrath of the Lord, and actually forfeits one's own forgiveness.

In Matthew 24:4, 5, 11-13, 23-26, the Lord promises to save those who 'endure to the end' (vs. 13). Believers are warned of the possibility of being led astray by false 'Christ's. Multiplied wickedness in the earth can cause the 'cooling' of a believer's love for God (vs. 12). In Matthew 25:1-3, in Christ's parable of the Marriage Feast, believers are warned against neglecting to purchase 'oil', thus resulting in their lamps going out when Christ comes (vs. 8), and being shut out of the marriage feast while trying too late to purchase on (vs. 10-12).

In Luke 8:11-15, believers are taught that spiritual fruitfulness and productivity (vs. 15) is the result of hearing the Word, holding it fast in an honest and good heart, and patiently enduring. Christians must guard against the devil stealing the Word from their hearts. They must guard against shallowness and falling away during temptation (vs. 13), and they must also guard against their lives being choked by the 'cares and riches and pleasures of life' (vs. 14).

In Luke 11:24-28, persons whose lives have been initially cleansed from evil must guard against evil spirits which are seeking re-entrance into the lives of those who had previously experienced deliverance. This

Scripture apparently is teaching that, following one's cleansing from sin, there must be positive 'infilling' of one's life with the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit (to prevent re-entry of any 'evil spirits').

In Luke 12:42-46, the Master (Christ) sets believers over his 'household' and over all his possessions. Faithfulness and wise management of God-entrusted responsibilities is expected from all servants. The servants (believers) are exhorted not to become impatient at the delay of the Master's coming. Impatience can lead to mistreatment of those persons who have been entrusted to their stewardship, leading to a 'life of debauchery' (vs. 45). Such faithless stewards will be punished with a severe 'beating' and assigned to the 'place of the unfaithful' (vs. 46, 47).

John 6:66-71, teaches that believers must continue to follow Christ, rather than 'drawing back' and no longer going with Him (vs. 66). There is a possibility (as in the case of Judas Iscariot) of a one-time believer 'betraying' Jesus (vs. 70, 71).

In John 8:31-32, Jesus states that persons can be His disciples (and 'know the truth which shall set them free') if they hold to his teachings and continue in His Word. John 8:51, states that a person shall never see (spiritual) death if he keeps God's Word. Act 14:21-22, reveals that a large number of persons became disciples to the Lord. It is recorded that Paul strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to 'remain true to the faith'. Paul taught that Christians 'must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God'.

In Paul's popular teaching in Romans 6:11-23, he teaches that it is possible for one's 'body parts' to be yielded as 'instruments of sin and wickedness' (vs. 12, 13). Paul warns against believers entertaining a shallow attitude toward God's grace, and a casual attitude towards sinning, and he exhorts believers never to claim that grace quickly provides for one's practice of sinning (vs. 15). Paul says that offering one's self to obey sin results in final spiritual death (vs. 16). In Romans 8:13, Paul says that one will die if he lives according to his 'sinful nature'.

Romans 11:20-22, teaches that a person enjoys a 'standing in Christ' if he has 'faith', 'humility', 'godly fear' and 'reverence' - and provided that he continues 'in God's kindness'. God will not spare those who persist in unbelief. Unbelief causes the branch to be broken off the Vine. Those who do not continue in God's kindness will be cut out (vs. 22).

Romans 14:15-23, teaches that a believer must act in love by carefully refraining from anything that is a source of stumbling to his fellow Christian. A Christian must guide his life and actions by 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (vs. 18). It is possible for a believer to be offended by and even destroyed by a fellow believer. It is possible for a believer to destroy the work of God and to cause a fellow Christian to

stumble by his insensitive and offending actions (vs. 20, 21). It is possible for a believer to sin as a result of doing things with doubt rather than with faith (vs. 23). I Corinthians 9:23-27, teaches that a person (believer) will enjoy "a crown that will last forever" (vs. 25) if he is willing to undergo God's strict training and if he runs the spiritual race with 'aim and purpose' (i.e., 'beat my body and make it my slave'). Paul (wholesomely) feared that "after I have preached to others, I myself will be disqualified for the prize" (vs. 27).

Serious warnings are issued to believers in I Corinthians 10:1-22. It is possible, after a believer has experienced many spiritual blessings, for God no longer to be pleased with him (vs. 5). It is possible for one who has experienced 'spiritual food and drink' to set his heart on evil things (as the Israelites in the wilderness did- verse 6). It is possible for a believer to fall into idolatry and sexual immorality, and consequently to be destroyed by God (vs. 7, 8). It is possible for a believer to 'test' (over-tempt) the Lord and to be destroyed by the Lord (vs. 9). It is possible for a believer to fall into a life of grumbling against the Lord and to be 'killed by the destroying angel' (vs. 10). Wrote Paul, "These things happened to them (the Israelites in the wilderness) as examples and were written down as warnings for us. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (vs. 11, 12) "I do not want you (believers) to be participants with demons." (vs. 20) "Don't arouse the Lord's jealousy." (vs. 22).

I Corinthians 11:27-32, notes that it is possible for a believer to become insensitive to the spiritual significance of 'The Lord's Supper', and consequently to sin 'against the body and blood of the Lord' and bring 'judgment on himself' (vs. 27, 29). Some even died in the Early Church because they insensitively partook of the Lord's Supper (vs. 30).

I Corinthians 15:1-2, teach that if one does not hold firmly to the word, which he received for initial salvation, he has 'believed in vain' (vs. 2).

2 Corinthians 11:2-4, teaches that a gullible believer can deceptively be led away from his pure and single-hearted devotion to Christ, into false teachings (as illustrated by Eve's deception by Satan- 2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

2 Corinthians 12:21-13:5, teaches that it is possible for a one-time believer to sin grievously (impurity, sexual sin, debauchery) without being activated to repentance.

Paul warns believers against reverting to a life of 'legalism', after having been initially set free from sin through God's mighty grace. With great sadness, Paul writes to the Galatians Christians who had reverted to 'legalism': "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; You have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

Someone said, "If a believer takes one step towards God, God takes a thousand steps toward the believer!" God is the 'God who acts' - the God who initiates, the God who is 'eager to respond' to any person who demonstrates any degree of desire to 'know God'. Someone wisely said, "It is not hard to live the Christian life; it is impossible - unless, of course, God's Spirit indwells and empowers the believer." Philippians 2:12-16 contains both Promises and Conditions, as these relate to one's salvation. As a believer, you can be encouraged, for "God works in you to will and do what pleases Him." (vs. 13) Because of the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, he can become 'blameless and pure', a child of God 'without fault in a crooked and depraved generation', and he can be a 'shining star in the universe' (vs. 15). But, with the promises and divine provisions, there are some conditions to be met: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (vs. 12). Christians are to 'do everything without complaining or arguing' (vs. 14).

Colossians 1:21-23, speaks of both a wonderful Promise to be claimed, and a serious Condition to be met. "God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

Colossians 2:4-8, contains all three- the Promise (divine provision), the Condition, and the Warning. The Promise (the divinely given provision) - "You received Christ Jesus as Lord" (vs. 6). The Condition- "Continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (vs. 6, 7). The Warning- "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (vs. 8)

Colossians 2:18-19, warns believers against the possibility of falling 'prey' to a deceptive philosophy (vs. 18), the result of which is disqualification for the spiritual prize. It is possible for a believer to succumb to the teachings and practices of a false philosophy, and consequently to lose "...connection with the Head (Christ)". (vs. 19)

I Thessalonians 3:1-8, teach that it is possible for believers to be unsettled by the inevitable trials and persecutions which all believers are destined to experience. (vs. 3, 4) It is possible for a believer to fade during temptation and to lose his faith, resulting in the efforts of the soul-winner becoming 'useless'. (vs. 5) Paul urges Timothy (Paul's young 'son in the Faith') to "fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience." (I Timothy 1:18-19) Paul teaches that it is possible for a believer to turn to false doctrines (I Timothy 1:3). It is possible for a believer to 'fall from grace' and to begin promoting controversial doctrines (regarding law keeping) rather than promoting the work of God, which is faith (I Timothy 1:4). It is dreadful to think about, but it is possible for a believer to wander away from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a

sincere faith, and to turn to "meaningless talk". (I Timothy 1:6) It is possible (as in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander) to reject faith and a good conscience, and thus to make 'shipwreck' of one's faith. (I Timothy 1:19-20)

I Timothy 4:1-16 contains wonderful Promises, multiple Conditions, and serious Warnings. The Promises - Godliness holds "promise for both the present life and the life to come." (vs. 8) The Living God saves those who believe. (vs. 10) The Conditions - "Train yourself to be godly." (vs. 7) "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (vs. 12) "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift." (vs. 12, 14) "Watch your life and doctrine closely. PERSEVERE in them, because IF you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." The Warnings - It is possible to "abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." (vs. 1) It is possible for one's conscience (apparently even the conscience of a one-time believer - according to the context of the Scripture) to become "seared as with a hot iron." (vs. 2)

I Timothy 5:8, teaches that it is possible for a believer to 'deny the faith' and, as such, to become 'worse than an outright unbeliever'. I Timothy 5:6, 11-15, contain some serious warnings for Christians. It is possible for sensual desires to overcome a believer's dedication to Christ. (vs. 11) It is possible for believers to break holy pledges, and to fall into hurtful habits, and thus to incur the judgment of God. (vs. 12-13) It is possible for a believer to turn away from the faith "to follow Satan." (vs. 15) It is possible for a believer to begin living for pleasure and thus to die spiritually. (vs. 6)

I Timothy 6:9-12, believers are urged to flee from the 'love of money', which is the 'root of all kinds of evil'. (vs. 10-11) Believers are urged to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (vs. 11) Believers are urged to "fight the good fight of the faith." (vs. 12a) Believers are urged (commanded) to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." (vs. 12) This portion of Scripture also contains a serious warning (especially relevant to modern-day Christians who live in a materialistically oriented society).

I Timothy 6:9-10 teaches that it is possible for believers to fall in love with money, resulting in "wandering from the faith and piercing themselves with many grief's", and plunging themselves into "ruin and destruction". In order for the materially wealthy believer to "take hold of the life that is truly life" and to establish "a firm foundation for the coming age", he/she is required to be generous and "rich in good deeds". The selfish and the greedy person will be judged by the Lord. (I Timothy 6:17-19)

According to I Timothy 6:20-21, it is possible for believers to succumb to the godless talk and foolish arguments of worldly 'knowledge' and, consequently to 'wander from the faith' ('lose their faith' - J.D. Phillips' translation).

"We (Christians) will live with him and we will reign with him (Christ). IF we died with him and IF we EN-DURE." (2 Timothy 2:11-12) It is possible for a believer to "disown Him" (God), with the result, that God will disown that person (vs. 12). In such a case, the faithful character of God does not stand in question (vs. 13). "Quarrelling about words only ruins those who listen." (2 Timothy 2:14). It is possible for a believer (as in the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus), to engage in 'godless chatter' and consequently to 'wander from the truth' and to cause others to have their faith destroyed. (2 Timothy 2:16-18)

Hebrews 2:1-3, teaches that it is possible for believers to 'drift away' from 'what we have heard' (the message of faith). (vs. 1) It is possible for believers to neglect and to ignore God's 'great salvation', resulting in just punishment. (vs. 2, 3)

Hebrews 3:6-19, contains Promises, Conditions, and Warnings. The Promises- "Christ is faithful over God's house" (which are believers). (vs. 6) "We are his house" (that is, Christ lives in us), and "we have come to share in Christ." (vs. 14) The Conditions "Encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (vs. 13) "If we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast." (vs. 6); "If we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." (vs. 14) The warnings it is possible for believers to harden their hearts, and to stray away from God's ways, with the tragic result of never entering God's rest. (vs. 7-11) It is possible for 'brothers' (believers) to have a "sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." (vs. 12) It is possible for a believer to become "hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (vs. 13, 15) It is possible for one-time believers to disobey God so grievously that they never enter into God's rest. "They were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." (vs. 19)

To enter the rest which God has prepared for His people, believers must "Like every effort, so that no one will fall by following the Israelites' example of disobedience." (Hebrews 4:11)

Hebrews 10:19-31, is full of Comfort (blessings and provisions for believers), but there are also multiple Conditions which believers must fulfill, and there are some serious Warnings for believers to heed! The Divine Provisions - "We have confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus." (vs. 23) The multiple Conditions (and commands to believers) - "Let us keep on drawing near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (vs. 22) "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess." (vs. 23) "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (vs. 24) "Let us not give up meeting together (as some are in

the habit of doing)." (vs. 25) The Warnings -It is possible to deliberately keep on sinning after a person has received the knowledge of the truth, with dire consequences involved - "a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." (vs. 26-27) It is possible for a one-time believer to trample the Son of God under foot and to treat as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and to insult the Spirit of grace with the consequent punishment of dying without mercy. (vs. 28-29)

Hebrews 10:32-39, teaches that a believer needs to PERSEVERE in the faith in spite of severe persecution (public exposure to insult, and imprisonment for the faith, and confiscation of personal property), (vs. 32-34). Maintenance of confidence and PERSEVERANCE in the faith is necessary in order to "receive what God has promised." (vs. 36) A believer must choose to believe and thus to be saved, rather than to shrink back from the faith and finally be destroyed. (vs. 39)

Hebrews 11 is called the 'Faith Chapter' of the Bible (listing the 'heroes of the Faith'). "All these people were still living by faith when they died." (vs. 13) (It is very important to read Ezekiel 3:10-16).

In Hebrews 12, believers are commanded to throw off everything that hinders them and the "sin which so easily entangles them." (vs. 1) Believers must run with PERSEVERANCE the race marked out for them. (vs. 1) Believers must fix their eyes on Jesus, who is the Pioneer and Perfecter of the Faith and who is the believer's Intercessor before the Father. (vs. 2) As a believer you must "consider him (Christ) who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (vs. 3) The believer must 'struggle against sin'. (vs. 4) A believer must willingly receive the Lord's discipline in his life (vs. 5) and he must submit to the Father in order to live. (vs. 9) The believer must endure hardship as discipline. (vs. 7) If a believer expects to share in God's holiness, he must be willing to receive discipline from the Lord. (vs. 10) There is a 'harvest of righteousness and peace' for those believers who have been trained by the painful discipline of the Lord (vs. 11) "Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." (vs. 12, 13) "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (vs. 14) "See to it that no one misses the grace of God." (vs. 15) "See that no one is sexually immoral." (vs. 16) Serious Warnings are here also. It is possible for the lame Christian to become disabled rather than to be healed. (vs. 13) It is possible for a believer to 'miss the grace of God'. (vs. 15) It is possible for a 'root of bitterness' to spring up in a believer's life, causing trouble and defilement to many. (vs. 16) It is possible for a believer to become godless (like Esau) by selling out his spiritual inheritance. (vs. 16, 17) According to Hebrews 12:25-29, God speaks to mankind from heaven, revealing His holy will and nature, and warning men to follow the Lord of Heaven. (vs. 25) "We are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken." (vs. 28) Christians are commanded: "See to it that you do not refuse him (God) who speaks." (vs. 25) It is possible for us believers to "turn away from him who warns

us from heaven", rather than continue to "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe", with the result that we will be punished by God who is "a consuming fire". (vs. 28, 29)

According to Hebrews 13:9, it is possible for believers to be "carried away by all kinds of strange teachings." Christians must be on their 'alert' during times of temptation. Jesus said "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit (of man) indeed is willing, but the flesh (of man) is weak." It is possible for a believer to be tempted, to succumb to 'his own evil desire', and to be 'dragged away and enticed', and to indulge in outright sin (which, when it is full-grown, gives birth to spiritual death). (See James 1:14-15)

It is possible for a believer to fall into the evil pleasures and friendships of the unsaved world. A one-time believer who "chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy" (James 4:4).

The often-overlooked last two verses of the Book of James contain some vital (and sometimes misunderstood) truths. Writes James (the half-brother of Jesus):"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) As in the case of Simon Peter who denied the Lord three times (and thus, fell into a terrible 'backslidden' condition), so it is possible for any believer to 'fall into sin' and to wander away from the Lord (thus destroying his 'fellowship' with the Lord, and eventually severing his 'relationship' with the Lord). However, according to James, it is possible for such a backslidden believer (as in the case of Simon Peter) to repent of his sins and to be restored to relationship with Christ. However, if it is possible to be restored, it is also possible not to be restored! It is possible for a believer to slip away from the Lord and no longer to trust the Lord, and ultimately (if the backslider is not turned back to the Lord) to experience spiritual death!

God's promises to believers are real, and those promises are most wonderful, but promises cannot be fulfilled unless certain conditions are met by believers. This fact is well established, time and time again in the New Testament. Take 1st Peter 1:5-9, 13 as an example of this repeated truth. "You are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time ... THROUGH FAITH." (vs. 5) The faith of believers must be proved genuine (at the time of Christ's return), through suffering all kinds of trials. (vs. 7) Believers are being filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, because they are being saved "THROUGH THEIR LOVE AND FAITH IN THE SAVIOR. (vs. 8, 9) You Christians must "prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." (vs. 13) Promises and Conditions are inseparably connected!

According to 2 Peter 1:5-11, a person (sinner) finds his 'standing in Christ' (justification) by Saving Faith. However, faith is only complete and effective when one increasingly adds to it the other great qualities of goodness, knowledge, self-control, PERSEVERANCE, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. (vs. 6, 7) If a believer does not possess these listed ethical qualities, "he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins." (vs. 9)

According to 2nd Peter 3:16-17, a believer enjoys a 'secure position' in Christ. But, a believer is to be on his guard against the 'error of lawless men'. It is possible for a believer to relax his watchful guard and consequently to "be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from his secure position." (vs. 17)

1st John 1:5-2:11, contains very precious truths regarding God's provisions for believers, but these provisions are not given automatically. Certain conditions must be met. We (Christians) have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses from every sin. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light (vs. 7); God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. IF we confess our sins to God and IF we continue to maintain an attitude of constant need for God's forgiveness (Note: 'Confess' is in the 'present tense' in the Greek language, and therefore 'confession' is an ongoing and continuing attitude which must be maintained for all life). "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." (vs. 6) He who claims to be a 'Christian' must continue to walk as Jesus walked- in humble dependence on the Heavenly Father, and in daily obedience.

According to 1st John 2:15-28, believers are given the promise that they will live forever, IF they "PERSEVERE in doing God's will" (vs. 17, Williams' translation) "See that what you have heard from the beginning REMAINS in you. IF it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father." (vs. 25) "And now, dear children, CONTINUE in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (vs. 16) It is possible for believers to be 'led astray' (vs. 26) by 'antichrists'.

1st John 2:29, teaches that the reality of the 'New Birth' is evidenced by the practice of righteous actions. One can only remain a child of God as he CONTINUES ('present tense' in the Greek language) to love his brothers. (1 John 3:10)

Can a person claim to be a 'Christian' if he is 'living in sin' (i.e., if he is habitually practicing sin -living a 'sinful lifestyle')? The answer is rather 'obvious'. Wrote John:

"So if we stay close to him, obedient to him, we won't be sinning either; but as for those who keep on sinning, they should realize this: They sin because they have never really known Him or become His." (1st John 3:6, Living Bible) The Greek 'perfect tense', properly translated,

refers to persons whose present practice of sinning shows that their 'profession of faith' was false from the beginning. By implication, I believe that this Scripture also refers to persons whose present practice of sinning reveals that they are apostates who have departed from true saving faith in Christ. I believe that this verse teaches that the believer who does not stay close to Christ and who does not remain obedient to Christ is the person who will (by his 'denial' of Christ) 'be sinning'. He who 'practices' sinning is he who cannot, at the same time, be 'born of God'. The two conditions (i.e., the condition of 'standing begotten of God' and the condition of 'habitually sinning') are totally incompatible and contradictory and cannot exist in a person at the same time. (vs. 9) A person (a one-time believer) who reverts to a 'practice of sinning' (and who fails to repent of his sins) destroys his relationship with God (i.e., he is no longer 'begotten of God' or 'saved'). These above-stated truths are rather clearly stated in God's Word! A 'sinning Christian' is a 'contradiction in words'! This is not to say that a Christian will never sin but when he sins, he quickly repents and confesses his sins to Christ, and he is quickly restored to fellowship and relationship with Christ. He does not allow the re-entry of a 'life of sinning' (i.e., a practice of a sinful lifestyle), for he daily 'short accounts' with His loves God. When He sins, he 'claims the blood of Christ' as His immediate (constant) remedy. Thus, he remains 'cleansed from all sin', for he 'keeps himself under the blood of Jesus'. Wrote John to Christians: "If we (believers) are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin." (I John 1:7, Living Bible) He continues: "My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God's wrath against our sins upon himself, and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only ours but the entire world's." (I John 2:1-2, Living Bible)

In 2nd John 1:8, Christians are told to "watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully."

Jude is a small book with big warnings! Those whom God honors and delivers, He can later destroy because of their persistent unbelief (vs. 5), or because of their rebellion against God's authority (vs. 6), or because of their indulgence in gross sin (vs. 7). It is possible (as in the case of the apostates that Jude warns against) for one-time believers to become "godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." (vs. 4) The actions of apostasy are most brazen and violent and deceptive (vs. 4, 8-10), but these actions will invoke God's ultimate destruction and judgment (vs. 10). Notes Robert Shank, "'Twice dead' (vs. 12) can only refer to the fact that men who once

were alive in Christ have again become spiritually dead by severing their union with Him 'who is our life'." (Life in the Son; pg. 174) It is gloriously possible for believers to experience eternal life (vs. 21). Through Christ's mighty power, believers can be kept from falling into sin (vs. 24). But, it is not only God who is able and responsible to 'keep believers from falling into sin'; it is also the responsibility of believers to 'keep themselves from sinning'. It is a cooperative relationship between the Almighty God and the obedient believer. Commands Jude to Christians: "Stay always within the boundaries where God's love can reach and bless you. Wait patiently for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy is going to give you." (Jude 1:21, Living Bible)

God will "give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God...to him who overcomes." (Revelation 2:7) Believers need not be afraid during times of suffering. (Revelation 2:10). Believers will be given the 'crown of life'. If they are faithful "even to the point of death". (Revelation 2:10) Believers will "not be hurt at all by the second death". If they will be over comers. (Revelation 2:11) 'Hidden Manna' and 'a white stone with a name written on it' will be given to the believer who overcomes. (Revelation 2:17) Christ commands Christians to "hold on to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:25) Says Christ to believers: "I will give authority over the nations to him who overcomes." (Revelation 2:26) However, it is tragically possible for believers to tolerate compromise, and it is possible for even God's servants to fall into sexual immorality, causing intense spiritual suffering and eventual spiritual death, "unless they repent". (Revelation 2:20-23)

Believers "will walk with Christ, dressed in white, for they are worthy", IF they do not "soil their clothes" (Revelation 3:4-5).

The believer will be 'dressed in white', and his name will remain in the Book of Life, and his name will be acknowledged before the Father and His angels. IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3:5)

God places before the believer "an open door that no one can shut", but believers must keep God's Word and not deny God's name. (Revelation 3:8)

God will keep believers from the hour of trial. IF they keep God's commandment "to God will keep believers from the hour of trial. IF they keep God's commandment "to endure patiently". (Revelation 3:10) Christians are told to "hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown." (Revelations 3:11) Christ will make the believer "a pillar in the temple of my God", and the believer will never leave it, and the believer will have the name of God and the name of the Holy City written on him. IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3:12)

It is dreadfully possible for believers to become 'lukewarm' spiritually, invoking God's anger, and the possible judgment of being 'spit out of God's mouth'. (Revelation 3:16) Believers are greatly loved by God, but they must be willing to receive God's rebukes and His discipline, which are meant to lead them to earnestness and to repentance. (Revelation 3:19)

It is possible for one-time believers to become self-sufficient, proud, and self-deceived (not realizing that they have become "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked"). (Revelation 3:17) Christ will give the believer the right to sit with Him on His throne, IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3:21)

The believer "will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son ". IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 21:7) "But the cowardly that turns back from following me and those who are unfaithful to me, their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the Second Death." (Revelation 21:8, Living Bible)

God promises a share in the 'Tree of Life', and in the 'Holy City'. "IF the believer does not add or subtract from "the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:18)

Many times, in the forgoing Scriptures, where we have looked at the 'perseverance of the believer' and the 'security of the believer', the 'contingency word' IF has appeared. "IF you will do this", says the Lord, "then I will do that". Fulfilled promises because of kept conditions! No person becomes a Christian initially without meeting certain 'conditions', and no one remains a Christian without meeting certain 'conditions' (and all the 'conditions' are God-given). Spiritual life (both in 'obtaining' and in 'maintaining') is based on 'contingencies'. Salvation, while it originates with God alone, is nevertheless a cooperative relationship between the initiating Savior and the responding believer.

"SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON 'PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS'"

There are scores of New Testament Scriptures which encourage Christians to 'persevere in the Faith' (i.e., not to succumb to temptations and other pressures in life, but to remain true to the Lord until 'the end of life').

Even though the theme of Christology (the doctrine of the 'person and nature of Christ') is a great theme of the Book of Hebrews, the primary theme of Hebrews is 'Perseverance of the Saints' (i.e., 'let us hold fast'). Notes Robert Shank (regarding the proper understanding of the theme of the Book of Hebrews):"The phrase 'let us go on' appears but once (Hebrews 6:1). 'Let us go on', he writes, 'unto perfection'. The writer may have reference to his intention to proceed to the advanced development of the doctrine of Christ to which he

proposes to lead them in the course of his letter. Or it may be a call to his readers to advance from spiritual infancy in which he found them (Hebrews 5:11-13) toward the maturity (vs. 14) which is possible for all who will grasp it. Actually, both things are within the writer's purpose. Certainly, it is his intention to proceed toward the fuller development of his Christology. But the presentation of his Christology is not an end in itself. The principal burden of the letter is not 'let us go on', but 'let us hold fast'. In contrast with the exhortation 'let us go on unto perfection', which occurs but once, the exhortation 'let us hold fast our confession' occurs twice:(Hebrews 4:14;10:23) and the epistle abounds with cognate exhortations: 'if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end' (3:6); 'if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end' (3:14); 'lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God' (3:12); 'lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin' (3:13); 'lest at any time we should slip away' (2:1); 'if we neglect so great salvation' (2:3); 'harden not your hearts' (3:8,15); 'lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (4:11); 'show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end' (6:11); 'let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith' (10:22); 'cast not away therefore your confidence' (10:35); 'for ye have need of patience, that... ye might receive the promise' (10:36); 'the just shall live by faith: but if he drawback, my soul shall have no pleasure in him' (10:38); lest ye be wearied and faint' (12:3); 'despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of him' (12:5); 'be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live' (12:9); 'lest that which is lame he turned out of the way' (12:13); 'lest any man fail of the grace of God' (12:15); 'lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who sold his birthright' (12:16); 'If we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven' (12:25); 'be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines' (13:9); 'let us keep going forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach' (13:13).

Any emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews on going on toward spiritual maturity is secondary. The burden of the writer's 'word of exhortation', is that his readers 'hold fast the confession of their hope' in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and 'the Source of eternal salvation unto all who obey Him.'" (Life in the Son; Robert Shank; pgs. 231-234)

The highly respected writer (from the early 20th century), James Denney, in his well-known book 'The Death of Christ', believed the main thrust of the Book of Hebrews was 'conservation of the Faith'. He writes, "The author (of Hebrews) was not an evangelist so much as a pastor, and it is not the initiation of Christianity, but its conservation, with which he deals throughout" The internationally-known New Testament scholar, William Barclay, agrees. He writes: "When we sum it all up, we can say that Hebrews is a letter written by a great teacher, written by a man whom we would call a professor, to a little group or college of Christians in Rome. He was their teacher; at the moment he was separated from them; he was afraid that they were drifting away from the faith; and so he wrote this letter to them."

When studying the New Testament, it is helpful to look at larger sections of Scripture with three thoughts in mind: (1) Promises to be claimed; (2) Conditions to be met; (3) Warnings to be heeded. With these three ideas in mind, let us briefly 'scan' some of the relevant New Testament passages, all of which deal with the important subject of the 'perseverance of believers' and the 'security of believers'. Space will not permit the quotation of many Scriptures, but I will attempt a brief summary of the 'key' points in several of the New Testament passages.

In Matthew 18:21-25, God promises total forgiveness of one's total 'debt' to God, provided that one is willing to forgive those who have sinned against him. A lack of mercy and forgiveness of others incites the wrath of the Lord, and actually forfeits one's own forgiveness.

In Matthew 24:4, 5, 11-13, 23-26, the Lord promises to save those who 'endure to the end' (vs. 13). Believers are warned of the possibility of being led astray by false 'Christ's'. Multiplied wickedness in the earth can cause the 'cooling' of a believer's love for God (vs. 12). In Matthew 25:1-3, in Christ's parable of the Marriage Feast, believers are warned against neglecting to purchase 'oil', thus resulting in their lamps going out when Christ comes (vs. 8), and being shut out of the marriage feast while trying too late to purchase on (vs. 10-12).

In Luke 8:11-15, believers are taught that spiritual fruitfulness and productivity (vs. 15) is the result of hearing the Word, holding it fast in an honest and good heart, and patiently enduring. Christians must guard against the devil stealing the Word from their hearts. They must guard against shallowness and falling away during temptation (vs. 13), and they must also guard against their lives being choked by the 'cares and riches and pleasures of life' (vs. 14).

In Luke 11:24-28, persons whose lives have been initially cleansed from evil must guard against evil spirits which are seeking re-entrance into the lives of those who had previously experienced deliverance. This Scripture apparently is teaching that, following one's cleansing from sin, there must be positive 'infilling' of one's life with the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit (to prevent re-entry of any 'evil spirits').

In Luke 12:42-46, the Master (Christ) sets believers over his 'household' and over all his possessions. Faithfulness and wise management of God-entrusted responsibilities is expected from all servants. The servants (believers) are exhorted not to become impatient at the delay of the Master's coming. Impatience can lead to mistreatment of those persons who have been entrusted to their stewardship, leading to a 'life of debauchery' (vs. 45). Such faithless stewards will be punished with a severe 'beating' and assigned to the 'place of the unfaithful' (vs. 46, 47).

John 6:66-71, teaches that believers must continue to follow Christ, rather than 'drawing back' and no longer going with Him (vs. 66). There is a possibility (as in the case of Judas Iscariot) of a one-time believer 'betraying' Jesus (vs. 70, 71).

In John 8:31-32, Jesus states that persons can be His disciples (and 'know the truth which shall set them free') if they hold to his teachings and continue in His Word. John 8:51, states that a person shall never see (spiritual) death if he keeps God's Word. Act 14:21-22, reveals that a large number of persons became disciples to the Lord. It is recorded that Paul strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to 'remain true to the faith'. Paul taught that Christians 'must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God'.

In Paul's popular teaching in Romans 6:11-23, he teaches that it is possible for one's 'body parts' to be yielded as 'instruments of sin and wickedness' (vs. 12, 13). Paul warns against believers entertaining a shallow attitude toward God's grace, and a casual attitude towards sinning, and he exhorts believers never to claim that grace quickly provides for one's practice of sinning (vs. 15). Paul says that offering one's self to obey sin results in final spiritual death (vs. 16). In Romans 8:13, Paul says that one will die if he lives according to his 'sinful nature'.

Romans 11:20-22, teaches that a person enjoys a 'standing in Christ' if he has 'faith', 'humility', 'godly fear' and 'reverence' - and provided that he continues 'in God's kindness'. God will not spare those who persist in unbelief. Unbelief causes the branch to be broken off the Vine. Those who do not continue in God's kindness will be cut out (vs. 22).

Romans 14:15-23, teaches that a believer must act in love by carefully refraining from anything that is a source of stumbling to his fellow Christian. A Christian must guide his life and actions by 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (vs. 18). It is possible for a believer to be offended by and even destroyed by a fellow believer. It is possible for a believer to destroy the work of God and to cause a fellow Christian to stumble by his insensitive and offending actions (vs. 20, 21). It is possible for a believer to sin as a result of doing things with doubt rather than with faith (vs. 23). 1st Corinthians 9:23-27, teaches that a person (believer) will enjoy "a crown that will last forever" (vs. 25) if he is willing to undergo God's strict training and if he runs the spiritual race with 'aim and purpose' (i.e., 'beat my body and make it my slave'). Paul (wholesomely) feared that "after I have preached to others, I myself will be disqualified for the prize" (vs. 27).

Serious warnings are issued to believers in 1st Corinthians 10:1-22. It is possible, after a believer has experienced many spiritual blessings, for God no longer to be pleased with him (vs. 5). It is possible for one who has experienced 'spiritual food and drink' to set his heart on evil things (as the Israelites in the wilderness did- (verse 6). It is possible for a believer to fall into idolatry and sexual immorality, and consequently

to be destroyed by God (vs. 7, 8). It is possible for a believer to 'test' (over-tempt) the Lord and to be destroyed by the Lord (vs. 9). It is possible for a believer to fall into a life of grumbling against the Lord and to be 'killed by the destroying angel' (vs. 10). Wrote Paul, "These things happened to them (the Israelites in the wilderness) as examples and were written down as warnings for us. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (vs. 11, 12) "I do not want you (believers) to be participants with demons." (vs. 20) Don't arouse the Lord's jealousy (vs. 22).

1st Corinthians 11:27-32, notes that it is possible for a believer to become insensitive to the spiritual significance of 'The Lord's Supper', and consequently to sin 'against the body and blood of the Lord' and bring 'judgment on himself' (vs. 27, 29). Some even died in the Early Church because they insensitively partook of the Lord's Supper (vs. 30).

1st Corinthians 15:1-2, teach that if one does not hold firmly to the word, which he received for initial salvation, he has 'believed in vain' (vs. 2).

2nd Corinthians 11:2-4, teaches that a gullible believer can deceptively be led away from his pure and single-hearted devotion to Christ, into false teachings (as illustrated by Eve's deception by Satan- 2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

2nd Corinthians 12:21-13:5, teaches that it is possible for a one-time believer to sin grievously (impurity, sexual sin, debauchery) without being activated to repentance.

Paul warns believers against reverting to a life of 'legalism', after having been initially set free from sin through God's mighty grace. With great sadness, Paul writes to the Galatians Christians who had reverted to 'legalism'; "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; You have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

Someone said, "If a believer takes one step towards God, God takes a thousand steps toward the believer!" God is the 'God who acts' - the God who initiates, the God who is 'eager to respond' to any person who demonstrates any degree of desire to 'know God'. Someone wisely said, "It is not hard to live the Christian life; it is impossible - unless, of course, God's Spirit indwells and empowers the believer." Philippians 2:12-16 contains both Promises and Conditions, as these relate to one's salvation. As a believer, you can be encouraged, for "God works in you to will and do what pleases Him." (vs. 13) Because of the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, he can become 'blameless and pure', a child of God 'without fault in a crooked and depraved generation', and he can be a 'shining star in the universe' (vs. 15). But, with the prom-

ises and divine provisions, there are some conditions to be met: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (vs. 12). Christians are to 'do everything without complaining or arguing' (vs. 14).

Colossians 1:21-23, speaks of both a wonderful Promise to be claimed, and a serious Condition to be met. "God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

"Colossians 2:4-8, contains all three- the Promise (divine provision), the Condition, and the Warning. The Promise (the divinely given provision) - "You received Christ Jesus as Lord" (vs. 6). The Condition- "Continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (vs. 6, 7). The Warning- "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (vs. 8)

Colossians 2:18-19, warns believers against the possibility of falling 'prey' to a deceptive philosophy (vs. 18), the result of which is disqualification for the spiritual prize. It is possible for a believer to succumb to the teachings and practices of a false philosophy, and consequently to lose "connection with the Head (Christ)". (vs. 19)

1st Thessalonians 3:1-8, teach that it is possible for believers to be unsettled by the inevitable trials and persecutions which all believers are destined to experience. (vs. 3, 4) It is possible for a believer to fade during temptation and to lose his faith, resulting in the efforts of the soul-winner becoming 'useless'. (vs. 5)

Paul urges Timothy (Paul's young 'son in the Faith') to "fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience." (1st Timothy 1:18-19) Paul teaches that it is possible for a believer to turn to false doctrines (1st Timothy 1:3). It is possible for a believer to 'fall from grace' and to begin promoting controversial doctrines (regarding law keeping) rather than promoting the work of God, which is faith (1st Timothy 1:4). It is dreadful to think about, but it is possible for a believer to wander away from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, and to turn to "meaningless talk". (1st Timothy 1:6) It is possible (as in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander) to reject faith and a good conscience, and thus to make 'shipwreck' of one's faith. (1st Timothy 1:19-20)

1st Timothy 4:1-16 contains wonderful Promises, multiple Conditions, and serious Warnings. The Promises - Godliness holds "promise for both the present life and the life to come." (vs. 8) The Living God saves those who believe. (vs. 10) The Conditions - "Train yourself to be godly." (vs. 7) "Set an example for the be-

lievers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (vs. 12) "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift." (vs. 12, 14) "Watch your life and doctrine closely. PERSEVERE in them, because IF you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." The Warnings - It is possible to "abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." (vs. 1) It is possible for one's conscience (apparently even the conscience of a one-time believer - according to the context of the Scripture) to become "seared as with a hot iron." (vs. 2)

1st Timothy 5:8, teaches that it is possible for a believer to 'deny the faith' and, as such, to become 'worse than an outright unbeliever'. 1 Timothy 5:6, 11-15, contain some serious warnings for Christians. It is possible for sensual desires to overcome a believer's dedication to Christ. (vs. 11) It is possible for believers to break holy pledges, and to fall into hurtful habits, and thus to incur the judgment of God. (vs. 12-13) It is possible for a believer to turn away from the faith "to follow Satan." (vs. 15) It is possible for a believer to begin living for pleasure and thus to die spiritually. (vs. 6)

1st Timothy 6:9-12, believers are urged to flee from the 'love of money', which is the 'root of all kinds of evil'. (vs. 10-11) Believers are urged to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (vs. 11) Believers are urged to "fight the good fight of the faith." (vs. 12a) Believers are urged (commanded) to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." (vs. 12) This portion of Scripture also contains a serious warning (especially relevant to modern-day Christians who live in a materialistically oriented society). 1 Timothy 6:9-10 teaches that it is possible for believers to fall in love with money, resulting in "wandering from the faith and piercing themselves with many grief's", and plunging themselves into "ruin and destruction". In order for the materially wealthy believer to "take hold of the life that is truly life" and to establish "a firm foundation for the coming age", he/she is required to be generous and "rich in good deeds". The selfish and the greedy person will be judged by the Lord. (1st Timothy 6:17-19)

According to 1st Timothy 6:20-21, it is possible for believers to succumb to the godless talk and foolish arguments of worldly 'knowledge' and, consequently to 'wander from the faith' ('lose their faith' (J.D. Phillips' translation)).

"We (Christians) will live with him and we will reign with him (Christ). IF we died with him and IF we EN-DURE." (2nd Timothy 2:11-12) It is possible for a believer to "disown Him" (God), with the result, that God will disown that person (vs. 12). In such a case, the faithful character of God does not stand in question (vs. 13). "Quarrelling about words only ruins those who listen." (2nd Timothy 2:14). It is possible for a believer (as in the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus), to engage in 'godless chatter' and consequently to 'wander from the truth' and to cause others to have their faith destroyed. (2nd Timothy 2:16-18)

Hebrews 2:1-3, teaches that it is possible for believers to 'drift away' from 'what we have heard' (the message of faith). (vs. 1) It is possible for believers to neglect and to ignore God's 'great salvation', resulting in just punishment. (vs. 2, 3)

Hebrews 3:6-19, contains Promises, Conditions, and Warnings. The Promises- "Christ is faithful over God's house" (which are believers). (vs. 6) "We are his house" (that is, Christ lives in us), and "we have come to share in Christ." (vs. 14) The Conditions "Encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (vs. 13) "If we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast." (vs. 6); "If we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." (vs. 14) The warnings it is possible for believers to harden their hearts, and to stray away from God's ways, with the tragic result of never entering God's rest. (vs. 7-11) It is possible for 'brothers' (believers) to have a "sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." (vs. 12) It is possible for a believer to become "hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (vs. 13, 15) It is possible for one-time believers to disobey God so grievously that they never enter into God's rest. "They were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." (vs. 19)

To enter the rest which God has prepared for His people, believers must "Like every effort, so that no one will fall by following the Israelites' example of disobedience." (Hebrews 4:11)

Hebrews 10:19-31, is full of Comfort (blessings and provisions for believers), but there are also multiple Conditions which believers must fulfill, and there are some serious Warnings for believers to heed! The Divine Provisions - "We have confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus." (vs. 23) The multiple Conditions (and commands to believers) - "Let us keep on drawing near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (vs. 22) "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess." (vs. 23) "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (vs. 24) "Let us not give up meeting together (as some are in the habit of doing)." (vs. 25) The Warnings -It is possible to deliberately keep on sinning after a person has received the knowledge of the truth, with dire consequences involved - "a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." (vs. 26-27) It is possible for a one-time believer to trample the Son of God under foot and to treat as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and to insult the Spirit of grace with the consequent punishment of dying without mercy. (vs. 28-29)

Hebrews 10:32-39, teaches that a believer needs to PERSEVERE in the faith in spite of severe persecution (public exposure to insult, and imprisonment for the faith, and confiscation of personal property), (vs. 32-34). Maintenance of confidence and PERSEVERANCE in the faith is necessary in order to "receive what God has promised." (vs. 36) A believer must choose to believe and thus to be saved, rather than to shrink back from the faith and finally be destroyed. (vs. 39)

Hebrews 11 is called the 'Faith Chapter' of the Bible (listing the 'heroes of the Faith'). "All these people were still living by faith when they died." (vs. 13) (It is very important to read Ezekiel 13:10-16).

In Hebrews 12, believers are commanded to throw off everything that hinders them and the "sin which so easily entangles them." (vs. 1) Believers must run with PERSEVERANCE the race marked out for them. (vs. 1) Believers must fix their eyes on Jesus, who is the Pioneer and Perfecter of the Faith and who is the believer's Intercessor before the Father. (vs. 2) As a believer you must "consider him (Christ) who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (vs. 3) The believer must 'struggle against sin'. (vs. 4) A believer must willingly receive the Lord's discipline in his life (vs. 5) and he must submit to the Father in order to live. (vs. 9) The believer must endure hardship as discipline. (vs. 7) If a believer expects to share in God's holiness, he must be willing to receive discipline from the Lord. (vs. 10) There is a 'harvest of righteousness and peace' for those believers who have been trained by the painful discipline of the Lord (vs. 11) "Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." (vs. 12, 13) "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (vs. 14) "See to it that no one misses the grace of God." (vs. 15) "See that no one is sexually immoral." (vs. 16) Serious Warnings are here also. It is possible for the lame Christian to become disabled rather than to be healed. (vs. 13) It is possible for a believer to 'miss the grace of God'. (vs. 15) It is possible for a 'root of bitterness' to spring up in a believer's life, causing trouble and defilement to many. (vs. 16) It is possible for a believer to become godless (like Esau) by selling out his spiritual inheritance. (vs. 16, 17)

According to Hebrews 12:25-29, God speaks to mankind from heaven, revealing His holy will and nature, and warning men to follow the Lord of Heaven. (vs. 25) "We are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken." (vs. 28) Christians are commanded: "See to it that you do not refuse him (God) who speaks." (vs. 25) It is possible for us believers to "turn away from him who warns us from heaven", rather than continue to "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe", with the result that we will be punished by God who is "a consuming fire". (vs. 28, 29)

According to Hebrews 13:9, it is possible for believers to be "carried away by all kinds of strange teachings." Christians must be on their 'alert' during times of temptation. Jesus said "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit (of man) indeed is willing, but the flesh (of man) is weak." It is possible for a believer to be tempted, to succumb to 'his own evil desire', and to be 'dragged away and enticed', and to indulge in outright sin (which, when it is full-grown, gives birth to spiritual death). (See James 1:14-15)

It is possible for a believer to fall into the evil pleasures and friendships of the unsaved world. A one-time believer who "chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy" (James 4:4).

The often-overlooked last two verses of the Book of James contain some vital (and sometimes misunderstood) truths. Writes James (the half-brother of Jesus): "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) As in the case of Simon Peter who denied the Lord three times (and thus, fell into a terrible 'backslidden' condition), so it is possible for any believer to 'fall into sin' and to wander away from the Lord (thus destroying his 'fellowship' with the Lord, and eventually severing his 'relationship' with the Lord). However, according to James, it is possible for such a backslidden believer (as in the case of Simon Peter) to repent of his sins and to be restored to relationship with Christ. However, if it is possible to be restored, it is also possible not to be restored! It is possible for a believer to slip away from the Lord and no longer to trust the Lord, and ultimately (if the backslider is not turned back to the Lord) to experience spiritual death!

God's promises to believers are real, and those promises are most wonderful, but promises cannot be fulfilled unless certain conditions are met by believers. This fact is well established, time and time again in the New Testament. Take 1st Peter 1:5-9, 13 as an example of this repeated truth. "You are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time ... THROUGH FAITH." (vs. 5) The faith of believers must be proved genuine (at the time of Christ's return), through suffering all kinds of trials. (vs. 7) Believers are being filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, because they are being saved, THROUGH THEIR LOVE AND FAITH IN THE SAVIOR. (vs. 8, 9) You Christians must "prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." (vs. 13) Promises and Conditions are inseparably connected!

According to 2nd Peter 1:5-11, a person (sinner) finds his 'standing in Christ' (justification) by Saving Faith. However, faith is only complete and effective when one increasingly adds to it the other great qualities of goodness, knowledge, self-control, PERSEVERANCE, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. (vs. 6, 7) If a believer does not possess these listed ethical qualities, "he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins." (vs. 9)

According to 2nd Peter 3:16-17, a believer enjoys a 'secure position' in Christ. But, a believer is to be on his guard against the 'error of lawless men'. It is possible for a believer to relax his watchful guard and consequently to "be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from his secure position." (vs. 17)

1st John 1:5-2:11, contains very precious truths regarding God's provisions for believers, but these provisions are not given automatically. Certain conditions must be met. We (Christians) have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses from every sin. IF we walk in the light, as he is in the light (vs. 7);

God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. IF we confess our sins to God and IF we continue to maintain an attitude of constant need for God's forgiveness (Note: 'Confess' is in the 'present tense' in the Greek language, and therefore 'confession' is an ongoing and continuing attitude which must be maintained for all life). "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." (vs. 6) He who claims to be a 'Christian' must continue to walk as Jesus walked- in humble dependence on the Heavenly Father, and in daily obedience.

According to 1st John 2:15-28, believers are given the promise that they will live forever. IF they "PERSEVERE in doing God's will" (vs. 17, Williams' translation) "See that what you have heard from the beginning REMAINS in you. IF it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father." (vs. 25) "And now, dear children, CONTINUE in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (vs. 16) It is possible for believers to be 'led astray' (vs. 26) by 'antichrists'.

1st John 2:29, teaches that the reality of the 'New Birth' is evidenced by the practice of righteous actions. One can only remain a child of God as he CONTINUES ('present tense' in the Greek language) to love his brothers. (1st John 3:10)

Can a person claim to be a 'Christian' if he is 'living in sin' (i.e., if he is habitually practicing sin -living a 'sinful lifestyle')? The answer is rather 'obvious'. Wrote John:

"So if we stay close to him, obedient to him, we won't be sinning either; but as for those who keep on sinning, they should realize this: They sin because they have never really known Him or become His." (1 John 3:6, Living Bible) The Greek 'perfect tense', properly translated, refers to persons whose present practice of sinning shows that their 'profession of faith' was false from the beginning. By implication, I believe that this Scripture also refers to persons whose present practice of sinning reveals that they are apostates who have departed from true saving faith in Christ. I believe that this verse teaches that the believer who does not stay close to Christ and who does not remain obedient to Christ is the person who will (by his 'denial' of Christ) 'be sinning'. He who 'practices' sinning is he who cannot, at the same time, be 'born of God'. The two conditions (i.e., the condition of 'standing begotten of God' and the condition of 'habitually

sinning') are totally incompatible and contradictory and cannot exist in a person at the same time. (vs. 9) A person (a one-time believer) who reverts to a 'practice of sinning' (and who fails to repent of his sins) destroys his relationship with God (i.e., he is no longer 'begotten of God' or 'saved'). These above-stated truths are rather clearly stated in God's Word! A 'sinning Christian' is a 'contradiction in words'! This is not to say that a Christian will never sin but when he sins, he quickly repents and confesses his sins to Christ, and he is quickly restored to fellowship and relationship with Christ. He does not allow the re-entry of a 'life of sinning' (i.e., a practice of a sinful lifestyle), for he keeps daily 'short accounts' with His loving God. When He sins, he 'claims the blood of Christ' as His immediate (constant) remedy. Thus, he remains 'cleansed from all sin', for he 'keeps himself under the blood of Jesus'. Wrote John to Christians: "If we (believers) are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin." (1st John 1:7, Living Bible) He continues: "My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God's wrath against our sins upon himself, and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only ours but the entire world's." (1st John 2:1- 2, Living Bible)

In 2nd John 1:8, Christians are told to "watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully."

Jude is a small book with big warnings! Those whom God honors and delivers, He can later destroy because of their persistent unbelief (vs. 5), or because of their rebellion against God's authority (vs. 6), or because of their indulgence in gross sin (vs. 7). It is possible (as in the case of the apostates that Jude warns against) for one-time believers to become "godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for

immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." (vs. 4) The actions of apostasy are most brazen and violent and deceptive (vs. 4, 8-10), but these actions will invoke God's ultimate destruction and judgment (vs. 10). Notes Robert Shank, "'Twice dead' (vs. 12) can only refer to the fact that men who once were alive in Christ have again become spiritually dead by severing their union with Him 'who is our life'." (Life In The Son; pg. 174) It is gloriously possible for believers to experience eternal life (vs. 21). Through Christ's mighty power, believers can be kept from falling into sin (vs. 24). But, it is not only God who is able and responsible to 'keep believers from falling into sin'; it is also the responsibility of believers to 'keep themselves from sinning'. It is a cooperative relationship between the Almighty God and the obedient believer. Commands Jude to Christians: "Stay always within the boundaries where God's love can reach and bless you. Wait patiently for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy is going to give you." (Jude 1:21, Living Bible)

God will "give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God...to him who overcomes." (Revelation 2:7) Believers need not be afraid during times of suffering (Revelation 2:10). Believers will be given the 'crown of life'. IF they are faithful "even to the point of death". (Revelation 2:10) Believers will "not be hurt at all by the second death". IF they will be over comers. (Revelation 2:11) 'Hidden Manna' and 'a white stone with a name written on it' will be given to the believer who overcomes. (Revelation 2:17) Christ commands Christians to "hold on to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:25) Says Christ to believers: "I will give authority over the nations to him who overcomes." (Revelation 2:26) However, it is tragically possible for believers to tolerate compromise, and it is possible for even God's servants to fall into sexual immorality, causing intense spiritual suffering and eventual spiritual death, "unless they repent". (Revelation 2:20-23)

Believers "will walk with Christ, dressed in white, for they are worthy". IF they do not "soil their clothes" (Revelation 3:4-5). The believer will be 'dressed in white', and his name will remain in the Book of Life, and his name will be acknowledged before the Father and His angels. IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3:5) God places before the believer "an open door that no one can shut", but believers must keep God's Word and not deny God's name. (Revelation 3:8)

God will keep believers from the hour of trial. IF they keep God's commandment "to God will keep believers from the hour of trial. IF they keep God's commandment "to endure patiently". (Revelation 3:10) Christians are told to "hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown." (Revelations 3:11) Christ will make the believer "a pillar in the temple of my God", and the believer will never leave it, and the believer will have the name of God and the name of the Holy City written on him. IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3:12)

It is dreadfully possible for believers to become 'lukewarm' spiritually, invoking God's anger, and the possible judgment of being 'spit out of God's mouth'. (Revelation 3:16)

Believers are greatly loved by God, but they must be willing to receive God's rebukes and His discipline, which are meant to lead them to earnestness and to repentance. (Revelation 3:19)

It is possible for one-time believers to become self-sufficient, proud, and self-deceived (not realizing that they have become "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked"). (Revelation 3:17)

Christ will give the believer the right to sit with Him on His throne. IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3:21)

The believer "will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son ". IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 21:7) "But the cowardly who turns back from following me and those who are unfaithful to me...their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the Second Death." (Revelation 21:8, Living Bible)

God promises a share in the 'Tree of Life', and in the 'Holy City'. IF the believer does not add or subtract from "the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:18)

Many times, in the foregoing Scriptures, where we have looked at the 'perseverance of the believer' and the 'security of the believer', the 'contingency word' IF has appeared. "IF you will do this", says the Lord, "then I will do that". Fulfilled promises because of kept conditions! No person becomes a Christian initially without meeting certain 'conditions', and no one remains a Christian without meeting certain 'conditions' (and all the 'conditions' are God-given). Spiritual life (both in 'obtaining' and in 'maintaining') is based on 'contingencies'. Salvation, while it originates with God alone, is nevertheless a cooperative relationship between the initiating Savior and the responding believer.

"SECURITY FOR BELIEVERS!"

I was eighteen. I had a great desire to study about my faith. So I enrolled in a correspondence course distributed through A Bible institute in Los Angeles. I scored perfectly on each of the rather easy tests.

One lesson was labeled "The Position of the Believer." It taught an irreversible (eternal) security for anyone who accepted Christ. I gave the expected answers on the test. But I also wrote a letter expressing my objections to the teaching. I received a short letter assuring me that if I read the enclosed brochure I could not fail to be convinced.

The brochure said there were two views about the security of one's salvation.

One view was illustrated by the way a cat carries its young. The other view was illustrated by the way the monkey carries its young.

My Calvinistic friends who advocated irreversible and eternal security said their view was illustrated by the cat. A cat carries its kittens by mouth. If the kitten falls, it is the mother cat's fault.

The other view (supposedly mine) was illustrated by the monkey. If the little fellow fell off the back of its mother, it had no one to blame but itself. It should have hung on and been more careful.

That presentation demanded my response. So I wrote that the cat illustration probably was adequate for the view they taught. But the monkey illustration would never do for that which others and I believed.

Illustrations are helpful aids to understanding. But they must be carefully selected and carefully used. The Bible uses many illustrations. Often a single word or term is in fact an illustration, metaphor, or analogy. "Born again" is one of those illustrating words.

With this caution regarding illustrations or analogies in mind, I suggested to my teachers that their cat illustration taken seriously was a violation of plain biblical teaching. There could be no view of salvation, which relieved the individual believer of resistibility for his relationship to God. Nor is it biblical or reasonable to blame God for our sins, apostasy, and neglect of Him. Indeed, one cannot save themselves, but neither can one be saved apart from himself. We were created by God to be responsible and respond-able."

Grace is the picture of Gods givingness, of His reach out to savingly touch us. Faith is my response to His reach. My faith response is an acknowledgment of my sin, my inability to save myself, my need of a Savior. "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith." (Colossians 2:6) What was required of me to "receive" Jesus is always required to continue and live (walk) in Him.

The cat illustration taken seriously makes God responsible for any break in the relationship with God. It relieves the individual of responsibility for continuing to respond to the grace of God. In many forms, this error is spread today by well-intentioned but misled teachers. The Bible never relieves the individual believer of his responsibility for constant response to the grace (givingness) of God.

But what about the monkey illustration? It was a complete misunderstanding of what the Bible taught and of what I believed. Certainly, I know of no evangelical who believes that my security is dependent alone on what I can do. But indeed my security is dependent on my response to what God can do for me. The monkey illustration is a distortion. God does not force me to be a believer or a receiver of Christ. But once I receive Christ and thereby begin a relationship with Him, I am not a little monkey hanging on for dear life. The illustration fails to indicate the believer's relationship to Christ.

I suggested an alternative illustration for what I and multiplied thousands believe. I said that while understanding the limitations of illustrations I would prefer that of the willing handclasp.

God offers His hand. He takes the initiative (grace). I respond by willingly placing my hand in His (faith). A new relationship is begun. He holds me as long as I want my hand to be in His. My security is illustrated by this common interlocking of hands by friends. The Bible vividly portrays the reconciliation which makes God and me friends.

But to suggest that God, having taken my hand, now says to me, "Ah, now I've got you; just try to get away; nothing you can ever do again can get you loose from me," is clear violation of the total biblical thrust and of the nature of relationships. My security in the sustaining of our relationship, which has most of the characteristics of a human one except there is one party to the covenant who is unailing and unchanging. God is constant and unchanging in His attitude and acts of "steadfast love." The constancy of our Lord does indeed beget a growing constancy in us as we "walk" or "live" in Christ.

I believe in the security of the believer. But it is conditional rather than unconditional. I am secure while I keep on believing, trusting, and responding. To be secure in any other fashion would violate all that is meant by personal relationship and covenant.

I believe in the "perseverance of the saints" if they persevere in their relationship with Jesus as both Savior and Lord. I believe that all the resources for persevering that were available to Jesus - the Holy Spirit, communion with the Father - are available to us. Indeed, we have the Word of God, the grace of God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the church to help us persevere. We should most certainly be secure. But at no point in our personal history does God intend to depersonalize us by destroying our will, our power to choose, our capability of responding positively or negatively to our relationship with God.

The Bible beautifully uses marriage as an analogy of relationship to Christ. Christ, the Bridegroom, wants to give himself fully to the bride - the church. The meaning is both corporate (church) and individual. Commitment is two-way. The resulting covenant is two-way. The Bible also speaks of the violation of this rela-

tionship. Israel's going a whoring is an eloquent though horrible illustration of the facts of life. No one is unconditionally secure until he is ushered into the presence of Jesus to be with Him forever.

The teachers of unconditional security hold out false security in the name of the Bible. They appeal to illustrating Bible words. So they argue if you are once "born", you can't be "unborn." But "born" is used to beautifully illustrate the newness of life which the Christian experiences in a saving relationship with Jesus, not to erect a doctrine of false security. Once in a family as a son or daughter, always a member of the family is a similar distortion of analogy. In our natural life, we had nothing to say about being born or becoming a member of a family. In our spiritual life we do, in fact, have the final say. We must be alert to the misuse of analogy, metaphor, and biblical illustration.

Proponents of unconditional security often appeal to John 10:27-29. The clincher is "shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." True. No force outside the person can break the relationship. The same applies to their appeal to Romans 8:38-39. Indeed nothing can separate us from the love of God - except ourselves. (Read the previous verses and discover that the words are addressed to "more than conquerors," not violators of a relationship with Christ.)

Appeal is also made to the theory of imputation of righteousness. That means that we are not responsible for righteousness but that Christ's righteousness is by religious magic made ours despite our own flaws, sins, or apostasy. This makes a farce of the Christian faith by removing it from reality. Advocates say, "When God looks at you He does not see you, for Christ stands between you and God. So your dirty rags are never seen, only the white raiment of Jesus." The trouble is that God sees us as we are at all times. We are not saved merely appositionally. We are either really saved, transformed, and made new, or Christianity is hypocrisy. The righteousness of Christ is continually imparted to me as I respond to Him and permit the Holy Spirit to work within me. I can have a clean heart!

There are Bible passages, which should shock those still clinging to the error of unconditional eternal security. Look at a few.

Examine the strong attack of Peter against false teachers who once clearly knew Jesus as Savior and Lord. II Peter 2:20-22 is a direct and conclusive contradiction of the teaching of unconditional security. Christians "escaped" but became "entangled" again in the "defilements of the world," and their "last state has become worse for them than the first." Compare this with II Peter 1:9-11, "...if you do this you will never fall." Clearly, "to fall" is so possible that warnings are necessary. One need not fall "if"!

The book to the Hebrews was written as a check against threatening apostasy. Genuine Christians are addressed (6:10 and 10:32-34), nevertheless warning is appropriate. Note especially 10:23 which urges hold-

ing "fast the confession of our hope without wavering" and follows up with a severe picture of punishment if they do not (10:26-29).

Apostasy - utter and final - is possibly for "those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit" (6:4-6). No wonder the writer concludes "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31). Jesus twice said, "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22; 24:13).

We observe Paul is anxiety for his converts who had received the Spirit (Galatians 2:2-5) and were running well yet later were not obeying the truth (5:7). He was alarmed. His labor could be in vain (4:11). See also I Thessalonians 3:5). Paul did not doubt the reality of his own conversion, but he still disciplined himself lest he should fail or fall (I Corinthians 9:27).

And finally, the words to the church at Ephesus found in Revelation 2:4, 5 should cause us to reject reliance in false security: "I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place, unless you repent." The Bible teaches conditional security. But what a wonderful security it is. God is always for me - every moment. Christ died for me. Christ rose for me. Christ sits at the Father's right hand praying for me. The Holy Spirit is for me. The Bible is given to me as my guide. The church was instituted of God for me. What security!

But Bible and reason tell me if I ignore all that is for me, I have no right to expect God to treat me as though He had given me a lifelong irrevocable life insurance policy. If we walk in the Spirit by faith and obedience - if we maintain our relationship with Christ - God and heaven is ours forever! Biblical quotations from Revised Standard Version. Light and Life Series, No .1 Writer: Lloyd H. Knox.

"THE DOUBLE WILL OF GOD!"

God's perfect will is the salvation of all, but the exercise of God's perfect will is not determinative, absolute, irresistible, inevitable, and unconditional. God's perfect will (i.e., the salvation of all persons) must always be studied with God's permissive will in view (i.e., God permits any man to reject His salvation, and, as a result, reap God's judgment), Is God's perfect will ever frustrated? Yes. For if, it were not, all men would be saved! His perfect will is frustrated to the extent that wicked men, who are capable of repentance~ refuse to repent! When men refuse to repent (or when I, a believer, refuse to resist the devil and instead succumb to sin even though divine resources are available to me), God's perfect will is frustrated and God's permissive will is operative. God limits Himself by permitting the genuine exercise of human will.

God has foreknowledge of my sins, but He does not in any way determine my sins. His perfect will is holiness of life for every man, but His permissive will allows men to disobey and to sin and ultimately to be lost!

God wills that all men be saved! He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). When the Bible describes God's will for universal salvation, the 'universal I must not be reduced in meaning to "some". God wills to save all; Christ died for all; the Holy Spirit calls all to' repentance. Why are not all going to be saved in the end? Because God 'permits' man to exercise free will in rebellion against God's saving purpose. God's perfect will is the salvation of all, but the exercise of God's perfect will is not determinative, absolute, irresistible, inevitable, and unconditional. The realization of God's perfect will is determined by the reception of God's universal offer of salvation by all men.

Calvin's doctrine of predestination of the righteous necessarily involves God's predestination of the wicked! The God of Calvin is arbitrary, unjust, cruel, and tyrannical when God's actions are not concealed behind the cloud of 'God's inscrutable purposes'. Much is incomprehensible concerning God, but not God's universal saving purpose and Christ's unlimited atonement! Every man can be saved if he will. Christ is able to save to the uttermost - and this includes everyone! God cannot desire the salvation of all persons (the Biblical teaching regarding God's desired or perfect will) and at the same time determine the sin and perdition of some men! Notes Robert Shank: "Calvin's thesis of unconditional particular election and reprobation is predicated on a misapprehension of the import of Romans 9:6-29 which is in radical contradiction of both context (9:30 - 11:36) and the central thesis of the Epistle to the Romans, 'The just shall live by faith! (1:17).'" (Elect in the Son; pg. 223) From the fatal misapprehension of Romans 9:6-29 is derived the assumption of monotheism - determinism, the concept so apparent in Calvin's definition of election ... Calvin's doctrine of election and the unwarranted assumptions of monotheism - determinism - monergism on which it is predicated must be rejected. Confounding predestination with election, denying the authentic agency of Christ in election in full dimension, positing as in abstracted election in which the atonement is symbolic and accessory, Calvin's doctrine of election rests on serious misapprehensions and misconstructions of scripture." (Elect In The Son; by Robert Shank; pgs. 223, 224, 226)

"It is difficult to read at length from Calvin without concluding that he was master at eating his cake and having it too. The left hand giveth, and the right hand taketh away. Calvin's difficulty stemmed from the fact that he labored under an erroneous fundamental assumption. His cardinal error was his failure to acknowledge that the will of God has more than single aspects which led to his consequent denial that God desires to have all men to be saved. It is apparent from his writings that Calvin reasoned thus: If God truly wished all men to be saved, and then all men would be saved. But most men are not saved. Therefore, we

must conclude that God does not wish all men to be saved. Calvin's logic is unassailable; but it is based on the erroneous assumption that the will of God has but a single aspect.

"Calvin deplored the fact that his opponents 'recur to the distinction between will and permission, the object being to prove that the wicked perish only by the permission, but not by the will of God'. Certainly, anything within His permission is within God's will. But this does not establish the fact that His will has but a single aspect. 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 may 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 allow it; but His perfect will forbid 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.' (I 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 I (Matthew 7:21). 'But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel (boule, purpose) of God for them, being not baptized of John' (Luke 7:30). According to the scriptures, much that happens is contrary to the will of God; it is evident that the will of God has two aspects, rather than one." (Life In The Son, by Robert Shank, pgs. 347-349)

Ron Christian 

DEAD TO SIN
ALIVE TO GOD

SIN – “PERVERSION OF A LEGITIMATE DESIRE!”

Wrote James (the brother of Jesus), “No one must say, when he is tempted to do evil, ‘I have a temptation from God to do evil’, for God cannot be tempted to do evil, and He never tempts anyone to do so. However, any one is tempted to do evil when they allowed by their own evil desires and enticed by bait. Then evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin is completed, it brings forth death.” (James 1:13-15, Williams Translation)

Notes highly respected Bible preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, “The sin is in the deliberate choice of the will and the determined act by which I turn aside to answer, not my desire, but the allurements to the fulfillment of desire in an improper way. When you turn toward evil courses, when you go out upon the highway or into the hidden secret, and shameful place, you are not seeking God, you are turning from Him. In your heart and conscience you know the thing which is right and the thing which is wrong.” (The Westminster Pulpit; Book 2; pg. 71)

“Take hold upon any proper and natural capacity of your life, I care not what it may be, and attempt to satisfy it outside the lines of God’s law, and you do but intensify the desire and never satisfy it.

If you answer the desire of your inner life outside the line of God’s will, which you know full well, then the desire which was proper becomes a fire which cannot be quenched.” (Ibid; pg. 73, 75)

As the chart (printed below) demonstrates, there are many legitimate (God-given) desires, all of which God wills for believers to enjoy in their proper fulfillment, but all of which (because of the frightening capacity of human choice) can be misused or perverted! Some Christians mistakenly think that there is something inherently wrong with material possessions. Even though there is, according to the Bible’s teachings, definite dangers associated with the possession of great wealth, it is important to realize that God grants to some persons the ability to make lots of money. But, to whom much is given, much is required! John Wesley taught the following regarding money: “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can!” In other words, if God grants you the gift of gaining great wealth, it is your responsibility to be frugal (not wasteful), and to be generous (not self-indulgent and selfish and luxurious and greedy).

To illustrate the principle: “Sin is a perversion of a legitimate desire.” G. Campbell Morgan (from whose writings I have been quoting), writes about the legitimate desire to possess material things, and how the God-given desire can be perverted and can become ‘devilish’! He notes, “The desire to possess is perfectly correct, it is part of the proof of your relationship to Deity.”

But a desire that is God-given and legitimate (as is true of all good desires) can too easily become perverted and, thus, can become very harmful – dishonoring to God, and hurtful to one's own self, and harmful to one's fellowmen. Money, for instance, which is meant to be used unselfishly to bless others, can, instead, be used to selfishly gratify one's own illegitimate passions and fantasies! Greed is the result of a wrong use of one's money and possessions!

Greed is "a grasping devilishness that blights everything that is human in the man and makes him cruel and hard and cynical, grinding all others to the dust that he may make his gold." (Ibid; pg. 74)

Ron Christian 

**“SIN IS A PERVERSION OF A LEGITIMATE DESIRE!”
(ILLUSTRATED CHART)**

Legitimate (God-Given) Desires

Misplaced or Perverted Desires

1. Sexual Desire	1. Sexual Lust
2. Acquisitive Urge	2. Greed (Materialism)
3. Inquisitive Urge	3. Gossip
4. Desire for Food (Physical Hunger)	4. Gluttony
5. Self-Esteem	5. Pride
6. Enjoyment of Friends	6. Compromise of Moral Standards (Peer Pressure)
7. Enjoy Contemplation	7. Isolation From People (No Positive Witness)
8. Desire Justice For Wrongdoers	8. Pursue Vindictiveness (Hatred for Offenders)
9. Hate Sin Intensely	9. Hate Sinner Intensely (No ‘Agape’ Love)
10. Hate Heresy (False Doctrine)	10. Persecute and Destroy Heretics
11. Love Your Church (Loyalty)	11. Sectarianism and Division among True Believers
12. Compliment other People Sincerely	12. Flatter others for one’s own ulterior motives
13. Intellectual accomplishments	13. Intellectual Snobbery and Pride
14. Genuine Humility (with Confidence and Gratitude)	14. Self-Despising (with Despair and Inactivity)
15. Proper and Intelligent Fore Planning for the Future	15. Anxiety and Worry about the Future (lack of trust in God’s Provisions)

<p>16. Enjoy Pleasurable experiences in one's life (food, friends, family, hobbies, sexual love in marriage, out –of-doors, entertainment, etc.)</p>	<p>16. Pursue 'Pleasure' as the all-important goal of life, rather than focusing upon meaningful and joyous relationship with one' Creator. (The God of Hedonism) ,</p>
<p>17. Pray much and often for Needs of Hurting People.</p>	<p>17. Failure to 'reach out in love', to practically help the 'hurting ones' through acts of generosity and compassion.</p>
<p>18. Evaluate the spiritual condition of non-Christians (backslidden Christians (Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them") (Christians are permitted to be 'fruit inspectors', but not 'judges' of the spiritual conditions of others).</p>	<p>18. Pronounce spiritual 'Judgment' on the moral life of non-Christians, by presuming that you have accurate knowledge of their inner 'heart conditions'. (Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged." All final judgment of a Soul's condition and destiny belongs to Christ alone.</p>
<p>19. Laughing with others while enjoying a wholesome and a genuinely 'funny' joke or humorous event (Laughter is a gift from heaven and so helpful to emotional and mental health).</p>	<p>19. Laughing at the expense of others is very insensitive to the value and tender feelings of others. It is not only unkind, but is a type of 'cruelty' (a lack of love for one's 'brother' and 'sister; and a violation of 'Golden Rule'). Unsanctified and coarse laughter (unwholesome jokes) is a violation of the 'Golden Rule of Holy Living'! Greatly grieves the God of Tenderness and Compassion! Jesus' Laughter and Humor was always pure, holy, and edifying!</p>
<p>20. Self-Love (realized through total surrender to the Lordship of Christ, and enjoyed because one is obediently following the will and ways of Christ, and because one finds significance through humbly fitting into God's 'Master Plan' for all of life, (personal and corporate life alike). He who lovingly gives himself away to others (without selfish calculations) is he who will find deep fulfillment through His life's involvement with people's needs.</p>	<p>20. Self-Centered Love (which results in ever-increasing frustration and a sense of increasing social isolation). He, who is primarily or totally in love with himself, is he who is increasingly preoccupied with his own interests – to the exclusion of persons around him. Therefore, the person who centers on himself rather than on God and on others will find himself despised by others! He will have no one to praise him, but himself (a very lonely person, despised by others).</p>

<p>21. Appetite for Food.</p>	<p>21. Gluttony – overeating that harms one’s body (The Bible talks about pagans “whose god is their stomach”</p>
<p>22. Desire to dress attractively and appropriately.</p>	<p>22. Vanity – Expensive clothing to proudly draw attention to one’s own self.</p>
<p>23. Righteous Indignation</p>	<p>23. Unchristian Resentment (Carnal Anger)</p>
<p>24. Critical Thinker (Charitable Evaluation)</p>	<p>24. Critical spirit (Desire to ‘destroy’ another person)</p>
<p>25. Self-Love (Thanking God for one’s God-given worth and value, to humbly minister to God’s People)</p>	<p>25 Self-Centered Love (consideration of one’s own self to be so important that everyone else should ‘serve’ one’s own interests and needs). (Inflated evaluation of one’s own importance and ‘position’ in the world of mankind).</p>
<p>26. Hate sin and evil</p>	<p>26. Hate sinners and evil persons</p>
<p>27. Embrace beliefs and doctrines that are precious to one that one thinks are Biblically based.</p>	<p>27. Reject persons (Christians) whose beliefs and doctrines differ from one’s own.</p>
<p>28. Open acceptance of Christians whose personal convictions and lifestyles are different from one’s own. (‘Ecumenical’ in spirit and in actions)</p>	<p>28. Close-minded, sectarian, and exclusive towards fellow Christians who are different from one’s self. (Protestants who judge the particular beliefs and religious practices of adherents of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy)</p>
<p>29. Greatly enjoy all things that God has provided in His world, and the entertainment provided</p>	<p>229. Become pleasure-obsessed and ‘hedonistic’ with the entertainment which the world pro-</p>

<p><i>by gifted persons in the world. (Art, music, recreation, sports, etc.)</i></p>	<p><i>vides, becoming self-indulgent in the pursuit of 'fun and pleasure and games and vacations', with the neglect of involvement in other person's needs.</i></p>
<p>30. Seeking conscientiously to obey all the commandments of God through sincere efforts. Involvement in many 'good works' of compassion in the causes of 'grace'!</p>	<p>30. Become more concerned about the 'letter of the law', resulting in a life of rigid legalism, judgmentalism, and lovelessness in one's approach towards people. Becoming 'law-oriented'!</p>
<p>31. Enjoying God-given 'closer freedom' from all of one's sinful bondages, resulting in great rejoicing, and in grace-filled love for everyone.</p>	<p>31. Using one's 'freedom' in Christian living as an 'excuse' for compromise with questionable 'practices' that can lead one away from a conscientious life of holiness, resulting in a 'careless' (antinomian) lifestyle! (A perversion of God's Grace, for Grace does not 'Save' a person 'in' his sins, but 'from' his sins).</p>
<p>33. Rejoicing in a definite (dated) 'Born Again' Experience, with amazing life style changes in one's daily life.</p>	<p>33. Judging one who claims to be a Christian, one without any reference to a specific (or dramatic) conversion experience. Failure to appreciate the fact that some persons slowly, but surely, come into a personal relationship with God. If a godly lifestyle is evident in a person's life, that person is 'Born Again', regardless of the means or the timing that is used by God to bring a spiritual relationship to a person.</p>
<p>34. Seeking to glorify God and to serve people through acts of love, motivated only with 'pure motives' (i.e., with unselfish and with holy and compassionate motivations).</p>	<p>34. Allowing one's motives for service to become 'tainted' with some selfish motivations (i.e., choosing to seek honor and recognition for one's self, using the 'disguise' of serving others). (Accepting 'some types of 'deception', to advance one's own interests at the 'expense' of hurting others and of dishonoring God).</p>
<p>35. It is proper (legitimate) that there be honest</p>	<p>35. In a 'spirit of attack', one manifests an atti-</p>

<p><i>and loving discussion and debate with a person whose views and ideas differ from one's own views and ideas. In searching for truth, one is open to the insights from other sincere persons. An open mind, a receptive spirit, a teachable and humble attitude, with a willingness to make changes in one's own viewpoints – signs of a healthy mind and a reverent spirit!</i></p>	<p><i>tude of resentment and hostility towards one's 'opponent'. Becomes negative, adversarial, judgmental, censorious, close-minded, non-co-operative in one's relationship to the person whose viewpoints one opposes. One turns a 'friend' into an 'adversary', by attacking another's person instead of debating another's viewpoints. One becomes angry with another person, instead of kindly disagreeing, in a reasonable manner with one's opponents.</i></p>
<p><i>36. Expressing legitimate (normal) grief when one experiences the loss (death) of a close relative, but looking sincerely to God's Spirit for deep and gradual healing from grief itself and from the ongoing effects of grief in one's life.</i></p>	<p><i>36. Becoming so 'bowed-down' and 'devastated' with grief that the grieving one falls into a terrible state of depression, and into a state of hurtful isolation from other persons, insulation even from close 'loved ones' who desire to help but who are rejected by the grieving one. Instead of finding relief through prayer and from caring persons, the grieving one withdraws into himself, into wallowing self-pity and in despair. These are the actions that lead to illness, instead of health.</i></p>
<p><i>37. Because God (according to the Bible) has given believers "all things richly to enjoy", a believer can freely and enthusiastically and legitimately embrace the many pleasures and enjoyments which God has 'built' into His vast world of wonderment, with the result that the believer becomes "lost in wonder, love, and praise" as He 'feeds' his five physical senses upon God's magnificent creation! A believer realizes that God intends for Christians to take time to recreate, to vacation (to observe God's beautiful</i></p>	<p><i>37. When a person (even a believer) becomes more infatuated with the creation than he becomes infatuated with the Creator, then the tragedy of 'idolatry' has taken place! When one (even a believer) becomes a 'lover of pleasure more than a lover of God', such a 'pleasure-obsessed' person has fallen away from his primary relationship with the Creator, and he has chosen to worship the Creation rather than to worship the One who has made creation for human enjoyment (but not</i></p>

world), to retreat (to regain perspective in one's work), to laugh and to play, and to run and to jump, to hike and to explore, to dine with special friends and relatives, to create with one's hands and to construct a dozen different 'things', etc., to explore the vast beauties of God's world (oceans, plains, and mountains) will leave one awestruck! Yes, pleasure is a God-given gift, intended to enhance all of one's life!

for human worship). There are those (even professing Christians) who spend more time 'enjoying' their pets, than they spend time worshipping their God! One, who makes 'pleasure' (recreation, sports, games, vacations) the main object (goal) of one's life, can only be described as a 'Hedonist' (not a true Christian).

38. The Bible declares that "God has given us all things richly to enjoy". Part of what God has given us humans to enjoy is the abundance of the earth's fertility – delicious fruits and vegetables, fish from the ocean, and cattle from the field, and grains from the harvests. God is the Giver of all good gifts – including the gifts of wholesome foods for the nurture of the body and for the delightful satisfaction of the taste! Because humans are made from the elements of the earth, God is pleased to give elements of the earth to nourish and to sustain the physical body of humans. We live and move and 'have our very being' – mere existence and physical sustenance – all because of the love of a "faithful Creator", whose care of humans is the care of a loving Father for His dependent children. Without the nurture, which the earth's fertility provides, no human could either exist nor could he be maintained. All good gifts – including the gift of nutritious food – come from the Heavenly Father, who loves and cares for His human creation! God desires that every person (without exception) be nourished physically from the abundance of the earth's resources. There is enough food for all of the inhabitants of the

38. What is meant by God to be a great blessing to humanity can be turned into a 'curse' to man! Food is meant to be used to nurture the body of a human being, but because of the consumption of too much food, or the consumption of the wrong kinds of food (high in fats and seasoned with too much salt), obesity results! The metabolism of the body becomes unbalanced, and the body eventually becomes subject to the invasion of various diseases – stress, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart problems, gout, indigestion, and possibly even cancer, etc. Unfortunately there are many Christians who have failed to "curb their appetite", and who have become over weight, and thus they have subjected themselves to a variety of serious diseases (especially the disease of diabetes). These sincere, but 'out-of-control' (over weight) Christians are gradually destroying the 'temple of God' (i.e., their human body) because of their lack of discipline regarding their 'habits of eating'! Many of these Christians have an 'abounding appetite', with no apparent desire to bring their appetite under God's control. They not only eat too much

earth, and when there are some who seriously lack food; it is due to human selfishness or improper distribution of food!

food, but they choose to eat food that is 'high in fats, sugar, and salt' – a recipe for disaster (heart attacks and diabetes and strokes)! Many are "addicted to chocolate" and to pop that is very high in sugar content! Other Christians are nearly addicted to alcoholic drinks – and they could easily become alcoholics! All of these practices result from perverting God's good gift of food!

39. Food is not to be despised, if it is received in the spirit of thanksgiving and of gratitude! If God's blessing is upon the food, then one is to greatly enjoy his food, along with the members of his beloved family. Jesus often partook of food with His friends, and Jesus enjoyed food and drink often, as a result of his invitations from various persons and from companies of person at special parties and celebrations. His first miracle was performed at a wedding feast. He loved to visit, to listen, and to laugh at dinner parties! Yes, Jesus at times fasted (went without food, in order to spend time in prayer), but Jesus was not an ascetic (that is, one who refrained from the joys of people who ate and drank and enjoyed the 'good things of life'). Jesus embraced all of life, including "eating and drinking and being merry" with persons whose company He enjoyed. Yes, Jesus was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (for He came to save a lost race of persons), but Jesus never despised the rich gifts of His Heavenly Provider – food and drink to nourish the human body! Jesus enjoyed eating so much that His critics called Him a gluttonous man! But, of course,

39. The glutton is a person who has lost control in the consumption of his food, with the result that he usually is considerably over weight and he is thus the subject to bodily disorders and probably disease (and often a pre-mature death). Such a person, who is undisciplined in his 'eating, habits' is likely to be undisciplined in other practices in his life. Because 'self-control' is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), his remedy for his gluttony is found in total surrender to the person and to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit! The Bible condemns the serious sin of gluttony, and declares that the gluttonous man is possibly headed for financial poverty (because of the tendency of a gluttonous man to become lazy and unemployed). "O my son, be wise and stay in God's paths; don't carouse with drunkards and gluttons, for they are on their way to poverty." (Proverbs 23:19, Living Bible) There is probably a 'countless' number of professing Christians whose 'besetting sin' is overeating, leading to overweight. A serious problem, for the Bible condemns 'gluttony'

He wasn't a glutton, for Jesus was the most controlled man on earth.

as a sin against the human body. Such Christians are trying hard (in many cases) to find deliverance from their debilitating problem, and many believers will find deliverance through the enabling power of the Spirit. Our God of love understands the weaknesses, which His children, struggle with family, and He is "a present help in time of need"! But for those God-rejecters who are living for the "pleasures of the flesh" (including large consumption of food), there rests upon them the 'condemnation of God'! For those who have made food (appetite) their 'god', their future is eternal loss (unless they forsake their pagan god)!

40. While it is true that "life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses", it is also true to say (from Biblical teaching) that there is nothing inherently wrong for a person to possess large amounts of money. It is true to say that one who possesses much money faces some serious dangers to himself (dangers such as temptations to pride and self-sufficiency and selfish greed), it is also true to say that the man who possesses honestly earned wealth is given the God-allowed opportunity to help many needy people, by means of his wealth! To whom much is given (in terms of financial wealth), much is required! Great is the temptation to wrongly and to selfishly use one's great wealth, but it is also true that great is the opportunity to bless a countless number of poor and oppressed and ill and suffering persons! The rich man (in Jesus' parable) had the oppor-

40. Money, of course, is not inherently evil! It is how one uses his money that determines whether his money is a 'means' to do good or to do harm to one's fellowman! Money can be used to do unspeakable good or unspeakable evil, to advance the Kingdom of God or to advance the kingdom of the devil! It is when one begins to 'love money' that one becomes no longer a disciple of Christ, but instead a disciple of materialism! "People who long to be rich soon begin to do all kinds of wrong things to get money, things that hurt them and make them evil-minded and finally send them to hell itself. For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6:9-10) One who worships

tunity to bring healing to poor Lazarus, but instead he selfishly kept his wealth to himself – and Lazarus died as a result! “Tell those who are rich not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone, but their pride and trust should be in the living God who always richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. They should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven – it is the only safe investment for eternity!” (I Timothy 6:17-19)

money (and what money can buy) is a Materialist! He lives only for this world (and for the ‘goods) of this world), and he has no ‘compulsion’ to live his life in light of eternity. He knows the ‘price’ of everything, and the ‘value’ of nothing! He fails to understand that ‘life does not consist in the abundance of things that a man possesses’! He says to all around him, “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die!” But, he fails to realize that Materialism is a ‘Dead-End Road’: (1) because of the inheritability of laboriously-gained riches, (2) because riches cause sleepless nights, (3) Because riches can be easily lost, (4) Because money cannot be taken with you when you die, (5) Because material possessions do not have the ability to satisfy the inner longing of the Soul. Money is either a wonderful ‘servant’ or a cruel ‘tyrant’. It all depends on your attitude, and on how you use your money! For yourself or for your God!

41. One of the ‘basic emotions’ that humans possess, as a result of the special creation, is the emotion of ‘Anger’! As important (and legitimate) as this emotion is – an emotion that under God’s control can motivate a believer to campaign against many social injustices – this emotion is nevertheless a very ‘dangerous’ emotion potentially. The great campaigners (again social ‘evils’ like slavery) have known how to ‘whip up’ their anger for ‘holy causes’! This includes the famous Abraham Lincoln whose anger against the practice of human

41. The Bible is most practical with the advice it gives regarding what one should do with his anger. There is no denial that anger is a ‘leading emotion’ – an emotion that is most dangerous if it is not brought under control by the powerful Holy Spirit. Most, perhaps everyone expresses ‘anger’ at one time or another, and for one reason or another. One sign of growing maturity in the Christian life is evidenced by a believer quickly to surrender to Gods anger (as a result of his unfair and unjust treatment by an ‘enemy’). Quick-

slavery was great indeed! His anger was God-controlled! He hated the cruel institution of slavery, and, at the same time, he loved the 'socially blinded' and the 'spiritually enslaved' slaveholders, including the thousands of soldiers who fought on the side of the 'South' (in defense of slavery). One who is God-directed must be intensely angry with sin (and with the horrible consequences which sin has brought to spiritually-enslaved sinners), but one must never be angry with the sinners, whose actions have brought much hurt to others around them and hurt to one's own self. Jesus never retaliated against those who hurt Him, but (on the other hand) Jesus often expressed anger toward those (religious leaders) who oppressed the weak and the vulnerable ones! Jesus expressed 'Righteous Indignation'!

ly surrender to God his anger (as a result of his unfair and unjust treatment by an 'enemy'. When a believer finds that his emotion of anger is provoked, as a result of a person's unjust treatment of him, what is he to do? Simply deny that he feels anger welling up inside of him? No, for that is denial and this is a dishonest response to the God-created emotion of anger! To suppress his anger or to deny this emotion is to do one's self psychological (mental) harm. No, the right way to deal with anger is to admit its presence, and then (in humility) to surrender this emotion quickly to the Heavenly Father (who understands everything and everyone)! Pray for the offender! Commit him to God! Ask the Spirit to cleanse you of all unrighteousness. Act in love toward your offender, and breathe a prayer for him often. God's anger is pure, and He will exercise His own vengeance against all evil doers! Don't live with anger (bitterness) against anyone. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay", says the Lord! Cease from anger, and live by love – for friends and enemies.

42. The race that God created was created with a very strong 'Social Instinct' – that is, an instinct to associate with fellow humans. Humans have a desire to know others in various ways, but especially through 'verbal communication'. God has created persons with a deep desire to know other human beings. Of Adam, God said, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make for him a 'helpmate'!" Of course, one of the

42. What God has created to be a wonderful characteristic of humans, namely, the desire to know and to be known in human society (marriage, family, friends, acquaintances), this instinct (drive) can so easily become 'perverted' and can even become the 'vehicle' for sinful action! Instead of talking to people, one can begin to talk about people ('behind their back', unknown to the person

great motivations for a single man or a single woman to be married, is to have a lifetime 'helpmate' - person who will be a partner, a companion, a confidant, someone with whom he/she can share the deepest feelings of his/her heart! In sorrow or in happiness, someone who will be faithful and true, loving and understanding! But the 'social instinct' is manifest in almost every context, in addition to the marriage relationship. Everyone wants a friend – a person who is open to sharing all the basic information of life – the 'who, when, where, how, why' of a friend's life, in order to 'know' him well, and to know him more and more as a result of a growing relationship. A desire 'to know and to be known' – that is one of the greatest characteristics of human existence!

about whom one is talking). Instead of one's tongue being used to share edifying 'news' with another, it is possible for one to begin to tell partial truths or even outright lies about someone (perhaps about a one-time 'friend' whom one has unfortunately turned into a virtual 'enemy' – because of a misunderstanding). When one time friends break up (because of disagreements or because of emotional hurts), the tongue can so easily be used, not to express forgiveness for misunderstanding to bring about reconciliation, but the tongue can be used to 'spread gossip', and to 'slander', and to inflict all kinds of hurt and harm! In this case, 'social instinct' has been perverted and untold damage in relationships results. The tongue (that God created as a 'tool' for the expression of love and satisfaction) can be used to (by the devil) to destroy the reputation of another, resulting in the breakdown of all meaningful social relationships! The tongue expresses love or hate!

43. There is an inbuilt, God-given 'acquisitive urge' within human beings. God created a material (physical) world, for the benefit, pleasure, and 'ownership' of mankind. God created the physical world, and therefore all things belong to God, but the God of love made material things for the purpose of man's enjoyment, and as a gift to mankind, (as a steward of God) to 'possess' and to 'manage' all things for the glory of God and for the good of mankind. The 'right to own private property' is a right that is given to

43. If one gets his eyes off God, he can become infatuated with money, and with what money can buy. Money and the possession of material things become the purpose for which one lives, with a serious failure of recognizing that "life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses." Having a love of money, because of what money can give one's self, in terms of pleasure, power, and popularity! Failure to realize that, just as a person came into this

mankind by God, and it is a right that no human government is to deny to human beings! This right to private ownership is a God-given (inalienable) right, and it is to be respected by governing authorities. The world, and all things that dwell therein, belongs to the Creator, but, because the Creator inherently is Love, the Creator wills generously to give material gifts to His creatures, and these creatures are to properly manage God's 'things', and to personally find much 'pleasure' in the variety of God's material 'treasures' – never forgetting the 'source' of all those 'good things' which are designed by the Creator to bring great delight to the hearts of humble and obedient followers of the Loving Creator!

world with not even a penny, so no one who leaves this world can take a single penny with them! Failure to realize that 'money' is a great servant with the capacity to help many persons, 'money can become a great tyrant with the capacity to hurt many people' when money is selfishly spent on one's own indulgence rather than spent on one's poor fellowmen. When the purchase of lands and houses and stocks/bonds becomes the obsession of the greedy/grasping hand of a one-time Christian person, then a legitimate 'urge' (desire) has become a perverted 'urge' (greed), and the person (Christian) who bows his knees before the 'god of materialism' has destroyed his own soul, and he is headed for eternal destruction. (See I Timothy 6:9)

44. There is a universal desire among humans' to pursue knowledge of God's vast world, with a desire to experience wisdom, understanding, and discernment in the use of that knowledge, to be used for the purpose of glorifying the God of all knowledge and for the purpose of lovingly serving one's fellowman. The Word of God exhorts humans to seek knowledge, and in all one's seeking of knowledge, to also seek wisdom and understanding! There is an innate quest for knowledge to explore all the amazing 'branches' of God's vast storehouse of truth! "Knowledge is power" – not power to exploit others with one's knowledge, but power (understanding) to better serve others with one's knowledge, in the spirit of and sensitivity. One must discover one's own unique 'spiritual gifts',

44. One (even a Christian) can become personally proud that he/she has achieved high levels of knowledge – 'intellectual snobbery' – and, thus, he/she can become self-conscious and self-serving and self-centered in the practical use of one's knowledge – rather than remaining self-giving and compassionate in the use of one's knowledge. Failure to realize God's evaluation regarding intellectual opportunities, namely, Knowledge Puffs Up but Love Builds Up! "To whom much is given (intellectually), much is required (in special service to others)." God hates pride in all of its forms – including 'intellectual pride'! We (believers) are always to "walk humbly before our God." "What have you (an intellectually talented person) that you did not re-

and then to use those abilities to edify the 'Body of Christ' (individual members of the Church). Jesus is to be the 'Lord' of all - including one's mind! The sincere follower of Christ seeks constantly to be transformed (changed towards greater Christlikeness) by the Renewing of his Mind! (Romans 12:1)

ceive? If then you received (your intellectual abilities), why do you boast as if you did not receive your intellectual gifts?). The holy life (of Christlikeness) is always the humble life! All that one has, and all that one is, has come from the hand of a generous God! Therefore, there is never a 'place' for intellectual boasting! All knowledge will pass away, but love abides forever. (See I Corinthians 13)

45. God commanded Adam and Eve (in the beginning of human history) to replenish the earth – to populate the planet through the sexual union of male and female (husband and wife). Therefore, it is obvious that the God-implanted 'sexual instinct' was for the purpose of giving birth to a new human life, and thus to fulfill God's specific command to bring new prodigy into the world. If there was no such phenomenon as sexual passion (drives) between man and woman, there would obviously be no act of sexual union, and certainly, the human race would vanish from the face of the earth! The attraction between a man and a woman is obviously deeper than the attraction of beauty (female) and handsomeness (male). There is no sin in 'sexual attraction' for the 'opposite sex', for God gave young unmarried men and woman that 'strong attraction' for each other! It is possible (and important) for a young (Christian) man to feel a strong attraction for the lady that he loves (and that attraction includes a deep desire – after his wedding – to 'Know' her sexually! However, as a man who loves her deeply, he has chosen (by the strength of the Spirit)

45. If 'sexual attraction' (towards a man or a woman whom one seriously desires to become a spouse) is God-given and is most legitimate and 'normal', then what can one conclude is a perversion of 'sexual attraction'? It is 'sexual lust' – that is, the desire to use the body of another person to experience personal sexual gratification! There are many manifestations of 'fleshly living', but one of the most evident manifestations is 'lust' and 'sexual passion'. There probably is no greater act of selfishness than the act of exploiting the body (and the entire life) of a woman who is not one's wife! Lust is totally self-centered, for the lust-driven man has no other goal other than the goal of using the sex organs of a woman to gratify his own passing passion. He makes no long-term commitment to the woman with whom he has a brief encounter! Women are totally 'functionary' – to be used and to be discarded. Then the passion-filled man ('exploiter') can proceed to the next woman whom he intends to entice, to dominate, and to use for his own insidious purpose! His 'god' is sex,

to wait until his 'wedding night' to experience the glorious (spiritual) mystery of sexual consummation. He knows that God's commandments are relevant, and he knows that 'love can wait' for the proper time to surrender his body to his lover!

and therefore he can be called a 'sensualist' – a man who lives by his 'flesh', his uncontrolled sexual passions! He has abandoned the sacred gift of God, and he has chosen instead to drag the beautiful and sacred gift of sex 'in the mud'. The man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he has destroyed his own soul."

46. There is a God-given 'instinct' (desire) for a person (created in God's image) to reflect God's image by the way he appears - physically. It is no sin for a person (especially for a Christian) to look as beautiful as he/she can – outwardly and physically. To dress handsomely and beautifully can be an outward reflection of one's God-given dignity - a dignity that is patterned after the God of all dignity and order and beauty! Because the human body is called 'the temple of the Holy Spirit' – the sacred location of the Spirit of God during man's pilgrimage on earth – no person (especially a Christian) will ever intentionally do harm to his/her body. One's body is never to be mistreated by one's self (no suicide).. One's body is must never be mistreated by careless, deliberate action such as: by overeating, by under eating, by improper eating, by neglect of adequate exercise, by overwork, by under sleep or by careless use of harmful drugs, etc... Christianity teaches that the human body is not to be despised (on one hand), and not to be worshiped (on the other hand). Rather, the human body is to be 'cherished' as a God-given gift, to be used as an 'instrument' of righteousness to serve the King-

46. It is possible for one (for even a Christian) to unduly 'focus' on his/her outward beauty to the exclusion of focusing on the development of the beauty of one's inward character! The most (physically) beautiful person in the world, will (with the passage of time) become old in his/her body – with the accompanying bodily signs of aging! Every person is made 'of the dust', and every person in time will return to the dust after physical death! "It is appointed unto all persons, once to die." How futile to spend large amounts of money, in an attempt to be transformed to the looks of a young person! Those who 'live for the physical appearance of their body', have not properly faced their own 'mortality', and they have not realized their 'call' in life to enhance their inner beauty (beauty of a godly character). For a woman to spend her time trying to 'imitate' the beauty of her youth is to waste valuable time. She depletes her energy, which should be expended on preparation for eternity – an eternity in heaven that has indescribable beauty, and unlimited pleasures, and undying and ever young spiritual bodies! To focus

dom of God! Honor God by the way you use your body – never for unholy (licentious) purposes, but only for Christ-glorify use. “You are not your own, but you belong to God. Therefore, glorify God in your body” – and let others enjoy your bodily presence – in holy love.

exclusively on earthly physical beauty (trying to find the ‘secret’ to unfading beauty) is to focus on that which inevitably perishes!



“BIRD’S-EYE VIEW OF REALITY!”

I have, throughout my long life, sought to eat right and to exercise right (I have consistently involved myself in running a few miles almost every day, since my teen years). However, an event took place when I was 68 years old – an event that caused me to ‘face my mortality’. Simply stated, I discovered a dime-shaped mole on the outer, upper right arm (a ‘spot’ that I could not even see with my own ‘bare eyes’). My wife told me about it, but I could only see it when I viewed it in my mirror. I dismissed this ‘spot’ as insignificant, but I thought I probably should mention it to my family doctor, at the end of my complete physical ex-

amination (April 2012). My doctor quickly viewed the dime-shaped black spot, but he said it was nothing to be concerned about. Well, I thought nothing about it – until, about 10 months after seeing my doctor, the little spot began to bleed, and finally that spot became a large erupting, bloody ‘mess’! My wife, of course, insisted that I go to the doctor, but I told her that there was nothing to be concerned about, since he told me the same message, a few months before. Finally, after she continued to insist, I went to the doctor (who had serviced me medically, for the last 30 years). When he took the covering off of the bleeding sore, he said that it ‘looked angry’, and he said that he must soon operate on it – to remove this ‘angry sore’. Two days later, after he removed the ‘angry sore’ (a simple surgery performed in his own office), he said he was ‘baffled’ as to what was the nature of the sore! However, he assured me that he was quite sure that it was not a melanoma (skin cancer). However, after he received the pathology report (two days later), he called me and sadly informed me that, indeed, it was a melanoma! He was troubled, and he began to tell me that the seriousness of this diagnosis could result in surgeries (removing lymph nodes) and chemo treatments, etc. Of course, my wife and my daughter (who was present when I received the call) and myself were all ‘shaken’ by the ‘bad news’. I soon began to think of the ‘worst’ – eventual termination of my life (death). It was a few days later that I visited a specialist (surgeon) who told me that the diagnosis (pathologist report) was ‘troubling’. He said that the fact that the melanoma was quite ‘deep’ into the skin (which has five layers), and the fact that the ‘sore’ bled rather profusely – these two facts meant that this situation could be serious. Before I left his office, this specialist said that frankly he was ‘troubled’. Of course, my sense of the ‘brevity’ and the ‘uncertainty’ of life - my own ‘mortality’ - filled my mind. However, I must say, to the ‘glory of God’, that, in spite of my understandable ‘fears’, I sensed a certain wonderful (God-given) peace. I said to myself, “Even though I have tried hard to live a healthy life (trying to keep my heart and lungs and circulatory system in ‘good shape’ though my consistent running), maybe God does not desire for me to live a long life (into my late 80’s or 90’s like my ancestors). I began to remember the scores of persons whom I loved on earth, who are now in heaven. I had written quite a lot about heaven (and had recorded hundreds of quotations about heaven). Maybe now it was time for me to leave the family I loved, and to meet my blessed Savior. The surgeon (specialist) said he would have to take a lot of my arm skin (where cancer probably resided), as well as one of my lymph nodes. Three days after the extensive surgery, the pathology report came into the hands of my primary physician, and even though I was not home at the time, he called my wife and told her that NO cancer was found - ANYWHERE – that I had a ‘Clean Bill of Health’! He said, “Praise the Lord!” My wife called me while I was traveling in a car with my brother, a few miles from home, and my brother and I could hardly believe the ‘good report’! The burden that was lifted from me was more than I can put in words! Scores spent time in prayer for my healing!

Do you believe in: The Power of prayer? Healing from God? Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

"OPEN SECRETS TO PERSONAL RENEWAL!"

Do you have a strong 'inner drive' to grow in your personal life? It is said of Jesus, "that He grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and Man." Balanced growth, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual growth! Are you personally 'reaching for higher ground'? After a lifetime of very fruitful ministry as a highly respected missionary/teacher/preacher/writer, E. Stanley Jones said (toward the end of his long life of nearly 90 years), "The best that I can say about myself is that I am 'only a Christian in the making'; I am not yet 'fully made'". He then stated that the most wonderful thing about the Christian life is the 'joy of becoming'! Becoming a more loving servant among suffering human beings, and becoming a person who is 'more Christlike' in character! No 'list' of steps (for maturing in life) is 'complete', but (after much personal 'soul-searching') the following 'secrets for personal renewal' were deposited in my mind (perhaps by the Spirit of enlightenment). We, too, can be a 'Christian-in-the-making' – maturing every day!

- 1. KEEP FREE OF BITTERNESS!** *"Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives." (Hebrews 12:15)*
- 2. KEEP YOURSELF FREE FROM THE COMPETITIVE 'RAT RACE'!** *Do not compare yourself with others. Be content with what you have! Enjoy the simple lifestyle.*
- 3. KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING BRIGHTLY!** *Make your home a 'haven of rest', a place of solace and comfort where all in your family can build a wholesome self-esteem through unconditional love and positive affirmations and creative family projects.*
- 4. KEEP LAUGHTER ALIVE IN YOUR LIFE!** *Develop a good sense of humor! Do not take yourself too seriously! A hearty laugh can do 'wonders' for you. Never laugh at people, but laugh with people. Enjoy 'clean' jokes!*
- 5. KEEP A 'CLEAR CONSCIENCE' BY DAILY CONFESSING ANY KNOWN SIN IN YOUR LIFE!** *Remember: "If we confess our sins to God, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong because Christ died to wash away our sins." (1 John 1:9)*
- 6. KEEP DIVERSION AND VARIETY IN YOUR LIFE!** *Someone said, "Variety is the spice of life!" God created a world full of variety, so God is pleased when we enjoy variety in life. Try something new or do the same thing differently. Do not be afraid of failure. A worse failure is never trying anything new. Visit a new neighbor! Put aside your 'natural timidity', and reach out and show interest in someone who is lonely! Send a fresh 'love note' to a parent or to a friend! God obviously 'loves variety' – for He made*

'Nature' with vast variety. Moreover, He created the human race with unusual (beautiful) variety. If God loves variety, then the creatures He made (men and women) are like God (i.e., they also enjoy variety). Persons with 'varied interests' tend to be the 'most interesting persons' to be 'around'!

7. **PRAY MUCH ABOUT EVERYTHING AND WORRY ABOUT NOTHING!** *"Cast all your cares upon God, for He cares for you." Such relief and rest!*
8. **BE A PART OF A SMALL SUPPORT GROUP ON A WEEKLY BASIS** – *The Bible says that we (believers) are to 'care one another's burdens', and thus demonstrate the 'love of God in our hearts'. Someone gave a simple definition of a Christian: "One who really cares!".*
9. **READ POSITIVE BOOKS THAT WILL ENCOURAGE YOU AND INSPIRE YOU TO LIVE A 'HOLY LIFE!** *But, of course, the Holy Bible should be on the very top of your stack of 'good books'.*
10. **DEVELOP POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS 'SETBACKS', 'PROBLEMS' AND 'TRIALS'. E.** *Stanley Jones says, "Make everything serve. Just as an airplane always rises from an airport not with the wind, but in the face of the wind, so I would make oppositions send me up, not down." If God be 'for' you, who can be 'against' you? VICTORY!*

"What Is The 'Gift Of Legacy' Which You Will Leave To Your Descendants?"

Unless you are a very 'famous person', it is not likely that you will be 'remembered' one hundred years from now (except, unless perhaps your name is recalled by someone who researches their genealogy). Nevertheless, even though you may not be personally recognized among future generations, it is almost certain that the 'legacy of your influence' (i.e., your enduring values which 'define your entire life') – this influence will 'live on' in the lives of your future generations. While the 'depth' and the 'breadth' of your influence is hard to evaluate with any kind of 'precision', the effect of your words, and choices (good and bad) that you make, and the 'projection of your personality' (introverted or extroverted) and the 'religious commitments' that you unashamedly reveal (honesty or deception) and the material lifestyle that you practice (simple or extravagant) – these aspects (and other aspects) of your total personhood all exercise a powerful influence, in the lives of many persons who 'come after you'.

What 'philosophy of 'life' are you communicating to everyone around you? What 'ideas' and 'manner of life' truly 'define' and 'describe' you? Experience (and careful observation and 'study' of humanity

throughout history) – I say, experience shows that there are many ‘low and broad roads’ (that eventually lead to ‘destruction’), and there is the ‘high road’ that leads to an abundant life on earth and to an eventual and glorious life (after physical death). Jesus (the One who is the ‘Expert of Life’) taught that there are many persons on the ‘broad road that leads to destruction’, while there are (relatively) few persons who are traveling the ‘narrow road’ (‘high road’) that leads to ‘life’. According to the ‘Wisest of All Men’, (the One in whom dwells all the knowledge of Almighty God, the Sinless Son of God), there are certain ‘philosophies’ that are totally ‘opposite’ (opposed) to the ‘Truth of God’. Jesus is the ‘Truth of God’ (whose understanding of Reality is ‘faultless’). Any human who bases his temporary life on the following philosophies is definitely on the ‘broad road’ that leads ultimately to ‘destruction’ (loss in time and in eternity). What are some of those (popular) philosophies?

- (1) Hedonism – worship of Pleasure,
- (2) Sensualism – worship of Sex,
- (3) Materialism – worship of Money,
- (4) Humanism – worship of Man,
- (5) Scientism – worship of Science,
- (6) Secularism – there is no ‘reality’ other than what can be ‘found’ through man’s ‘5 senses’,
- (7) Relativism – there is no such thing as an absolute ‘moral code’ to determine moral decisions; everyone does that which is ‘right in his own eyes’.

God (in the Bible) often warns us to ‘beware of false philosophies’ (which ‘ruin your soul’). If you are on the ‘broad road’ (the ‘low road’ of man-made ideas and even false religions) you do not enjoy the ‘smile of approval’ of your Creator, and you certainly do not have anything ‘substantial’ (true and lasting) to ‘pass on to your children’! You are made BY God, and FOR God, to SERVE God – all the days of your life. The Bible says, “There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is the ‘way of death’.”

My great grandmother (born in 1860) in a ‘covered wagon’ (near what is now Colorado Springs) was without a mother (her mother died in ‘child birth’). Someone who did the ‘research’ told me that her father was an ‘atheist’ – and that (because he did not want to keep the baby) he decided to give this infant to a certain ‘Christian’ couple whom he knew! Legacy! Each generation following her has been Christians! Her sixth generation (now) loves Jesus!

“Have You Been ‘Ensnared’ By The God Of ‘Materialism’?”

About 30 years ago, I received a ‘soul-revealing’ letter from a young (brilliant) businessman who was, at that time, about 30 years old. When he was rather young, he formed his own ‘finance company’. He quickly

'rose to the top' in his field. However, this young man (so personable and outgoing and honest) – he, obviously, revealed from his letter that he was experiencing great 'inner conflict'. His ability to express his feelings (using the analogy of the 'candy store') was quite remarkable. The following is a portion of that letter: "In my life the process goes on. My faith is in frequent conflict with my obsession to participate in the consumption of this world's fruit. I often feel like a child in a candy store. I wander past the fields of sweet delights, gazing at the vast assortment of choices. All the while in mind, the echoes of my mother's word warn me against the consequences of over-consumption. Yet, the warnings go mostly unheeded, and I continue to confidently, if not somewhat guilt-tinged, select items, which I feel sure, will satisfy my desires ('surely this one will be the last...Oh, just one more'). It is only when the toothache attacks, or the stomach revolts that I consciously pursue my mother's care, knowing that her caring arms and infinite wisdom will sooth my injuries. Her loving character will forgive my errant ways and soon everything will be all right again. In chagrined humility, I wish I could follow her will, knowing full well that if I don't give in to her will and wisdom completely, I will soon made the same mistakes again (Oh the tribulations of being an 'undisciplined child')"!

In spite of his ambivalence (i.e., being 'torn' between the 'way of materialism' and the 'Christian way'), this young man became a highly respected and 'successful' businessman (real estate investor, etc.). His business peers (in his later career) thought so much of him (his knowledge and experience in investment, etc.) that they elected him to be the president of their association for the entire state of Texas! Wealthy investors (in France, etc.) hired this very competent businessman to 'head up' several projects (I think about 20 developments, simultaneously!) in several locations. Part of his 'stairs of success' resulted in this fine person (highly experience by this time in his 'successful career') building himself a beautiful, large house (really, a mansion). This person (greatly skilled) seemed to be 'flying high' (professionally). When I last talked to him (at his wedding – a wedding that might have cost \$50,000), he communicated to me (during the few moments that we had alone) that he wanted to regularly read the Bible every day (with his new bride). There was evidence that there was still an inner 'hunger for God'! (Sadly, the marriage ended in 5 years!)

About three years ago (during the economic down'), I heard (indirectly) that 'the bottom fell out'! A 'boom' can become a 'bust'! Bankruptcy became a term very 'real' to this one-time very 'successful' investor! I do not know all the 'details' (of course), but I heard that he lost nearly everything, including his beautiful (large) house! We all should know that money can quickly 'take wings'. Paul instructs us not to set our hopes "on the uncertainty of riches." King Solomon (David's son), supposedly the richest king of his time), wrote: "He who loves money shall never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income, so what is the advantage of wealth-except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers! The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia." (Ecclesiastes 5:10-

12) *“Those who chase riches are constantly falling into temptations and snares. For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil!” Who is your master – Money or God?*

“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 God is only able to forgive sinners – justly – 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), that God can 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 in the ‘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 ‘earth’. 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 several 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 practice! 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.

"TWO MASTERS – TWO CHOICES – TWO DESTINIES!" There, of course, are 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, 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 'Pride 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!

"Beware Of Becoming 'Ify' Christians!" How different is Jesus' unconditional love of people from our conditional love of people. We are too often, 'IFY' Christians. "I will love you if...". How often we qualify our acceptance of people. We draw up our own list of conditions for acceptance of persons – IF they are like us in their background, IF they are like us in their theology, IF they like our kind of music, IF they have had our kind of religious experience or emotional experience, IF they will ask our forgiveness, IF, IF IF, on and on the list of 'ifs' grows. We are 'IFY' Christians.

Make no mistake about it. We are not asked to become alike in our life style, or our religious experience, or our cultural likes and dislikes. Neither are we asked to condone people's behavior, which is less than Christlike. We are not even asked to become close friends with everyone.

But we are asked (actually required, by the Christ of Christianity) to love unconditionally, with no 'ifs'. Jesus loved everyone unconditionally – the nice and the nasty, the Jew and the Gentile, the young and the world, the respected and the despised, the rich and the poor, the cultured and the uncouth, the literate, and the illiterate, the saint and the sinner.

To accept people unconditionally is to accept and to love them without forcing our personal convictions upon them. Even though you may not agree with the 'homosexual lifestyle' (and you can point to Biblical statements to 'back' your moral position), you are called (by Jesus) to deeply love those who are practicing such a lifestyle. Jesus (after all) deeply hated sin (which was destructive to the personhood of individuals), but Jesus was all-inclusive in his love for everyone. Jesus, for instance, 'hated' the duplicity (fakery) of the

religious leaders of His day (Pharisees and the scribes), and Jesus, with great anger, pronounced His many 'woes' against them – BUT, Jesus engaged in this strong confrontation of evil (religious) persons (who 'hurt' so many around them) – Why? Because He was trying to 'shake them loose from their moral complacency', in hopes that they would 'open their spiritual eyes' and repent and 'come to the Truth (Jesus Himself)! The follower of Christ will usually be called upon to exercise 'tender love' (gently urging sinners to come to the loving Savior), but – following the example of Christ Himself – there will (infrequently) be 'situations' when love-driven Christians will 'strongly confront' evil persons who are 'intent to destroy and to exploit the weak ones of our world' (examples: confronting 'child abuse', 'abortion', 'sexual slavery', 'inexcusable cases of world hunger', neglect of the elderly, etc., etc.) Unconditional love is 'giving the best that we know' to every person we meet (i.e., food for the hungry, clothing for the naked, visitation of the lonely elderly, financial assistance to the divorcee, a listening ear to the depressed, compassionate treatment of the inmate, and justice to the criminal).

Unconditional love is possible – not as a 'human attainment', but as a 'divine enablement'. The love of God is 'shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit' (Romans 5:5). We are created to love, but, because of the 'entrance of sin into the world' (Genesis 2), we humans are 'born in sin' and we have all chosen deliberately to sin! Sinners by 'nature' and sinners by 'choice'. We are born with the 'bent' toward sinning – 'a gravitational pull downward' – a 'basic self-centeredness' and self-dimensions. But Jesus came for the express 'purpose' to 'defeat' (destroy) sin in all of its dimensions. Jesus forgives sins, gives pure motives, and **EMPOWERS US WITH HOLY LOVE!**

"Is Compassion Your True 'Passport To Heaven'?" According to the famous passage in Matthew 25, it seems quite apparent that Jesus, as the Judge in the End, will applaud 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 to me.' All they know is that 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' come not 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, races, and religious affiliation 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', and 'regeneration', and all the other difficult theological (salvation) terms, does NOT mean that these persons are unconverted (or not in God's family).

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, according to what Jesus taught in Matthew 25), 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 (fountainhead) 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'.

"Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art!" Those (humans) who manifest your type of compassion surely belong to you, Jesus! Compassion, motivated by unselfish love, is the practical and the 'visible' manifestation of 'God's love on the earth'! If compassion is the concrete expression of divine-like love, then surely all persons who have compassion in their heart will gain a glorious entrance into the 'Heaven of Love'! Compassionate ones in heaven!

"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 1 and 2 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 by share of 'good deeds'. I believed that, because I was a fifth generation Free Methodist, I was morally acceptable to God and that God would automatically let me go to heaven. I, like the morally upright Jews described in Romans, felt that God favored me. I reasoned that, because I didn't indulge in grossly immoral sins, that surely I was acceptable enough to God! The day came, however, when I realized that God has no 'grandchildren', only children. A second-hand experience of God through my godly mother, would never suffice! I needed personally to repent of my sins - my sinful attitudes, my pride, my self-righteous claims, my dependence upon morality alone to save me. I realized that up-and-out (religious) sinners needed God just as much as 'down-and-out' (irreligious) sinners. One kind of sinner can go to hell as quickly as the other kind 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!

"Do You Believe That God Is 'Able' To Break The 'Bondage Of Your Sins'?" As is 'true' of most ministers in local churches, during my long-term as a pastor (of a Methodist Church in Fort Collins), I 'had my hands in all kinds of ministries' (and in a smaller Church, I also spent considerable time scrubbing and waxing floors and cleaning toilets and mowing lawns). A pastor of a smaller Church learns the meaning of 'versatility', 'variety', 'adaptability', 'availability', 'hard work', and more. I loved the families that I served, and 'gradually' (slowly) my Church grew. We grew from having one small worship service, to three services.

Even though our Church was, even at the conclusion of my 27 years as pastor, only 350 in attendance on a Sunday morning, that was a 1000% growth (for when I came to the church as a 22 year old pastor, there was verily 35 people – and mostly (wonderful) older folks). Well, as a young pastor, I was quite sure that ‘members from other city churches’ would not be ‘inclined’ to leave their church to join my church (ha!), and I knew that ‘sheep stealing’ was not (really) pleasing to God, and that such ‘church growth’ (transfer from other churches) was not ‘genuine church growth’. In that case (as is often true among local churches today) ‘my’ church growth would be some other church’s loss. How sad that there is so much ‘circulation of the saints’ among local churches today! (I have observed this phenomenon among several churches in our city – especially among the large churches which have a ‘magnetic pull’ – drawing members away from other churches!) Well, why go into all the ‘above details’ about ‘my’ church and the other local churches in Fort Collins? Again, I want to state the fact that, even though we were very small (as a local church), I determined that, even if there would be some who would decide to ‘come’ to my church (from some other local church), I would not deliberately engage in the ‘low practice of sheep stealing’ (robbing members from other churches). Do I want (as a pastor) to break God’s commandment ‘Thou shalt not steal’?

So what did I do to ‘grow’ the Church where I was appointed to pastor (as an inexperienced 22 year old, recent graduate)? This is what I did – for the next 20 years! I met an experienced pastor whose local Church (on the West Coast) had ‘practiced’ sharing the Gospel of Christ with many persons (for a long time), and who saw his Church grow amazingly (mostly through ‘convert growth’). As an artist (as well as a pastor) he designed a most beautiful ‘aid’ that he used to present the ‘plan of salvation’ in the living rooms of hundreds of folks. Using his colorful ‘flip chart’, I simply and lovingly shared the ‘plan of salvation’ to scores of families. Almost without exception, these persons prayed ‘the sinner’s prayer’. I was overjoyed to see about 350 adults (during two decades) make a personal commitment to Christ! The joy on the countenance of these precious persons was most wonderful to behold! Of course, after these ‘Salvation By Appointment’ Bible studies were completed in these homes, I assigned lay couples to ‘follow up’ with these ‘new believers’. These lay couples were called ‘Timothy Couples’ (called that because they were involved with discipleship of the recent converts). These couples (during a 12 week follow-up with the new Christians) very often ‘bonded’ quite strongly with the new believers, and lasting friendships were often established (that lasted for several years). So many of the couples (or singles) who were ‘converted’ in their homes (through these ‘appointments’) were ‘bound’ by the ‘habits’ of sin! I witnessed the ‘bondage of sin’ broken! Some of the happiest and kindest and most generous and most positive and hardest working and fastest growing and most talented and most intellectually ‘acute’ persons I ever knew, were these hundreds of persons who were ‘converted’ in their homes! Bondage Broken! Sin Abounds, But Grace Superabounds!

“Do You Fully ‘Appreciate’ Your Wonderful ‘God Of Protection’?” In all ‘honesty’ trying to answer that question, you rightfully could say, “God obviously does NOT always ‘protect’ people (in general) or

Christians' (in specific)." People (by the millions) have died from all 'sorts' of causes (natural disasters, car accidents, diseases, even martyrdom). As many 'Christians' as 'non-Christians'!" An honest answer to an honest question – with no desire to be cynical or critical to the teachings of 'Christianity'! But the fact is, it 'seems' (from all appearances) that Christians are 'subject' to the ravages of time and the accidents of life, as much as anyone else! I (the writer of this article) have been 'distressed' when I hear that some 'great persons' (strong Christian believers) have died suddenly and tragically. In accidents – a 48 year old man (board member of a Christian School, father of 4 children, with a lovely wife) slides off a roof on a construction job, and he is killed almost immediately. Car wrecks – a well-known Christian leader (David Wilkerson) is killed in a 'head-on' car crash (as quickly as a robber in a 'run-away' car is killed when he speeds away from pursued cops, and crashes into a highway dividing wall). Natural disasters – a long-time missionary 'perishes' while he is doing a construction project for 'poor persons' in Haiti, when the hurricane strikes with a fury. Diseases – the number cannot be countered of the 'Christian' persons who have died (so young) from cancer and other death-delivering diseases. Why didn't God 'protect' them from the germs (and conditions) that caused the diseases? And why do some very 'wicked' people escape all diseases, and hurricanes and tornadoes and earthquakes and floods, etc., and 'end up' living to a very old age? Why does God 'seem' to take the lives of the 'righteous ones', and He allows the 'God-rejecters' to live to a 'ripe old age'? Mysteries, inequities, injustices – life seems to be 'full of these' troublesome 'matters' (unanswerable questions). And add to all of these 'facts', the fact that (according to the ones who 'research the numbers'), there were more Christians who 'died for their faith' in the 20th century, than in all the previous centuries 'put together'! This may be a 'shock' to you (since we live in a nation that allows the expression of 'religious freedom' – at least to 'some extent').

Because of all the premature (and sometimes unexplainable) deaths of 'believers' (from all kinds of causes), you may have to have faith in 'long trousers' to really believe that you serve a God who is a "Protector"! I believe it is sometimes God's 'perfect will' for a 'believer' to die. When a person is 'advanced' in age, both that person, and God Himself, believes that death is a 'friend', to usher the faithful pilgrim to his heavenly home. When God's faithful (obedient) followers die 'prematurely' (not God's 'perfect' will, but God's 'permissive' will), God will surely COMPENSATE for them in heaven. God will 'make up' for them, what they missed on earth. This fact is 'true' for every unborn baby that was aborted on earth! Whether a believer dies when he is old or when he is young, dies an unexpected death or a sudden (tragic) death, dies a 'comfortable' death or a 'disease-caused' death –regardless, regardless, we must take comfort in what David wrote, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Even though, of course, all persons are not fortunate enough (for some 'strange reason') to enjoy 'divine intervention' – to avoid an accident or a natural disaster of a deadly disease – it is, nevertheless a (documented) 'fact' that some people have been 'spared' a catastrophe, because of a 'protecting angel' (whom some people have actually seen!) God protects us (spiritually) by giving us 'weaponry for our

spiritual battles'. To keep us from being destroyed by the enemy of our soul', God provides the Holy Spirit (our all-sufficient Protector)!

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). A lot about the importance of properly using our 'tongue'. As you 'glance' (or 'gaze') at 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 very deplete 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 ones self to 'apologize'. It takes a 'noble person' to put aside all the excuses, and to 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 worshippers, 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 homosexual 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’!

“Can You Gain ‘Self-Esteem’ From Your Outward World?” People everywhere are in a desperate search for personal self-esteem, that is, a sense of personal value and individual significance! But so many persons (unfortunately) are looking in the ‘wrong place’ or to the ‘wrong people’ to give them a sense of ‘worthwhileness’. Everyone wants to feel that they are ‘accepted’ and ‘acceptable’. Teens and even adults will go to almost any ‘effort’ (‘means’) to be a part of the ‘in group’. A feeling of ‘rejection’ by one’s peers is almost unbearable! I suppose that some ‘teen crimes’ are (at their ‘root’) caused because there is a ‘rebellion’ by the ‘loner teen’ who feels that he had never been accepted by ‘society’ in general, and by his family or friends in particular. Thus, he is extremely angry (outraged) against those who have rejected him (who have turned a ‘cold shoulder’ of judgement against him). Now, he thinks, he will ‘show others around him’ (including those who have long ‘bullied’ him) that he is ‘significant’, even if it means that he ‘kills’ people around him who are ‘innocent’ (like mere children). His ‘violent’ (senseless) actions are the ‘counterattack’ against the actual ones who have terribly mistreated him (or even against others who are the ‘innocent’ scapegoats – the ‘stand-ins’). According to the truth of God’s Word (Holy Bible), a human being is made by a God of love, and therefore the human being (made “in God’s image”) is made to love – and to be loved! A person (teen or otherwise) who has not received love (from his parents or from other ‘significant persons’), this unloved person will probably not know how to love others. Thus, the unloved one (teen) is deplete (in his spirit) of the very greatest need that he, as a human, is created to receive and to give. Such a person (teen or adult) is therefore strongly ‘driven’ to fight back’ – to ‘shout to the world’ that ‘he exists’ and that he is going to ‘have a say’ in his world – even if it is the ‘voice and action of violent reaction’! Most (maybe even all) murderers have not been loved, and they (in turn) have never themselves known how to love, and as a ‘sick human being’ (feeling no sense of genuine ‘significance’ to themselves or to anyone else), they are going to ‘take out their deep hurt and hate’ upon their perceived ‘enemies’ (i.e., upon those who have long ‘put them down’ and ‘despised them’ and ‘ridiculed them’ and ‘overlooked’ them, and sexually abused them, and long neglected them, and belittled them, and under-rated them, and hated them). There is, of course, no ultimate excuse for ‘violence’ (by teens or adults), and the victims of their crimes are to be defended and protected – but, the cause of violence oftentimes ‘boils down’ to the perpetrator being painfully ‘sick’ because of his never discovering true ‘self-esteem’ (genuine significance).

Where is self-esteem found? Not your peers, for the praise of peers is changeable and is often based, not on the facts, but upon the whims of changeable people. The praise of peers so often is conditional – ‘if you do this, then I will accept you.’ Self-worth based on material things is unreliable, for you may suddenly lose your money (and what money can buy). There are adults still hanging on to the symbols of youth – fads and fashions in clothing – as an attempt to maintain a crumbling sense of self-worth. Don’t set your hopes and build your sense of self-worth on popularity, for the world’s popularity is elusive and passing!

Only God can affirm you at the deepest level of your being. There are those who are constantly seeking to be affirmed by others, but who find that even those who are nearest and dearest cannot fill the inner void in their lives. God alone can give you a lasting sense of value. Remember: To have the quiet smile of God’s approval resting on your life is worth more to you than the applause of all of the earth’s kings!

“Have You Ever Been ‘Awestruck’ By The Wonders Of Nature?” Ever since I was a young person (a long time ago), I have been ‘jogging’ – for the sheer ‘enjoyment’ of it, for the obvious ‘health benefits’, but also for the ‘spiritual benefits’ which this ‘outlet’ has afforded me. By the latter, I mean that during my countless ‘solo runs’, I have plenty of time to reflect upon my own life (strengths and weaknesses), time to meditate and worship and praise the God who loves me (and who ‘saved’ me when I was a 11 year old child and who has faithfully guided my life with all of its many ‘ups and downs’, ‘sorrows and joys’). For more than 50 years I have consistently ‘guarded’ my time alone with God (of course, not just during the early morning ‘runs’). Often (as is true of multitudes of God-seeking runners) I have found both comfort and correction from the Creator/Savior whose creation has brought me a sense of ‘awe’ and ‘wonder’ – while I am running. Of course, I do not ‘go as far’ as many persons who substitute times in the out-of-doors for time in the weekly (corporate) worship service – but being alone with God in ‘nature’ is, nevertheless, very helpful to me (and is a ‘complement’ to my corporate worship, or family worship). Even though I try to ‘exercise my will’ each morning to ‘center on my Creator’ (at least, some of the time each morning), most mornings are rather ‘normal’ for me. But ‘consistency’ and ‘routine’ and ‘normal’ – this is the ‘context’ in which occasionally (unpredictably) my ‘dear Lord’ comes to me with a special message (at least, ‘special’ to me).

As I was completing my regular morning ‘jog’, on the morning of May 7, 2008 (I was 63 at the time), several ‘aspects’ of Nature converged in my mind – ‘aspects’ that easily demonstrate the ‘wonders of God’s Creation’. (Common knowledge, known not only to all scientists, but to every ‘lay person’ as well). But the so-called ‘common’ (that I had often thought about before) on that particular morning ‘hit me with new awariness and appreciation’).

- (1) *The BEAUTY of nature. Think of this: The God who created such a beautiful world has to be very beautiful, and the place (Heaven) where God dwells must be indescribably beautiful! (“The river cannot run higher than its source.”).*
- (2) *The amazing ORDER in nature. Future “events” in the movements of planets, etc., hundreds of years from now can be “calculated” accurately, all because the Creator is a “God of Order”, not a God of carelessness and chaos.*
- (3) *Before the POWER of nature (lightning, wind, tornadoes hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes), humans are puny in power and very vulnerable to the destructive forces inherently in Nature. The aforementioned list of ‘natural disasters’ were not a part of God’s original creation; instead, these man-killing powers of nature must be attributed to ‘demonic activity’. The ‘God of love’ (whose original creation, before the ‘historic fall of mankind’ - Genesis 2 – was not a deadly threat to mankind’s survival) – this Beneficent God will surely ‘compensate’ in heaven the loss of all life, due to the misuse of power in nature (as a result of demonic activity).*
- (4) *The MAGNITUDE of nature. The magnitude of creation is a vivid reminder of the greatness, the bigness, the incomprehensibly huge God that we serve.*
- (5) *The amazing VARIETY in nature. I am certainly not a scientist, but even I (a layman) am overwhelmed with the vast number of species in the animal world, the plant world, the world of trees and grasses and vegetation of all kinds! A ‘simple implication’, namely, my God must be a Creator who obviously values and likes variety. What a ‘fascinating and interesting God’ I serve – a God-Creator who created a world with tremendous variety in the realm of human beings! God created each person with unique physical features, with a special_“baggage” of talents, gifts, mental capacities, personality, and temperaments!*

“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 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 describes 'materialism'.

The person of 'common sernse' 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! First, the road of materialism is a dead-end road, 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 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 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! Worldly pleasures are simply a 'perversion' of the true and wholesome and God-given pleasures – pleasures not 'centered in our body' (although there is legitimate sexual pleasures and other bodiy pleasures, given by God), but the pleasures 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 dancee 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 Knowledgee. 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 since 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!

“How ‘Significant’ Is The Bible In Your Life?” Someone said that ‘man is incurably religious’, that man has ‘a God-shaped vacuum’ that desires to be ‘filled with God’. It was the ancient Augustine who said that “man is restless until he rests in God”. Yes, man is ‘born, thirsting for infinity’! Every person has a desire to ‘know God’, whether or not he consciously is aware of this universal human desire! In ‘light’ of these realizations regarding the inherent ‘spiritual nature’ of the human race, (using a simple analogy) it is easy to declare that every person is presently ‘climbing some ladder’, the purpose of which is to lead one closer and closer to his Creator, and eventually to God’s eternal home (which God has specifically prepared for each person) There are many different ‘ladders’ (means of grace) that help individuals ascend toward spiritual fulfillment. One of those very significant (well-known) ‘ladders’ is the BIBLE.

One person (under most difficult circumstances) who found his way to a personal relationship with God, through the Bible, was Jacob DeShazer. Jacob DeShazer, who fought in World War II, was raised in a Christian home, but he had not become a follower of Christ himself. When he became a ‘prisoner of war’ (in a rough Japanese prison camp), he was deeply embittered with hatred for his Japanese guards. He was reduced to ‘skin and bones’ as a result of harsh treatment during the 40 months that he was imprisoned. Physically and spiritually he lay ‘very low’ – barely surviving! But he had a ‘praying mother’ and a ‘merciful God’, even though he was not consciously thinking about these important realities.

Miraculously, a Japanese guard was used by God to do a ‘saving act’ for Jacob DeShazer! This act of mercy probably saved DeShazer’s mental sanity, and certainly it saved his spiritual life. The guard gave DeShazer a copy of the Bible. To occupy his time, DeShazer started to read and memorize large portions of the Scriptures. Through that activity (day after day, for months) this weakened and embittered man was converted to Jesus Christ! He climbed the stairs to a relationship with God (Christ) through reading (memorizing) the Bible. God changed Jacob DeShazer totally! After his conversion, the guards could not understand why DeShazer expressed such love for them! When DeShazer was finally released from prison, he felt God’s call upon him, to eventually return to Japan to be a missionary to the very people who had so cruelly treated him! His work (for decades) in Japan was so effective that, finally, an interesting movie was produced and featured in theaters across America!

“Your words, O God, are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me, and keep me from stumbling.” (Psalms 119:105) ***“The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it strightens us out and helps us do what is right.”*** (II Timothy 3:16)

How significant is the Bible in your own life? Allow me to offer you a ‘personal challenge’! Set aside five minutes of your time – each day – to concentrate on a few verses from the New Testament. Read

consecutively and with an open mind and a responsive spirit. Before you read, breath a short prayer to the One who is the 'Author' of the Bible, and ask Him to give you genuine understanding, and also to give you 'courage' to obey anything that the Bible reveals to you! In one year's time (if you do this consistently), you will be a 'new' person! Just try this!

"Are You On A 'Dead-End' 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 quesitons, '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 someday (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 increases 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 clearer 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, and forgiveness!

"Can An Intelligent Person Believe That A 'Personal God' Exists?" "The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God." (Those are not my words, but the words of God, given in His Holy Word). Some of the most 'intelligent' persons – past and present – have been devoted 'followers' of the God whom they claim 'walks and talks with them'! The arguments (logically-stated) for the existence of God are many and varied (down through the 'ages' and during our contemporary times). The following are a few of those 'arguments' which have made 'sense' to me personally, and which have 'undergirded' my own personal 'faith'.

The existence of an intelligent order points (logically) to an intelligent Creator. Next, amazingly, there is a one-to-one correspondence between internal logic and external laws, which points to a common source of origin, namely God! As every scientist knows, there is the principle of 'entropy'. The Universe is 'running down', a gradual depletion of 'energy'. As is often noted, since the 'clock' (universe) was wound in the beginning, there had to be a Winder of the clock! Where did the universal sense of moral obligation come from? Not from an impersonal 'force' somewhere in the universe. It came from a 'personal being' who has revealed the 'inherent moral order' in the universe. When I 'break' (violate) that moral code (i.e., go against what my conscience 'tells' me) I feel 'bad' (guilty)! There is a personal God in the universe who has clearly revealed His moral expectations (not only through the Ten Commandments, but through the conscience that He gave me). This universal sense of moral obligation points to an objective moral order, but that moral order does not have the 'power' to 'speak' to me personally with an inner persuasion that I have done something 'good' or something 'bad'. My conscience bears witness to the personal existence of God who clearly 'communicates' to me.

As the famous C.S. Lewis has pointed out: the widespread use of 'ethical terminology' in common conversation, is a 'give-away' (evidence) that there is a 'personal God'. My strong convictions, regarding 'Right' and 'Wrong' are useless convictions, unless they are born out of the Objective Moral Law – and the Moral Law points to a 'Personal Lawgiver'! Laws do not 'derive' from inanimate 'substance' in the distant expanses of the Universe! When you observe 'quarreling' between persons, these persons say things like

“That is not fair, I was in the line first, and you ‘broke into the lines’.” (And dozens of other exchanges between ‘angry’ persons, who are contending for ‘justice’). Without an objective moral standard, one cannot prove another person wrong, for each man’s judgment is as valid as another! And why make an excuse for your own personal behavior if you haven’t felt that you have failed to ‘live up’ to a certain, real standard for conduct? The fact that you ‘feel bad’ (when you ‘fail’) is evidence that you have made the God (who is very close to you) ‘feel very bad’. If you are truly (as a human) made ‘in God’s own image’, and if you sometimes ‘feel sad’ because of your failure in your human relationships, this fact is a ‘revelation’ (however small) that truly God (who loves you as His creature) also ‘feels’ very sad! Because you are a created being, and because you are a ‘personal being’, surely God must be (at least) a ‘Personal God’ (with genuine and deep feelings, and with the capacity to love a personal and satisfying ways). Just as it is difficult to imagine a stream which runs higher than its source, so it is inconceivable to imagine an impersonal being who is able to create personal creatures. And most important (regarding the existence of God) – think about the millions of persons (in all ages) who declare that God is a personal presence to them! Widespread moral transformations is only possible because of a Personal transforming God!

“Can You Accept The Three ‘Pies’ Of Christianity?” How accepting are you of ‘believers’ (Christians) who differ from you in the way they worship, and in the way they view the outward world of human events? One of the greatest missionaries of all time (who wrote many books and who preached many thousands of sermons and who delivered multiple lectures – especially in India), many times held up ‘three fingers’ to his congregations (of various nationalities), and he would loudly say ‘Jesus Is Lord’. “Anyone who truly believes that ‘Jesus Is Lord’ is my brother/sister!” So said E. Stanley Jones!

How tolerant are you personally toward those other believers (or groups of believers or ‘strange denominations’) who are vastly different from you? If you like ‘up-beat and fast rock-type’ Christian music, are you accepting of Christians who like ‘slow, worshipful, meditative, ancient hymns’? And what about the ‘loudness’ with which music is ‘played’ in the ‘worship services’? If you have a ‘liking’ for ‘free-style’ and spontaneous services (not ‘rigidly planned’), do you accept ‘fellow believers’ in the highly ritualistic services (well-ordered with the ‘Book of Common Prayer’, or repetition of ancient prayers in the Eastern Orthodox Church which has existed for a thousand years)? We (believers) obviously all have certain (religious) ‘tastes’ and ‘preferences’ – and even believers (who are supposed to be unusually ‘accepting’ and ‘flexible’ and ‘charitable’) – I say, even believers have their ‘comfort zone’. The ‘cheerful’ and ‘free-moving’ charismatic Christians would probably have difficulty appreciating the ‘formal mass’ of the Catholic Church. I listened carefully to the insights of a ‘key lay person’ (an elder in a rather large local Protestant Church) who discussed in considerable ‘detail’ the serious problem that many Protestant Churches (some quite large) regarding the ‘type of music’ that parishioners either ‘like’ or ‘dislike’. He confessed that (since he has carefully observed and ‘studied’ the ‘issues’ surrounding music in his Church), there have been many persons

(both older and younger) who have 'left the church' (recently). Mostly because the 'music was too loud', or because there was not enough of the (older) hymns, etc.

Today and throughout history, doctrinal differences (and differences in 'music taste') have 'divided churches'. Christians (like everyone else) are 'very human' and, according to my friend, selfish. The 'Me generation' is what he said. If a Church is not meeting all my (self-centered) 'needs' (in terms of a lot of 'things' – like the sermon or like the kind of music), then I will 'go from Church to Church' in search of the 'place' that 'best serves my needs'. (These problems are as 'old as the hills'!)

To one young person (who had, amazingly, been in all the 'branches' of Christianity) I used an illustration. I told him the following: Christian believers often have a 'definite preference', as to which 'kind of pie' they prefer—that is, which kind of 'pie' they like best! But if you are a believer who prefers 'Cherry Pie' (the Protestant Faith), it is important that you do not criticize and belittle those believers who happen to prefer 'Peach Pie' (Catholic) or 'Apple Pie' (Orthodox)—both 'flavors' of which are every bit as 'good' as 'Cherry Pie' (Protestantism). All those 'branches' of Christianity are legitimate (right and meaningful) expressions of 'Faith in Christ'. You must never be 'guilty' (in the name of loyalty to your own 'Pie') of attacking another 'branch' of Christianity. The Church of Jesus Christ includes all of those persons who truly love and who truly worship Christ, even though believers have different ways of showing their love and of worshipping the Lord! JESUS IS LORD OF ALL THREE 'PIES'!

"Are 'Heavenly Citizens' Ever Permitted To Visit 'Earthly Inhabitants'?" During our Christian race of life, "we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." (Hebrews 12:1) There is abundant evidence that, when God deems it helpful, God allows earthly visits from these heavenly saints – all for the purpose of encouraging Christians who may be struggling under some special trial during their race of life.

When my great 'Aunt Mary' (who lived with my grandmother, because my aunt had been crippled throughout her lifetime, because of contracting polio when she was very young), I say when she died, my grandmother was quite 'devastated'. They were very 'close' and loved each other. God knew of her great sorrow, and God sent 'Aunt Mary' (shortly after her death) to briefly 'see' my grandmother. One night God gave my grandmother a vision of her sister. 'Aunt Mary' was dressed in garments of pure white, her face radiant with the countenance of heavenly strength and health. My grandmother knew that 'Aunt Mary' was with Jesus. Suspended in mid-air, looking upwards toward heaven, 'Aunt Mary' seemed to be saying to my grandmother, "Come on up, Edna."

A few years ago, my wife's mother had a most wonderful experience. The following is her first-hand account: "I find it difficult to share publicly a precious experience that God gave to me quite a few years

ago. I had lost my father, and my mother lived alone for a few years. Her health was not good and she finally consented to surgery. We had brought her home from the hospital and I was staying with her. One night I had checked many times to see if she was resting. I had gone to sleep, but suddenly was wide-awake. I got out of bed thinking I had heard mother. I went to the door and I saw my father standing, looking in on mother. I said, 'Don't waken her dad, she has been so sick.' He turned his head and looked at me. He said so quietly, 'I'm not going to waken her. I just wanted to see that she is all right. I want to go back.' He turned and without seeming to walk, he was across the living room and through the windows. I watched him cross the yard and, although it was very dark, I saw him as he crossed the small pasture. I was not frightened, but was filled with a beautiful peace. I don't mourn for my dad, though I still miss his gentleness and concern. I am sure that at the resurrection we will have bodies we will recognize."

On the night of August 14, 1981 (Friday night), my brother called me and told me that 'one of God's children went home tonight'. Then he told me that his beloved 15 year old daughter (Sharla) died (as a result of a rare seizure) while she was having fun riding a roller coaster, at a well-known Denver Amusement Park. My brother was totally 'devastated', but (as a dedicated Christian) he declared (regarding the terrible accident) 'God makes no mistakes!' He asked me (a minister) to perform the funeral message a few days later. Just 13 days after her death, God mercifully allowed Sharla to briefly 'visit' her father. My brother recorded the amazing incident. It is much longer than I can now share. He writes; "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 (her sister). Sharla then kissed, hugged, caressed, and expressed her love..."

"How Do You React To The 'Christ Child'?" The Christ of Bethlehem is the Christ of the Ages. Christ is ever contemporary and He confronts every age with His presence and His demands. All men/women today who meet Christ, react to Him in one of three ways. Herod the king, the priests and scribes, and the Wise Men each represent one of the three types of reactions to Christ.

Hostility: Think of Herod. He represents those who react with hatred and hostility. Herod tried to destroy the Christ Child, but he was unsuccessful. Men can never destroy Christ or His message. The message of the Gospel (Good News) may be either accepted or rejected, but it can never be eliminated. It is like a flame that can never be extinguished or quenched. Men (as in the 'case' of Herod of old) try to put Christ out of their minds, but their conscience betrays them and continues to speak out for Christ and Right (moral order). Why do men seek to destroy Christ and His messengers? It is because Christ reveals things as

they really are! “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in God’s sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of God with whom we have to do” (to whom we all will someday give an account of our lives). (Hebrews 4:13) Men hate Christ because Christ will not let them have their own (wicked) way!

Indifference: Think of the Chief Priests and the Scribes. They represent people who are merely ‘indifferent’ to Christ and His claims and His Church. Among the many reasons why people choose to be ‘indifferent’ to Christ, three reasons come easily to mind. (1) Some are indifferent because they believe the Church has been a failure. As a pastor for 27 years in Fort Collins, CO., I heard this ‘excuse’ many times! In all honesty, I must say, however, that some people who expressed disappointment with the ‘local churches’, were not ‘turned off’ to Christ Himself. But, there were others who really were indifferent to the living Christ, but who used the failure of the Church as an ‘excuse’ (a ‘shield’) for their ‘heart indifference’ to Christ. (2) Some are indifferent because of their present preoccupation with the cares of this earthly life. No time for a serious commitment to the living Christ, because the ‘things of this world’ preoccupy their time and attention. Some say they might give serious thought to Christ, but not now. Someone said (with vividness of language) that ‘the road to hell is paved with good intentions’! (3) Some are indifferent because they attempt to be neutral to Christianity. But remember: An indecision to follow Christ and an attempted neutrality, automatically becomes a decision against Christ. Said Jesus: “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” (Matthew 12:30)

ADORATION: Think of the Wise Men. They represent all who react to Christ with adoring worship. The Wise Men sought Christ until they found the Baby in Bethlehem! The Wise Men offered gifts to the Christ Child! Remember: The essence of true adoration is self-surrender and presentation of ourselves to God. “Who answers Christ’s insistent call, must give himself, his life, his all without one backward look.” When one considers the supreme sacrifice of Christ (on the cruel Cross of Mount Calvary), he/she becomes “lost in wonder, love, and praise”, and he/she is constrained to say, “Here, Lord, I give myself to thee, tis all that I can do.” When one bows in adoration to Christ, he acknowledges that Christ truly is the ‘Way, the Truth, and the Life’! What think ye of the Christ Child?” **HOSTILITY, INDIFFERENCE, OR ADORATION? WHAT IS YOUR CHOICE?**

“What If There Were No Resurrection?” God is creator of all ‘natural laws’. They ‘belong’ to Him! It is altogether ‘reasonable’ to think that God could introduce a ‘supernatural event’ in history, if it would serve His eternal purpose. A universe which has redemptive purposes at its heart makes the resurrection of Jesus both a philosophical feasibility and a moral necessity (for without the resurrection, no human being could be saved for heaven)!

What if there was NO resurrection? Well:

- (1) ***Your Faith in God's Love is in Vain. If Jesus was the sinless Son of God and if God would have allowed His Son to stay in the grave permanently to rot, then we would have to conclude that God was both unjust and loveless.***
- (2) ***Your Faith in God's Integrity Is In Vain. If Jesus would have remained in the grave, then God's promises would prove to be false and God's claim to Integrity would be invalidated.***
- (3) ***Your faith in God's Power Is In Vain. If Christ would not have been raised from the dead, then it would be true to say that death is stronger than life, evil is stronger than righteousness, Satan is stronger than God! The resurrection is what makes Jesus the conquering King and Satan the defeated foe!***
- (4) ***Your Faith In God's Justice Is In Vain. If there is no resurrection, then there is no hope that evil men will be brought to justice, that evil will be destroyed, that Satan will be vanquished, that righteous men will ultimately be recognized and rewarded!***
- (5) ***Your Faith In Christ's Righteousness Is In Vain. Jesus' claim to be sinless would be invalidated without the resurrection. If Jesus would have stayed in the tomb, one would have to conclude that Jesus was no different than any other man (just a great 'hero'), that Jesus was (like everyone else) a sinner and thus subject to the penalty of sin which is death!***
- (6) ***Your Faith In God's Power To Change Human Nature Is In Vain. If there was no resurrection, then there is no power to transform people's lives, and without moral transformation (spiritual conversion) people who die are lost eternally! The Christ who defied the power of death and who left the tomb, is the same Christ whose power is able to accomplish the humanly impossible – to change a bad man into a truly good man!***
- (7) ***Your Faith In The Possibility of Establishing A Personal and Intimate Relationship With God Is Futile. The resurrection proved that Jesus' blood (unlike the blood of all human beings) was, indeed, pure and sinless. Now, based on Jesus' perfect righteousness, any sinful human being is invited to 'plead the blood' of Jesus as the means by which his/her sins can be cleansed away – and a new and glorious 'love relationship' can be established (and maintained) between mere humans and the Loving Savior! A***

personal and warm relationship with God – because of the ‘work’ of Christ (on the Cross and because of the ‘empty tomb’)!

- (8) *Your Belief That Your Deepest Aspirations Will Eventually Be Fulfilled Hereater Is All In Vain. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no resurrection for humans and without resurrection for humans there is no opportunity for life’s deepest aspirations to find fulfillment in the ‘immortal realm’.*
- (9) *Your Inner Desire To Have A Permanent Existence With A Recognizable Spiritual Body After Physical Death Is All In Vain. Belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus gives the foundation of hope in the subsequent resurrection of the body of true believers! Jesus said, “Because I live, you too will live.” He said, “In My Father’s House are many mansion; I go to prepare a place for you.” But that promise would be an empty (false) promise, if Jesus had not been raised from the dead! The Resurrection of Jesus is the ‘Foundation of Christianity’. All else in Christianity is the ‘Superstructure’!*

“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 fate. 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!

"Should The Bible Be Taught In Our Public Schools?" *When I first came to Fort Collins (in my early 20's), more than 40 years ago, to pastor a Methodist Church, I came to this 'fair city' with a strong 'drive' - first, to preach the Gospel of Christ, and secondly, to encourage the public schools to allow all teens (perhaps even children) to seriously study the Bible (as history and as literature). Just previous to my coming to the city (that I soon learned greatly to 'love'), the United States Supreme Court had 'dealt' with the controversial issue of whether or not the Bible should properly be taught in the public schools in America. The outcome? The opinion of the highest court in the Land? The court in its ruling , Abington etc.,' not only said that the Bible could be taught in the public schools, but the Court (in its 'tone') actually encouraged the teaching of the Bible in the public schools! A few words from that ruling: "IT CERTAINLY MAY BE SAID THAT THE BIBLE IS WORTHY OF STUDY FOR ITS LITERARY AND HISTORIC QUALITIES."*

With the very positive 'ruling' of the U.S. Supreme Court (regarding the study of the Bible in the public schools in America), I should have gone directly to the leaders of the School System, to present my request that the Bible be taught (very soon) in all the curriculum. Instead, I led a 'petition campaign', and I (with the

help of others) collected about 900 names of persons who solidly supported the proposal (to the School) to add the Bible to the curriculum in our Schools.

At my appointment with the 'Curriculum Director' for the entire School System (I think he was a Mr. Smeltzer), I experienced a courteous (if not totally 'warm') reception, and he was so impressed with my knowledge and my efforts (the petition drive that collected so many names). He told me that he would 'follow through' on this request (since it was, obviously, very worthy and definitely 'legal'). I never knew, for sure, what 'steps' he took to implement the request, but I understood that he, indeed, arranged for the Bible to be included (in some fashion) in the curriculum (at the high school level). Since that time, I have often wondered if our School System has taken seriously the opportunity (to teach the Bible) which the U.S. Supreme Court has 'afforded'. Not only 'Permission', but apparently 'Encouragement' to teach the Bible! I wonder how many actual (full) classes - courses that teach the Bible as History and as Literature - are being taught in Middle School and in High School. I am not thinking about 'passing references' to the Bible (in history and literature classes), but I am thinking about serious study of the Bible!

Two scholars (James Panoch and David Barr), who together wrote an entire book, in which they seriously look at the subject of the Bible in Public Schools, are rather comprehensive in their treatment of this subject. They competently answer scores of questions that many persons bring to this 'controversial' subject. They are most 'objective' in their perspective, but are very sympathetic to the Court's decision (and 'opinion' that the Bible should be taught in public schools). They note, "The founding of our country is heavily steeped in Biblical connotations of every sort. Literature and the arts have been greatly influenced by the Bible. The Bible has influenced the basic philosophy of Western civilization. The high value of the individual soul, a Biblically inspired concept, serves as the real basis of Western culture. As long as man lives on earth, the Bible will be valid and illuminating. As a piece of literature that reflects inner emotions the Bible has no equal."

Decision-makers in our Public School System, please add the Bible to the TOTAL CURRICULUM!

"Does God Love 'All Persons' Or Only 'Some Persons'?" What is your personal 'response' to the following two Scriptural references? "God is not willing that any should perish, and God is giving more time for sinners to repent." (2 Peter 3:9) "This is good and pleases God our Savior, for he longs for all to be saved and to understand this truth: That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and – Christ Jesus, himself man - is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for all mankind." (1 Timothy 2:3-5) You cannot have it 'both ways'! Either God loves all persons and He wants all persons to repent and to be 'saved', or God does not actually love persons and God does not want all persons to repent and to be 'saved'. If you have a 'warm approval' of the 'universal viewpoint' (i.e., that all persons are 'savable' - not automatically 'saved'), then you must 'repudiate' (reject) the 'narrow view' of God's love and of His

'salvation gift'. This latter view regarding God's selection of only certain persons to be 'saved' and to go to heaven - this popular view is called 'Calvinism'. There are 'several points' to this 'system of belief', but Predestination is the 'premise' for all the other 'sequential points'. Here, I center on the 'premise' of the doctrine.

Frank Schaeffer, respected writer and church leader (and son of the famous Francis Schaeffer) departed from this 'doctrinal camp' with great abandon when he could no longer accept a view of God's will (purpose) which he strongly believed contradicted the 'picture' of God (Jesus) in the New Testament. Hear his 'outcry' (defiance) against the doctrine of Calvinism (which he, for years, had believed): "The Calvinist 'God' was a great unfathomable Zeus-like computer in the sky who arbitrarily saved some while damning others - an irrational perhaps berserk Augustinian phenomenon no more loving or predictable than a forest fire. The 'God' of Calvinism emerged as inexplicably less merciful than most of his human creatures. God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation, before the foundation of the world, rests solely in His sovereign will. His choice of certain individual sinners to be saved is not based on any criterion that is humanly knowable. Election, therefore, is not determined by or conditioned upon, what a man will do. On the contrary, God gives faith to individuals He selects. God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice to follow Christ, is the only cause of salvation. This must be so since humanity has no capacity to choose since the will and the intellect are utterly depraved."

CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION REPUDIATES MAN'S FREE WILL - The Bible teaches that, even though God is sovereign (all-powerful), God chooses to allow every person freely to choose either to accept or to reject God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION VIOLATES GOD'S JUSTICE - Any sensitive and honest person would quickly conclude that, for God to predestinate any person to eternal damnation (independent of that person's 'free will choice') would be an act of 'greatest injustice'. It is 'harsh' to say, but I don't see much difference between the 'God' of Calvinism, and the 'Devil' himself. The only difference is this: The 'former' wants (wills) that most of the human race go to hell; the latter (devil) wants everyone to go to hell! The 'God' of Calvinism is not the God of the New Testament (that is best known through the all-together loving Christ!)

CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION IS A DENIAL OF GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY - The 'true God' is pictured like a 'Good Shepherd' in pursuit of His 'one lost sheep'! Like a Father who waits patiently for His prodigal son to come home to His loving embrace. Remember: God loves all, God wants to save all, Christ died for all, the Holy Spirit calls all. How wide is His mercy? "GOD SO LOVED ALL THE WORLD". YOU TOO!

"Does God 'Will' The Death Of Every Person?" As a pastor of one local church in Ft. 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 Ft. 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!

"HOW HAVE YOU LEARNED TO 'COPE' WITH YOUR MULTIPLE FEARS?" It seems that 'fear' is a universal challenge to all humanity. Think of the 'common' types of fears - fear of the 'unknown', of 'ill health', of exposure of our past life of 'wrongdoing', of the 'dying process' that leads to the 'terror of death', of inadequacy on the job (failure), of losing our job (financial poverty), fear of exposure of our ignorance in the presence of 'brilliant people', etc. etc. etc. Yes, these 'common fears' have the power to 'eat away' from our own happiness and confidence, as well as the happiness of those around us!

Of course, you and I well know that there are certain 'fears' that sometimes 'haunt' us - sometimes in our 'secret times' (alone). Most of us have some 'fears' that don't bring much 'stress' to us, and which 'we can live with' (with no moral or personal debilitation). Here are some of my 'fears' (that I am well aware of) - some of which are 'serious concerns' and others that have little 'affect' on my everyday lifestyle. I fear: rattle snakes, pool water (for I never learned to swim), heights (I will never do 'roofing' for a job), my beloved wife (of 45 years) dying and leaving me a widower, my becoming bedfast for years before I die, my offending members of my family or friends by my 'insensitive speech', physical pain (I am a 'chicken' when it comes to pain; I have a low tolerance for pain), as a Christian, my fear that I might 'grieve' the Holy Spirit because of my moral disobedience, the 'deceptive plots' of evil persons against me (of which I have had some very painful experiences), the eventual 'downfall' of my beloved Country (because serious concerns about God, Bible, Prayer have been taken out of the public schools and the 'public square', and I know, from reading the Bible, that there is a limit to how far God will extend His mercy towards a nation that has 'left its spiritual heritage').

For many years I (who have had a 'battle with fear' during my long life) have been quite 'aware' of the Biblically-based 'guidelines' for effectively dealing with fear. To the extent that I have 'practiced' those 'guidelines', to that same extent I have experienced victory over 'fear'. I must admit (ashamedly) that I (a long-time minister) have found myself (too many times) 'filled with worry and anxiety and fear'. I have been, at times, almost 'paralyzed' with fear, and it is then that I have (many times) had to 'call out to the God of mercy and love and healing'- for his divine intervention. When you are 'most desperate' (in the midst of life's difficult trials) you must earnestly pray (really 'talk' to God, beyond mere 'casual mouthing of a few words'). I have recognized (along with Abraham Lincoln during the War) that I had nowhere to turn except the Lord. (Prayer should, however, be our 'first resort', not our 'last resort', during the trials of life).

- (1) Face fear and determine to overcome it.
- (2) After facing fears, we must find out why we have these fears (perhaps with the help of

another person, who can help us to be objective, aside from our 'wallowing in grief').

- (3) We must constantly affirm our faith in Jesus' power to overcome our fears. If we have not accepted Jesus in a personal way, then it is time to turn from our 'old life' (repent) and to turn to Christ (expressing faith in what He did on Calvary to remove our sins). Many of our fears are immediately gone when we know we are forgiven persons (adopted into the 'family of God').*
- (4) We must practice faith every day in order to defeat our fears. Make faith affirmations during difficult circumstances, such as "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Jesus said that He would never leave you nor forsake you.*

Jesus knows perfectly the kinds of fears you face, and He will 'speak' peace to your troubled heart. He cares!

"Do You Know That 'Valentine's Day' Is A Religious Holiday?" In the third century (A.D.) the Roman emperor Claudius ordered all Romans to worship twelve gods, and he made it a crime punishable by death to associate with Christians. "But" as one reported, "Valentinus was dedicated to the ideals of Christ, and not even the threat of death could keep him from practicing his beliefs. He was arrested and imprisoned." Awaiting execution (for his dynamic faith in Christ), this committed man was asked by a parent of a child, to teach her blind child. He not only taught her a lot of knowledge (mathematics, etc.) but, through the power given to him, Valentinus experienced the miracle of healing of blindness of the child! On the eve of his death, Valentinus wrote a note to the child (Julia), and urged her to stay close to God, and he signed the note "From Your Valentine." On FEBRUARY 14, 270 A.D. the sentence was carried out. So, on February 14, 'Valentine's Day' love notes are sent to persons around the world.

How tragic, in light of the 'sacrificial love' (unselfish and self-giving love) which 'Valentine's Day' represents, that there is likely more 'sensual-sexual love' expressed on February 14, than perhaps any other day of the year! That can't, of course, be 'proved', but there will be many men who will 'woo' women (their girlfriend or some other woman) to the romantic setting of a lovely dining area (for a delicious meal), with the 'expectation' that the 'date' will later in the evening 'enjoy some fun' in a motel room (or perhaps even in the back seat of a car)! Lust - using the body of another human, as a means of bringing temporary sensual 'thrill', but with no commitment to a lasting relationship). Some men even 'brag' about the 'number of catches' they have gotten, through the years of their lust-filled life! How very opposite to the genuine (sacrificial) love of Valentinus (deep and suffering love for his Savior, and tender and caring love for his fellow human beings). Giving of himself totally - how different from lust which takes from others totally and selfishly!

Wholesome love is seen when a man (with a pure heart and a generous hand) gives a 'skillfully written' Valentine's Card to his beloved wife (with a few roses). Followed by tender words, and later (in the spirit of gentleness and understanding of his wife's true needs) appropriately takes her into his embrace in the 'love act' of 'full and mutual giving'.

Sex is (1) God's 'invention' and is greatly blessed by the Creator, not a shameful, guilt-producing act between two unmarried persons (don't forget one of many Scriptures which declare that "the man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he brings destruction to his own soul.") (2) Sex between a married couple is intended for 'pleasure' (God created our bodies for sensual pleasure) (3) Sex (when the 'two become one flesh') is meant to 'symbolize' the unity of the three persons of the holy Trinity, and it is to symbolize the 'oneness' of the couple in a lifetime commitment. (4) Obviously, God created sex as His method to keep the human race alive and growing (God places a great premium upon the birth and raising of children, even though, of course, not all couples could or should 'have children')

Love (not lust) is a matter of the 'commitment of the whole person' - body, mind, emotions, will! A love that goes far beyond mere 'passing feelings' or 'physical attraction' or 'pleasant agreements' or 'similar likes'! I asked the elderly wife of a couple (who ended up living together for 73 years), what she and her husband did when they had a serious disagreement. She said, "We go to separate rooms for a while, then 'make up', and never go to bed with anger!"

"What Is Your Reaction To The "Ten Commandments?" For the sake of a simple 'illustration', think with me, for a few moments, about the old-fashioned 'floor furnace' (which, of course, appeared only in homes which were built many years ago). Centered in the middle of the living room, the heat from the underneath furnace came 'billowing out' of the furnace - to heat the entire house. I can imagine the caring mother, with several 'preschool children', declaring to these children: "The floor furnace is 'off-limits'. Do not step on it, lest you 'burn yourself' (your bare feet). Now, obey your mother! Period!"

In this 'word picture', think of the floor furnace as the Laws of God (the Ten Commandments and other important Laws of God). There are three different reactions to the 'floor furnace' (as there are to the 10 Commandments). (1) Defiance (outright disobedience to the 'voice' of the mother (i.e. defiance against God and His Holy Commandments); (2) Ambivalence (double-mindedness) - (the children sometimes obeying the command, and sometimes the children being attracted to the floor furnace, just as some persons at times seek to obey the commands, and at other times people are inclined to 'step on the commands', the 'floor furnace'; (3) Surrender to God and allow God to 'change your inner nature', so that you will gladly respect and obey the commands of God (just like submissive children gladly obey their mother's declaration, not to step on the 'floor furnace').

1. The first reaction is Defiance (Rebellion) - Relativism! "If I want an abortion, I will get one, and no one will dare tell me what to do with my own body." "The German people are the superior race, and all other races must 'bow the knee' to us." Relativism - "No 'North Star' to guide me in my moral decisions. I will do 'what feels right' to me!" "Everyone does what is right in his own eyes." (Ancient Israel) Relativism (very self-centered) eventually leads to chaos and destruction!
2. The second reaction is Legalism. "Trying to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" is futile. Why? Because the 'corrupt nature' with which all humans are born (original sin) keeps a sincere person from reaching God's standard of 'moral excellence' (the holy laws of God). "There is none that is righteous, no not one. We have all gone astray and followed our own evil ways." The Law of God can be likened to a 'Mirror' - showing us our sinful condition. But a 'Mirror' can only reveal, it cannot 'save' (change human nature). A disobedient child was told to go and sit in a corner. After a while, the little boy shouted to his mother: "I am sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up in the inside." Defiance and rebellion - that is true of all humans! Because of our 'fallen nature' (our selfishness and pride and independent spirit) we are incapable of keeping the Laws of God. We are (sadly) 'drawn' to the 'floor furnace', and we seem to believe that 'stolen fruit is sweetest of all!' Why do we find it so 'easy' to break the Commands?
3. The third reaction is Grace. When you 'lay down your arms' and surrender to Christ, you will be 'inwardly changed' in your 'nature'. The love of God is "shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit". As a 'new person in Christ Jesus' (truly converted within yourself), you now have a deep love for God - a passionate desire to please Him, in all you do and say and think. Amazingly, you find yourself with a growing 'feeling' of love for all persons (even for enemies).

Should Every Baby Have A 'Right To Live'? What would happen to you, as a woman, if you decided to 'rob' an eagle's nest, to 'exercise your freedom' to destroy the eagle's egg? You know that you would not 'dare' do such an 'evil' thing! That is, unless you wanted to pay a large fine, and probably spend a few days in the county jail!

What would happen to you, as a woman, if you decided (in the 'name of personal rights' and 'personal freedom') to go to a doctor to have the 'procedure done' (destroying the 'human egg'- killing the developing human being within you)? No 'big deal', for no one can tell you how you should treat your own human body! After all, it is your 'own body' - and what is in your 'womb' belongs alone to you. There is no so-called

Yes, a gift that involves great sacrifice 'to r'life' within you - only extra 'tissue' that is worth very little! And not even 'God' (if there is a 'God') has any jurisdiction over your body! And it is not 'convenient' for you to have a child (or another child) - a child that you did not plan, and a child that you do not 'want'! Don't tell me that the act of 'abortion' is the most 'selfish thing' I could decide to 'do' - that is 'my own business'! If there is a 'Great White Throne Judgment' (following my physical death) - a 'Day of Final Accountability' where all my 'earthly deeds' will be 'judged' by a 'Supreme Being' - well, I will 'take my chances' and, as 'practically-minded' (earthly-oriented) person, I don't have time to even think about the future! I feel 'rather comfortable' with my decision to get an abortion, for, after all, there have been about 50 million other 'fetuses' (extra tissues) which have been 'cleansed out of the wombs of other women' who didn't choose to let the 'little creature' fully develop! 'Freedom' to be the women that we choose to be (granted by the highest court in the Country in 1973) - that is 'all that counts'! So, I am an 'independent, modern-day woman', and I am not about to let anyone 'take away my own personal freedom'! The 'radical' (hateful) 'conservative Christians' can leave me alone, and they don't have a right to 'champion their cause' (of 'moral uprightness') with the purpose of making me 'feel guilty'! Maybe I don't want to bring 'the little thing' inside of me, to 'full term', and go through the 'pains of childbirth', only to give up my 'baby' for adoption! Who are they (those conservative 'right to life' advocates) to 'tell me what to do'? Who are they to tell me that 'life begins at conception', and that, to abort means 'taking the life of a never-dying soul'? Why do they keep telling me that the DNA of a human being is 'established' at the very time that 'the sperm enters the egg'? Why do they keep telling me that there is an amazing 'heart beat' (in what I call 'the little creature') just a few weeks after 'conception'? Evidence of 'real life', independent of myself - that is what they tell me! There is 'no right' to destroy this living and developing 'human being'! They tell me that God chose me to be the 'proud mother' of a beautiful baby boy/girl! A divinely-given gift from heaven! A gift that shall give 'untold happiness' also! And, I am told, that there will be some loving persons (at least one person, if not the father) who will give 'loving support' to me, as I give birth to the developing child within me - and during the many years in which the child will become a maturing person! In spite of my 'self-centered' approach to life, in general, and as it applies to my attitude of 'having a baby', these so-called 'radical conservatives' have tried to express a lot of love and concern and compassion - and they have actively offered practical 'aid' and support to me. Maybe I should seriously (and prayerfully?) consider the 'eternal value' of the 'little one' inside of my womb! Maybe it is true that there is a 'loving Creator' who has given me the amazing 'privilege' of 'bearing a child' and 'raising a child' to become a responsible and loving adult (different from my attitude of 'women's rights').

"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 se-

rious 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 ministers'). The name of the book was rather 'shocking' to many psychologists: 'WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?' Imagine a well-renown 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 Ten 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, Psalms 32 and 51). In deep humility, he confessed all his sins (I John 1:9).

"How Do You 'Cope' With Loneliness?" The great evangelist, Billy Graham, often during his massive crusades, preached on the subject of 'Loneliness'. He thought that 'loneliness' was one of the greatest maladies (hardships) that people ever experienced.

Allow me (concisely) to share some of my experiences with loneliness. Even though I was only 11 years old when I became a believer in Christ, my conversion was 'deep' and very meaningful. I began to memorize entire chapters in the New Testament, and I spent a lot of time alone in prayer (along the creek bank in my small community). Because of my brand new (and glorious) freedom which I felt (as a fast growing child of God), I was looked at (by my fellow students, during Junior and Senior High) as 'religious and a little different'. I did not want to 'be different' (to draw attention to myself), but I realized that I could have few friends in a secular school environment. I tried to be friendly to all persons (including teachers), but I soon realized that I was not 'one of them'. The obvious 'worldliness' in behavior (from both students and teachers) brought 'distress' to my inner spirit. I sometimes read my Bible during 'study hall'. Yes, at times, I definitely felt ostracized from the 'in group' - and I definitely (most of the time during those 6 years of public school education) felt Lonely.

I felt lonely when I left for college (when I was 17 years old). The first ten weeks away from my beloved parents, I found myself weeping at times (alone). The song 'Five hundred miles away from home' (speaking of loneliness) made me 'cry like a baby'! The college (in Kansas) where I was a student, was almost exactly 500 miles from my home in Colorado! I was less lonely my last two years of college, for I was seriously dating a young lady (who later became my wife - now of 45 years!) When many parishioners (in my church where I was the pastor for 27 years) - when these parishioners moved to another city, I greatly missed them (some of them my personal friends). A sense of loneliness, simply because of 'change of location'. Unfortunately, there were many couples (far too many couples) in 'my church' who decided (because of unresolved conflict) to 'call it quits' (divorce). Again, I experienced grief for these 'broken persons', for I know God 'hates divorce' (Malachi 2). What loneliness these persons experienced, following their divorce (especially when some of them had been together in companionship for many years, before 'tragic circumstances' hit them)! Is there any greater loneliness than when a 'divorced person' has to spend many hours alone - in a newly rented apartment, and when such a person is often 'criticized' by former friends (who can't empathize, for they have never experienced the agony of divorce). Many former 'friends' leave the now divorced person! That spells 'hurt' and great 'loneliness'!

Of course, I don't have all the answers to the question: "How Do I Cope With Loneliness?" But here are a few suggestions: (1) Find a personal relationship with your God - with the One who loves you and who desires to fellowship with you throughout all of life's experiences; (2) Remember that all the 'separations' in your life (which bring 'loneliness') are intended to be 'used' by God to prepare you for the ultimate separation - the separation of your body from your spirit (physical death). If you are following the 'Good Shepherd',

you will not be alone when you die! "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." (3) Forgive those who separated from you unjustly and hurtfully. Release them to God!

"How Strong Is Your Belief In The 'Power Of Prayer'?" Do you personally believe in 'prayer' - that 'prayer is powerful', that God truly does 'answer your prayers', that God often 'uses' the 'mysterious power' that resides in 'prayer' to actually 'change events' in your life (and in the life of the world as a whole)?

The Bible says, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Either you pray, or you 'faint' amidst the problems that encompass you! Why pray? Because God commands us to pray - period! Pray because God knows what is best for you (after all, He made you and He knows 'how you tick')! Pray - for God greatly desires your personal friendship (communion)! Pray - for you yourself need strength and comfort which only your Creator can give to you! Pray - for others need the healing which your prayers can make possible!

Jesus often prayed (at all times, but especially during the pre-dawn hours). If Jesus felt the need to pray to His Heavenly Father, how much more do I (a member of a 'fallen race') need the 'touch from the Holy One'! Jesus' practice of prayer demonstrated His belief that this is a purposive universe (not a mechanical universe) in which God wills for man to cooperate with God in fulfilling God's eternal purposes. Prayer is necessary because man cannot help carry out God's purposes through his life without knowledge of those purposes and strength to fulfill these purposes, both of which comes through prayer. Prayer is fellowship and through fellowship with God, man becomes like God, thus fulfilling man's purpose for creation and thus fulfilling God's desire for companionship with Man. When we pray, we (of course) are not informing God of 'things' that He does not know, any more than a small child informs his earthly father of 'things' that he needs (like food and clothing and other 'basics'). A human father knows a child's needs without the child ever asking the father for gifts and necessities, but the father, nevertheless, desires the child to ask, in order to deepen the love relationship between father and son.

It is apparent, from an overview of Biblical history (as well as from a brief view of so-called 'secular history') that there have been many 'changes' (even some 'reversals') in events, largely because of the prayers of sincere persons who have 'held on to God' in earnest 'intercessory prayer'. Think of the events of W.W.II that 'turned around' because many people were praying! The events of Bible times were drastically influenced (changed) because God's people 'stood in the gaps', because they prayed to a 'prayer-answering', 'miracle-giving' God! There are some people who believe in a 'spiritual version' of 'whatever will be, will be' - that, because God is all-powerful, His 'perfect will' will be accomplished, regardless of what (evil) men will do. They believe that God works 'unilaterally', - that is, 'by Himself' with no involvement with His (sinful) creatures. But the Bible, in contrast to this view of a God who is 'detached' from mankind, teaches that God has chosen to 'limit His own infinite power', in order to 'partner' with humans - to accomplish His divine pur-

pose for the world that He created! God and Man working together - a cooperative relationship that defines 'true love'! And prayer is a 'love relationship' between a 'small human' and a 'big God'! Many changes in this world can only 'happen' through the 'ministry of prayer'! Are you willing to become a 'prayer warrior'? It will take a lot of time, effort, and practice! But Prayer is the greatest privilege known unto human beings! Remember:

"A good man's prayer is powerful and effective." (James 5:16) "If my people will humble themselves, pray, turn from wicked ways, I will forgive them and will heal their land."

"How Highly Do You 'Regard' The Human Body?" For the last several decades of my life, I have given considerable 'thought' to this question, and I concluded (very simply) that there are basically three 'attitudes' that people have regarding the 'human body'. (1) Worship it, (2) Despise it, (3) Honor it. In many different ways (through various 'principles') the Bible strongly teaches us that we are to 'honor the human body'. The following 'principles' (all Biblically-based) have given to me a much greater appreciation for the 'value' of the human body, than would be possible otherwise. The Bible teaches me that I am not to 'worship' the body (which, of course, is subject to death and eventual 'dust'); neither am I to 'despise' the body (as many 'pagan' religions and false philosophies throughout history have done). There is so much that could be discussed (and written) about this subject (which I have done in other settings), but I can only (in brief outline, in this setting) share some important 'principles' (all of which directly or indirectly advocate 'honoring' the human body). In addition, I will share a few of the applications for living, from these principles.

- 1. CREATION OF MANKIND. The Bible says, "God gives to all life, and breath, and all things. For in God we live, and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28). Application: Does a doctor or a consenting parent have any moral 'right' to kill any of God's unborn off springs? God gave the conception and the growth to the baby, and no human (parent) has a right to take this life!*
- 2. INCARNATION PRINCIPLE. The greatest fact of human history is the fact that God became a man, embodying Himself in human flesh. The human form (including the 'form' of the developing baby in the womb) has deity stamped upon it, and therefore this 'never-dying' (developing baby) is very sacred to God. No one should 'kill' what God has created. One who does so (based on his/her own selfish motives) will have to 'answer to God' someday!*
- 3. COMPASSIONATE LIFE OF JESUS. Christ's responses and attitudes toward people, as He lived and moved among individuals and among the crowds in Palestine, is the*

model for the followers of Christ to imitate. Christ truly loved people, and so must we, if we are to be truly human. The compassionate Christ loves the most 'vulnerable' (weak) ones - namely, unborn ones and small dependent children. Jesus said, "Let the little children come unto me!" Do you think that such compassion is compatible with the cruel act of killing little ones in the womb? Never!

4. **JESUS' ATONING DEATH.** *No man/woman can be called valueless for whom Christ died! Christ died for the 50 million babies who have been killed in their mother's womb, that is, Christ died so that He could give them an abundant life on earth, and an eternal life in heaven. Yes, Christ's desire to live and move in their earthly body - this divine purpose was forfeited because of 'kill-happy' humans (parents and a consenting doctor).*
5. **PRINCIPLE OF THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE HUMAN BODY.** *Our bodies are the 'temple of the Holy Spirit' and they do not belong to us. We are to care for 'God's property', and never destroy His property(including abortion).*
6. **PRINCIPLE OF THE SUPREME LAW OF LOVE.** *God (by definition) is Love, and through His Holy Spirit, He gives us His type of (divine) love. Possessing His love in our lives is certainly not compatible with killing small innocent (totally vulnerable) developing babies!*
7. **PRINCIPLE OF LOVE AS COMPASSIONATE ACTION TOWARDS THE HELPLESS AND NEEDY.** *Who is more 'helpless' and 'needy' than 'unborn babies'? They must be protected!*
8. **PRINCIPLE OF THE GOLDEN RULE.** *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Jesus' command) Would the doctor who aborts an unborn child without that unborn child's consent, have wanted his own life aborted before his own birth?*

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 the 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 the 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 'unrealistic', too 'deflating to my own sense of self-esteem', too 'archaic and outdated', 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 10 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!"

Are You Strongly Anticipating The 'Glories Of Heaven'? Like so many thousands of dear women, throughout our 'fair land', who 'fight the battle against breast cancer', there was one beautiful, fifty-five year old woman (Sharon) - an active parishioner in the church where I was pastor (in Ft. Collins) - that 'lost her battle' with this dreaded and widespread disease! She was so 'radiant' and 'triumphant' in her 'faith in Christ', as she realized, after 'challenging the disease' for a few years, that she was definitely going to leave

this 'place' that she loved so much (she was an outdoors person, going hunting with her husband, and so much more!). Even though all medical procedures were used (the 'typical methods' for several years), she found herself suffering terribly during the last few days. She had great assurance that she would soon 'meet her dear Savior' in peace and love (the moment she died), but she, nevertheless, was troubled. She finally (humbly) acknowledged to her husband, why her 'dismay'! Strangely enough, this woman of great 'faith' was troubled because she wondered how, amidst the vast crowd in heaven, she would be able to find (i.e., to locate) her loved ones when she entered the 'gates' of heaven. She was 'distracted' for several days. Then, as is always true of 'God's mercy and provision', Sharon was given what might be called a 'glorious vision' - a 'vision of reassurance'. God told her that she need not worry that she could not find her loved ones in heaven, amidst the throngs of sainted people. She would immediately feel at home in heaven. Her loved ones, who would be there to welcome her, alongside Jesus Himself, would first greet her! What glorious assurance was given to her, a short time before her 'home going'!

Man is made by God, and man is made for Heaven. As important as earth is, and as beautiful as earth is, earth is, from God's perspective, only the 'prelude' to heaven. God prepared heaven for man's 'final dwelling place' - a place of indescribable joy and fulfillment - a place where each earthly inhabitant has a special place to live and a special assignment to carry out for the Father. A place of glorious fellowship with the multitudes of redeemed souls who lived during all the ages of the earth - deep fellowship with all, with absolutely no comparison and no competition and no jealousy between the inhabitants of that happy place. New (spiritual) bodies - with no aging, no sickness, and certainly no death. Each for all, and all for each! And, just think of it, the best of all is the fact that every heavenly citizen (redeemed by the 'blood of Jesus') will unitedly focus on worshiping and praising the 'King of the Universe', the Lord of All Things, the 'Giver of Eternal Life' in heaven! We will never tire of ascribing 'glory' to the One who saved us from all our sins, and who granted us 'heavenly, eternal life'! This (and so much more that can't even be described) constitutes 'Reality' - for the 'children of God', for those who gladly bow their knees' in surrender to the 'Creator of the Universe'! It is not hard to love the One who poured out His life's blood to redeem a lost and undone race of sinners! Heaven will be most wonderful, and Jesus has prepared this 'eternal abode' for you! Now, you must receive His gift. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind, what God hath prepared for those who love Him!"

The last words of dying persons have often been recorded: Here are a few: "The chariot has come, and I am ready to step in." (Margaret Prior) "Eternity rolls up before me like a sea of glory." (Jordan Antie) "How bright the room! How full of angels!" (Martha McCrackin) "I wish I had the power of writing; I would describe how pleasant it is to die." (Dr. Cullen) "The sun is setting; mine is rising. I go from this bed to a crown. Farewell." (S.B. Bangs) "Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus." (John Arthur Lyth) Want glory?

Ron Christian 

“ARE YOU A ‘WISE’ MAN OR

1. A Fruitful Life
2. Spirit-Centered Life.
3. Self-Forgetful Life
4. Life of Confidence
5. Life of Creativity
6. Christ-Centered Worship
7. Life of Prayer
8. Spiritual Wisdom (Bible)
9. Life of Fellowship (Believers)
10. Growing Abundance
11. Attractive Humility
12. Outgoing Compassion
13. Clear Goal Setting
14. Pure Heart and Clean Motives
15. Genuine Honesty
16. Clear Conscience
17. Delights in Being Peace-Maker
18. Tells the Truth
19. Amiable and Approachable
20. Patient and Long Suffering
21. Generous and Uncalculating
22. Joy-Filled and Thankful
23. Assurance of Eternal Life
24. Enjoys Simple Lifestyle
25. Quiet and Contemplative Spirit
26. Discipline of Human Passions
27. Enjoys Humble Service
28. Quickly Forgives Offenses In Past
29. Made peace with ones wrongs
30. Forward - Moving and Optimistic
31. Carefree and Happy Life (Laughter)
32. Humble and Teachable (Desire to Learn)
33. Fragrant and Winsome Life
34. Focus on ‘Good’ In Others
35. Delights in Knowledge of Bible
36. Optimism in God’s Promises
37. Guards Each Man’s Reputation
38. Worships Often In Church
39. God-Reliance in Work
40. Ascribes Praise to God for Accomplishments
41. Founded on Christ (solid Rock)
42. Attitude of Gratitude

A ‘FOOLISH’ MAN?”

1. A Barren Life
2. Fleshly Life (Controlled by passion)
3. Self-Preoccupied Life
4. Life of Despair
5. Life of Destruction
6. Worldly-Worship (Many False Gods)
7. Life of Carelessness
8. Worldly Wisdom (Secularism)
9. Life of Loneliness (Self-Centered ‘Friends’)
10. Increasing Poverty
11. Repulsive Humiliation (Self-Rejection)
12. Selfish Preoccupation and Selfish Pursuits
13. Purposeless Wandering
14. Corrupt Heart and Ulterior Motives
15. Deception and Evil Plots and Schemes
16. Guilty Conscience
17. Delights in Being Trouble-Maker
18. Easily Tells Lies
19. Overly-Sensitive and Easily Offended
20. Impatient and Irritable
21. Grasping and Greedy
22. Forlorn and Ungrateful
23. Terror-Stricken In Face Of Death
24. Grasping For More Material Possessions
25. Never-Ceasing Boisterous Noise
26. Uncontrolled License to Fleshly Passions
27. Seeks Status and Position and Honors
28. Holds Grudges against Offenders
29. Plagued with Guilt Regarding One’s Past Wrongs
30. Backward Looking With Regrets and Remorse
31. Worry-Worn and Anxiety-Ridden (Sadness)
32. Proud and Close-Minded
33. Wretched and Repulsive Life
34. Focuses On ‘Bad’ In Others
35. Ignorant and Indifferent Towards Bible
36. Despair In World’s Political Solutions
37. Gossips and Bears ‘False Witness’
38. Seldom or Never Attends Church
39. Self-Reliance in Work
40. Accept Praise to Self-For Accomplishments
41. Founded On Mere World (Sandy Soil)
42. Attitude of Complaints

“Do You Believe In ‘Physical Healing?’” I have, throughout my long life, sought to eat right and to exercise right (I have consistently involved myself in running a few miles almost every day, since my teen years. But an event took place when I was 68 years old – an event that caused me to ‘face my mortality’. Simply stated, I discovered a dime-shaped mole on the outer, upper right arm (a ‘spot’ that I could not even see with my own ‘bare eyes’). My wife told me about it, but I could only see it when viewed it in my mirror. I dismissed this ‘spot’ as insignificant, but I thought I probably should mention it to my family doctor, at the end of my complete physical examination (April 2012). My doctor quickly viewed the dime-shaped black spot, but he said it was nothing to be concerned about. Well, I thought nothing about it – until, about 10 months after seeing my doctor, the little spot began to bleed, and finally that spot became a large erupting, bloody ‘mess’! My wife, of course, insisted that I go to the doctor, but I told her that there was nothing to be concerned about, since he told me the same message, a few months before. But finally, after she continued to insist, I went to the doctor (who had serviced me medically, for the last 30 years). When he took the covering off of the bleeding sore, he said that it ‘looked angry’, and he said that he must soon operate on it – to remove this ‘angry sore’. Two days later, after he removed the ‘angry sore’ (a simple surgery performed I his own office), he said he was ‘baffled’ as to what was the nature of the sore! But he assured me that he was quite sure that it was not a melanoma (Skin cancer). But, after he received the pathology report (two days later), he called me and sadly informed me that, indeed, it was a melanoma! He was troubled, and he began to tell me that the seriousness of this diagnosis could result in surgeries (removing lymph nodes) and chemo treatments, etc. of course, my wife and my daughter (who was present when I received the call) and myself were all ‘shaken’ by the ‘bad news’.

I soon began to think of the ‘worst’ – eventual termination of my life (death). It was a few days later that I visited a specialist (surgeon) who told me that the diagnosis (pathologist report) was ‘troubling’. He said that the fact that the melanoma was quite ‘deep’ into the skin (which was five layers), and the fact that the ‘sore’ bled rather profusely – these two facts meant that this situation could be serious. Before I left his office, this specialist said that frankly he was ‘troubled’, of course, my sense of the ‘brevity’ and the ‘uncertainty’ of life - my own ‘mortality’ filled my mind. But I must say, to the ‘glory of God’, that, in spite of my understandable ‘fears’, I sensed a certain wonderful (God-given) peace. I said to myself, “Even though I have tried hard to live a healthy life (trying to keep my heart and lungs and circulatory system in ‘good shape’ though my consistent running), maybe God does not desire for me to live a long life (into my late 80’s or 90’s like my ancestors). I began to remember the scores of persons whom I loved on earth, who are now in heaven. I had written quite a lot about heaven (and had recorded hundreds of quotations about heaven). Maybe now it was time for me to leave the family I loved, and to meet my blessed Savior. The surgeon (specialist) said he would have to take a lot of my arm skin (where cancer probably resided), as well as one of my lymph nodes. Three days after the extensive surgery, the pathology report came into the hands of my primary physician, and even though I was not home at the time) he called my wife and told her that NO can-

cer was found anywhere – that I had a ‘clean bill of health’. He said, “Praise the Lord!” my wife called me while I was traveling in a car with my brother, a few miles from home. Needless to say, my brother and I could hardly believe the ‘good report’! the burden that was released from me was more than I can put in words! Scores spent time in prayer for my healing!

“Do You Believe In The Power Of Prayer?...Healing From God?... Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow?” **Open Secrets To Personal Renewal!** Do you have a strong ‘inner drive’ to grow in your personal life? It is said of Jesus that “He grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and Man.” Balanced growth – physical, social, intellectual, spiritual growth! Are you personally ‘reaching for higher ground’? After a lifetime of very fruitful ministry as a highly-respected missionary/teacher/preacher/writer, E. Stanley Jones said (toward the end of his long life of nearly 90 years), “The best that I can say about myself is that I am ‘only a Christian in the making’; I am not yet ‘fully made’. He then stated that the most wonderful thing about the Christian life is the ‘joy of becoming’! becoming a more loving servant among suffering human beings, and becoming a person who is ‘more Christ like’ in character ! No ‘list’ of steps (for maturing in life) is ‘complete’, but (after much personal ‘soul-searching’) the following ‘secrets for personal renewal’ were deposited in my mind (perhaps by the Spirit of enlightenment). We, too, can be a ‘Christian-in-the-making’ – maturing every day!

1. **FREE OF BITTERNESS !** “Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives.” (Hebrews KEEP 12:15)
2. **KEEP YOURSELF FREE FROM THE COMPETITIVE ‘RAT RACE’ !** Do not compare yourself with others. Be content with what you have! Enjoy the simple lifestyle.
3. **KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING BRIGHTLY!** Make your home a ‘haven of rest’, a place of solace and comfort where all in your family can build a wholesome self-esteem through unconditional love and positive affirmations and creative family projects.
4. **KEEP LAUGHTER ALIVE IN YOUR LIFE !** Develop a good sense of humor! Don’t take yourself too seriously! A hearty laugh can do ‘wonders’ for you. Ever laugh at people, but laugh with people. Enjoy ‘clean’ jokes!
5. **KEEP A ‘LEAR CONSCIENCE’ BY DAILY CONFESSING ANY KNOWN SIN IN YOUR LIFE!** Remember: “If we confess our sins to God, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong because Christ died to wash away our sins.” (I John 1:9)

6. **KEEP DIVERSION AND VARIETY IN YOUR LIFE !** *Someone said, "Variety is the spice of life!" God created a world full of variety, so God is pleased when we enjoy variety in life. Try something new or do the same thing differently. Don't be afraid of failure. A worse failure is never trying anything new. Visit a new neighbor! Put aside your 'natural timidity', and reach out and show interest in someone who is lonely! Send a fresh 'love note' to a parent or to a friend! God created a world full of variety, so God is pleased when we enjoy variety in life. Try something new, or do the same thing differently. Don't be afraid of failure. A worse failure is never trying anything new. Visit a new neighbor! Put aside your 'natural timidity', and reach out and show interest in someone who is lonely! Send a fresh 'love note' to a parent or to a friend! God obviously 'loves variety' – for He made 'Nature' with vast variety. And He created the human race with unusual (beautiful) variety. If God loves variety, then the creatures He made (men and women) are like God (i.e., they also enjoy variety). Persons with 'varied interests' tend to be the 'most interesting persons' to be 'around'!*
7. **PRAY MUCH ABOUT EVERYTHING AND WORRY ABOUT NOTHING!** *"Cast all your cares upon God, for He cares for you." Such relief and rest!*
8. **READ POSITIVE BOOKS THAT WILL ENCOURAGE YOU AND INSPIRE YOU TO LIVE A 'HOLY LIFE'!** *But, of course, the Holy Bible should be on the very top of your stack of 'good books'.*
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10. **DEVELOP POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS 'SETBACKS', 'PROBLEMS' AND 'TRIALS'.** *E. Stanley Jones says: "Make everything serve. Just as an airplane always rises from an airport not with the wind, but in the face of the wind, so I would make oppositions send me up, not down." If God be 'for' you, who can be 'against' you?*
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"What Is The 'Gift Of Legacy' Which You Will Leave To Descendants?" Unless you are a very 'famous person', it is not likely that you will be 'remembered' one hundred years from now (except, unless perhaps your name is recalled by someone who researches their genealogy). But, even though you may not be personally recognized among future generation, it is almost certain that the 'legacy of your influence' (i.e., your enduring values which 'define your entire life') – this influence will 'live on' in the lives of your future generations. While the 'depth' and the 'breadth' of your influence is hard to evaluate with any kind of 'precision', the effect of your words, and choices (good and bad) that you make, and the 'projection of your personality' (introverted or extroverted) and the 'religious commitments' that you unashamedly reveal (honesty or deception) and the material lifestyle that you practice (simple or extravagant) – these aspects (and other aspects) of your total personhood all exercise a powerful influence, in the lives of many person or persons who 'come after you'.

What 'philosophy of 'life' are you communicating to everyone around you? What 'ideas' and 'manner of life' truly 'define' and 'describe' you? Experience (and careful observation and 'study' of mankind throughout history) – I say, experience shows that there are many 'low and broad roads' (that eventually lead to destruction), and there is the 'high road' that leads to an abundant life on earth and to an eventual and glorious life (after physical death). Jesus (the One who is the 'Expert of Life') taught that there are many persons on the 'broad' road that leads to destruction', while there are (relatively) few persons who are traveling the 'narrow road' ('high road') that leads to 'life'. According to the 'Wiseest of All Men' (the One in whom dwells all the knowledge of Almighty God, the Sinless Son of God), there are certain 'philosophies' that are totally 'opposite' (opposed) to the 'Truth of God'. Jesus is the 'Truth of God' (whose understanding of Reality is 'faultless'). Any human who bases his temporary life on the following philosophies is definitely on the 'broad road that leads ultimately to 'destruction' (loss in time and in eternity).

What are some of those (popular) philosophies?

- (1) Hedonism – worship of pleasure,
- (2) Sensualism – worship of 'Sex,
- (3) Materialism – worship of Money,
- (4) Humanism – worship of Man ,
- (5) Scientism – worship of Science,
- (6) Secularism – there is no 'reality' other than what can be 'found' through man's '5 senses',
- (7) Relativism – there is no such thing as an absolute 'moral code' to determine moral

decisions; everyone does that which is 'right in his own eyes'.

God (in the Bible) often warns us to 'beware of false philosophies' (which 'ruin your soul'). If you are on the 'broad road' (the 'low road' of man-made ideas and even false religions) you do not enjoy the 'smile of approval' of your Creator, and you certainly do not have anything 'substantial' (true and lasting) to 'pass on to your children'! You are made BY God, and FOR God, to SERVE God – all the days of your life. The Bible says, "There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is the 'way of death'."

My great grandmother (born in 1860) in a 'covered wagon' (near what is now Colorado Springs) was left without a other (her mother died in 'child birth'). I was told (by someone who did the 'research') that her father was an 'atheist' – and that (because he did not want to keep the baby) he decided to give this infant to a certain 'Christian' couple whom he knew Legacy! Each generation following her have been Christians! Her sixth generation (now) loves Jesus!

"Have You Been 'Ensnared' By The 'God Of Materialism'?" About 30 years ago, I received a 'soul-revealing' letter from a young (brilliant) business man who was, at that time, about 30 years old. When he was rather young, he formed his own 'finance company', and he quickly 'rose to the top' in his field. But this young man (so personable and outgoing and honest) – he, obviously, revealed from his letter that he was experiencing great 'inner conflict'. His ability to express his 'feelings' (using the analogy of the 'candy store') was quite remarkable. The following is a portion of that letter: "In my life the process goes on. My faith is in frequent conflict with my obsession to participate in the consumption of this world's fruit. I often feel like a child in a candy store. I wander past the fields of sweet delights, gazing at the vast assortment of choices. All the while in mind the echoes of my mother's word warn me against the consequences of over-consumption. Yet, the warnings go mostly unheeded, and I continue to confidently, if not somewhat guilt-tinged, select items which I feel sure will satisfy my desires ('surely this one will be the last...Oh, just one more;). It's only when the toothache attacks, or the stomach revolts that I consciously pursue my mother's care, knowing that her caring arms and infinite wisdom will sooth my injuries. Her loving character will forgive my errant ways and soon everything will be alright again. In chagrined humility I wish I could follow her will, knowing full well that if I don't give in to her will and wisdom completely, I will soon made the same mistakes again. Oh, the tribulations of being an undisciplined child!"

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in frequent conflict with my obsession to participate in the consumption of this world's fruit. I often feel like a child in a candy store. I wander past the fields of sweet delights, gazing at the vast assortment of choices. All the while in mind the echoes of my mother's word warn me against the consequences of over-consumption. Yet, the warnings go mostly unheeded, and I continue to confidently, if not somewhat guilt-tinged, select items which I feel sure will satisfy my desires ('surely this one will be the last...Oh, just one more;). It's only when the toothache attacks, or the stomach revolts that I consciously pursue my mother's care, knowing that her caring arms and infinite wisdom will sooth my injuries. Her loving character will forgive my errant ways and soon everything will be alright again. In chagrined humility I wish I could follow her will, knowing full well that if I don't give in to her will and wisdom completely, I will soon made the same mistakes again. Oh, the tribulations of being an undisciplined child!"

In spite of his ambivalence (i.e., being 'torn' between the 'way of materialism' and the 'Christian way'), this young man became a highly respected and 'successful' business man (real estate investor, etc.). His business peers (in his later career) thought so much of him (his knowledge and experience in investment, etc.) that they elected him to be the president of their association for the entire state of Texas! Wealthy investors (in France, etc.) hired this very competent business man to 'head up' several projects (I think about 20 developments, simultaneously!) in several locations. Part of his 'stirs of success' resulted in this fine person (highly experience by this time in his 'successful career') building himself a beautiful, large house (really, a mansion). This person (greatly skilled) seemed to be 'flying high' (professionally). When I last talked to him (at his wedding – a wedding that might have cost \$50,000), he communicated to me (during the few moments that we had alone) that he wanted to regularly read the Bible every day (with his new bride). Evidence that there was still an inner 'hunger for God'! (Sadly the marriage ended in 5 year!)

About three years ago (during the 'economic down') I heard (indirectly) that 'the bottom fell out'! a 'boom' can become a 'bust'! Bankruptcy became a term very 'real' to this one-time very 'successful' investor! I don't know all the 'details' (of course), but I heard that he lost nearly everything! Including his beautiful (large) house! We all should know that money can quickly 'take wings'. Paul instructs us not to set our hopes "on the uncertainty of riches." King Solomon's (David's son), and supposedly the richest king of his time) wrote: "He who loves money shall never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income, so what is the advantage of wealth-except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your finger! The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia." (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12) "Those who chase riches are constantly falling into temptations and snares. For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil!" Your master – Money or God?



“TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIVING!”

“Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

“And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:38-39)

³¹ “But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. (Matthew 25:31-33)

“The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” (Psalms 1:6)

¹³ “You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴ But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (Matthew 13-14)

¹⁹ “Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! ²⁰ You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the LORD, you will live long in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all perish!” Repentance and belief are the two decisive steps into the kingdom of God! ‘Repentance’ means

turning away from one's sins (in other words, a 'moral u-turn'). Belief means turning in trust and faith to the Savior who alone can forgive sins. Those who continue to believe in Jesus as Savior have eternal life; those who don't believe in Jesus do not have eternal life. (John 3:36)

Ultimately, in life, every person has one of two options – REPENT OR PERISH! Walk in the light or walk in the darkness! Serve God or serve self! A fruitful life or a barren life! A fleshly life or a Spirit-controlled life! A happy (guilt-free) life or a miserable (guilt-dominated) life! A life of freedom or a life of selfishness! A self-forgetful life or a self-preoccupied life! A life of productivity or a life of dissipation! A life of confidence or a life of despair!

A life of creativity or a life of destruction! A life of Christ-worship or a life of worldly-worship! A life of prayer or a life of carelessness! A life of spiritual wisdom or a life of worldly wisdom ! A life of heavenly Sonship or a life of prodigal loneliness! A life of heavenly vision or a life of worldly preoccupation! A life of loving acceptance or a life of hateful rejection!!

A life of divine fellowship or a life of demonic oppression! A life of growing abundance or a life of increasing poverty! A life of attractive humility or a life of repulsive humiliation! A life that "reaches out in love," or a life that withdraws into petty selfish concerns! A life of winsome communication, or a life of ugly silence and indifference! A life of clear goal setting, or a life of purposeless wandering. A life of warm embrace, or a life of cold isolation!

A life centered on worship of the one true God, or a life centered on the worship of the world's many false gods! A life that is carefully heaven bound, or a life that is carelessly hell-bound! A life whose ears are carefully attuned to the Spirit's voice or a life whose ears are only attuned to the frivolous noises of the world! A life that cherishes a pure heart and a clean conscience, or a life whose heart is corrupt and whose conscience is seared!

A life that is committed to being a "peacemaker", or a life that takes a sinister delight in being a "troublemaker"! A life that seeks to be amiable and approachable, or a life that tends to be overly-sensitive and easily offended! A life that is patient and longsuffering with others, or a life that is impatient and irritable towards others! A life that is grasping and greedy and unsympathetic towards others or a life that is generous and uncalculating towards others. A life that is joy filled and thankful, or a life that is forlorn and ungrateful!

A life that is characterized with assurance of eternal life, or a life that is terror-stricken in the face of inevitable death! A life that is satisfied with few earthly possessions, or a life that is in a quest for an abun-

dance of the earth's possessions! A life that is characterized by a "quiet and contemplative" spirit, or a life that is characterized by fast movements and a never-ceasing boisterous voice! A life that is characterized by Spirit-controlled discipline of human passions, or a life that is characterized by uncontrolled fleshly passions and unbridled ambitions!

A life that seeks only a place of God-honoring service, or a life that proudly and selfishly seeks status and position and wealth! A life that is living for "two worlds" (time and eternity), or a life that is living only for this preset passing and dying world!

A life that seeks quickly to forgive one's offenders or a life that harbors resentments and that seeks revenge for one's offenders! A life that, because of loyalty to Christ, is a "double winner" (on earth and in heaven), or a life, because of rejection of Christ, is a "double loser" (on earth and in hell)! A life that has made peace with one's past through repentance and faith, or a life that is plagued with the guilt of one's sins from the past!

A life that is forward moving and optimistic of the future, or a life that is backward looking and full of regrets and remorse! A life that sees possibilities in every problem or a life that sees insurmountable problems in every possibility! A life that "casts its every care upon the Lord", or a life that endeavors to carry the world's unbearable troubles on its own shoulders! A life that is carefree and happy, or a life that is worry worn and anxiety-ridden!

A life that is humble and teachable or a life that is proud and close minded! A life that is confident and strong with God-assurance, or a life that is weak with multiple doubts and fears! A life that is fragrant and winsome with the "fruits of the Spirit", or a life that is wretched and repulsive with the "fruit of wickedness and corruption"! A life that focuses on the 'good' and minimizes the 'bad' in other persons, or the life that focuses on the 'bad' and minimizes the 'good' in other persons!

A life that believes that God's abounding grace spells ultimate victory in the world's outcome, or a life that believes that mankind's unconquerable evil spells destruction in the world's outcome! A life that delights itself in the knowledge and wisdom of the Holy Scriptures, or a life that is ignorant and oblivious to God's Holy Word and Ways! A life of hopeful optimism because of God's faithful promises, or a life of hopelessness and despair because of earth's shattered dreams and shallow promises.

A life whose heart is 'light' because of Christ's yoke or a life whose heart is 'heavy' because of Satan's yoke of slavery!"

HOW WIDE IS GOD'S MERCY?" During one period of my life, I spent several months reading the daily devotional book, entitled "In Christ" by the great missionary-evangelist E. Stanley Jones (one of my very favorite authors who has helped me immensely to grow in my knowledge and spiritual understanding for many years).

I read a passage that fascinated me – a passage that was very thought-provoking. That passage is as follows: "Someone asked 'Why wasn't Gandhi a Christian'? The reply is that he never really saw Jesus through the racialism of South Africa. The fact is that when Gandhi in that next world sees Jesus as He is, He will probably fall at His feet and say, 'My Lord and my God.'" (pg. 345)

This quotation by this great writer and evangelist (who, I think, it is said preached more sermons than any person in history – perhaps 60,000 sermons!) brings up questions that, of course, cannot be fully answered. Perhaps there will be multitudes of persons who, like Gandhi, "never really saw Jesus" here on earth, because of many factors (like racialism, ignorance of the true Gospel, etc., etc.). Surely, the God of mercy will not turn His back upon these many unfortunate (ignorant) persons who would immediately repent and follow Christ if they would have "really seen Jesus" here on earth. Like Gandhi, (according to E. Stanley Jones' belief) they will, in the "next world" see Jesus as He is in all His amazing love and mercy and beauty, and they will gladly fall down at His feet and say "My Lord and my God"! In other words, the many on this earth who did not adequately and accurately have a chance to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, will (after they physically die) have opportunity to behold Jesus for who He really is, and they will fall down and wholeheartedly worship Him! He whom they longed for during their earthly pilgrimage (but failed to find because of ignorance or confusion or misguided seeking), will be there in the presence of Christ who will have outstretched arms to give a warm welcome to eternal life! Why? Because the One who truly knows the heart of all persons who have ever lived, will not allow those to perish who truly yearned for truth and love and intimate fellowship with the true God of the Universe (and with His blessed Son and Spirit), but who remained ignorant of His true personhood while on earth.

The darkness that surrounded such unfortunate souls on earth (who unsuccessfully groped, like Gandhi, after the true God during their hard pilgrimage on this terrestrial planet), will be gloriously introduced to the Light that shines forever – namely, the kind face of a caring and forgiving and understanding and merciful God! Such torn, battered, and ignorant souls will be taken into the warm embrace of the tender arms of the loving Heavenly Father! No more darkness, but eternal light! No more hurts, but eternal healing and health! No more loneliness but eternal fellowship and friendship! No more sadness and sorrow, but joy and laughter and happiness forevermore! No more confusion and ignorance, but understanding and wisdom and knowledge that shall unfold and increase forever! No more dullness and drabness and monotony, but eternal delights and beauty and creativity and growth in heavenly awareness! Worshiping the triune God forever! Coming gradually to know the heavenly saints as the ages of eternity unfold. Becoming more like

God forever but never becoming gods. Just heavenly citizens, loving God supremely and loving others joyously and humbly!

Some may criticize this idea because it advances what they think is a concept of a “second chance” after physical death for some people, an idea they think is both unbiblical and heretical. But (along with one of the most evangelical, holiness writers of the 20th century, E. Stanley Jones) we are not advocating a “second chance” for rebellious sinners who die in an unrepentant state.

Rather, we are advocating an “adequate chance” for persons who did not have the mental or spiritual resources on earth to make an understanding (intelligent) commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. The misconceptions regarding true Christian belief were so great in the life of the godly Gandhi that he was overwhelmingly hindered in making an intelligent decision to accept Christ as his personal Savior – even though he deeply admired Christ and greatly respected Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount”. Many, like Gandhi, are sincerely “walking in the light of the truth” as they best understand it (such as countless numbers of Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus like Gandhi). God, the all-together merciful One, alone can judge the condition of all persons’ hearts. He will not condemn anyone to hell, simply because of ignorance! All persons, whether on earth or in eternity will be given sufficient knowledge regarding the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ, to allow every person to exercise his/her will positively to surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Like Gandhi, I believe there will be multitudes of persons who, because they were in the darkness of ignorance regarding the saving power of Christ, and thus made no volitional commitment to accept the Savior, will nevertheless in eternity have their spiritual eyes opened to behold the reality of Christ’s personhood and saving power, and these spiritually-hungry persons will fall on their knees and they will say “My Lord and My God!”

If some emphatically and skeptically declare that this idea is unbiblical – the idea of an adequate chance for many to accept Christ in eternity because they did not have that chance while they lived on earth – let such skeptics (including some evangelical Christians) think long and hard about the meaning and the implications of the “Mercy of our God”. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! And why should it be impossible for some (probably many) persons to experience repentance after they have left their bodies? Again, we are not talking about rebellious people - people who have intentionally rejected Christ after adequate opportunities have been given to them – but rather we are talking about the masses of unfortunate (ignorant) people who, on earth, never had unbiased, clear, simple, adequate opportunities to intelligently and honestly accept Christ.

Some may still accuse those (like me) who hold this viewpoint regarding the “wideness of God’s mercy” that they advocate a “second chance” for some people after they die. If critics, including most evangelical Christians, want to accuse me along with many other such advocates like highly respected evangelical writer-evangelist E. Stanley Jones, of believing in an unbiblical doctrine, ‘so be it’! What is so wrong (or unbibli-

cal) in believing that God's Mercy is so wide that it encompasses all persons on earth, in all different kinds of circumstances – including persons who unfortunately have never read the Bible.

Persons who have never met even one true Christian person, who is surrounded from their birth to their death by pagan people who practice heathen rituals. Persons who are 'brainwashed' from earliest childhood to think certain ways and to do certain things that is totally alien to the teachings and the practices of true Christianity? Only God knows the heart of every person. God, in mercy and in justice, has nothing but love in His great heart for these broken, ignorant, and spiritually hungry persons!

Adequate chance for acceptance of Christ will be given all persons – either on this earth or in eternity!

"WILL SOME BE SURPRISED WHEN THEY FIND THEMSELVES IN HEAVEN?" Of course, only God knows who will be saved in the end, and how many persons, 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 T.V. and radio speaker too 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." (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 compassionate 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 abode (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 (fountainhead) 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 Machem, 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!

“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)

One of the greatest preachers of the 19th century, Phillips Brooks, 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!

Notes Phillip Brooks (great preacher of the nineteenth century), "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 Gamaliels 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!” (Taken from “Sermons Preached In English Churches”, by Phillips Brooks, pgs. 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 says that this is “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. The source of the light is still not known to them. 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.” (Taken from “My Jesus” by Christophe Cardinal Schönborn; 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.” (Taken from “Through the Year with Fulton Sheen”; pg. 209)

Notes well-known theologian Jerry Walls: “Indeed, we can find examples of theologians from earlier generations who though Protestants may have been too hasty in discarding the doctrine (of Purgatory). Writing several decades ago, the noted Scottish theologian P.T. Forsyth expressed the hope that many people who may not be fully converted in this life could have their moral eyes further opened after death and be

thoroughly converted in the long run. "We threw away too much when we threw purgatory clean out of doors. We threw out the baby with the dirty water of its bath. There are more conversions on the other side than on this, if the crisis of a death opens the eyes as I have said." Forsyth is another instance of those who see purgatory as a helpful way to conceptualize the hope that salvation may ultimately embrace more persons than it appears to us in this life.

More recently, the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann has written sympathetically about purgatory in a similar vein. Moltmann notes that the basic idea of purgatory is suggested in the famous beatitude that promises, "The pure in heart shall see God." The doctrine of purgatory allows a person's history with God to continue until the purity of heart necessary to see God is achieved. This is a specific aspect of the more general truth that God will continue until completion of the good work he has begun in our lives. Moltmann is hopeful that his promise applies not only to the fortunate of this world, but also to those whose lives were cut short by tragedy or were otherwise stunted or maimed by adverse circumstances. He rejects the notion of purgatory as a place of punishment or a place to perform penitential acts, but affirms the idea of an intermediate state in which God can advance his purpose for our lives. "So I conceive" he writes, "of that 'intermediate state' as a wide space for living, in which the life that was spoiled and cut short here can develop freely. I imagine it as the time of a new life, in which God's history with a human being can come to its flowering and consummation." (Taken from "Purgatory, the Logic of Total Transformation". By Jerry L. Walls, pgs. 52-53)

A most thoughtful, sensitive, godly preacher/scholar was William Sangster. As a committed follower of Christ (and Methodist), he often explored 'facets' of the 'Holy Life of Sanctification', and he believed in the 'wideness of God's mercy'!

He writes; "The word 'hell' is used, even in Christian literature, with a double meaning. Normally, it is employed for the place (or state) of firm separation from God – the opposite of heaven. However, sometimes it is used as the equivalent of 'hades – the place of all departed spirits, not yet set in their eternal abode.

Precisely what the early fathers who shaped the Apostles' Creed believed about this phrase is still a subject of discussion among scholars, and even the present interpretation of it differs in various branches of the Church. Some think that Christ challenged Satan and all his powers in the central 'citadel' of hell. Some think that his mission there was particularly to those who had followed the best light they had in their generation, but who having lived before his earthly ministry, had had no opportunity to respond to the best of all.

It is this second interpretation, which fosters the hope in some Christians that Christ still has a ministry on the other side of death. Millions die never having heard of Him. Millions more have heard of Him, but He

is little more than a name to them; they have never felt the conscious impact of His love, nor traced some of the loveliest things in the world to His influence. Even in countries classified as “Christian”, thousands of children grow up in homes from which Christ is virtually excluded, and hear His name only in blasphemy.

It is unthinkable that the God whom Christ came to reveal could allow these multitudes to miss their highest bliss because of the accident or misfortune of their birth. A God of love is compelled by His nature to pursue with the offer of salvation all creatures made in His own image. Why Christ descended into hell – and precisely what ‘hell’ used in this context means – is a mystery not likely to be cleared up on this earth, but the constantly repeated phrase has this overtone in the minds of many of the faithful, and leads them to the conviction that death does not end the ministries of grace. (Taken from “Questions People Ask about Religion”; by William Sangster; pgs. 62-63)

The ever-relevant (brilliant) theologian and Bible commentator, Adam Clarke, shared his deep conviction (many years ago) that God loves all persons and that God desires that all receive the gift of eternal life. Adam Clarke notes: “It (salvation) is designed for the whole human race, for ‘all that are sinners’ (I Timothy 1:15) is applicable to all. Because all are sinners; and may be received by all, being put within every man’s reach, and brought to every man’s ear and bosom, either by the letter of the word, or, where that revelation is not yet come, by the power of the Divine Spirit. The true light from Christ that lightens every man that cometh into the world. From this also it is evident that the death of Christ, and all its eternally saving effects, was designed for every man.” (Clarke’s Commentary; vol. 6; pg. 587)

“The Day Following, Jesus Would Go Forth Into Galilee, And Findeth Philip; And Saith Unto Him, Follow Me.” (JOHN 1:43). “So we have a gradual heightening revelation of the Master’s graciousness to all souls, to them that seek and to them that seek Him not, it is a revelation of the seeking Christ.” He will welcome and ever answer Andrew and John when they come seeking; He will turn around to them with a smile on His face, that converts the question, “What seek ye?” Into an invitation, “Come and see”, (John 1:46) and when Andrew brings his brother to Him, He will go more than halfway to meet him. But when these are won, there still remains another way by which He will have disciples brought into His Kingdom, and that is by Himself going out and laying His hand on the man and drawing Him to His heart by the revelation of His own. But He really is seeking us all, whether through human agencies or not; whether our hearts are seeking Him or not, still in deepest truth. There is no heart upon earth which Christ does not desire and no man nor woman within the sound of His Gospel whom He really is not - in any metaphorical, but in a simple, literal, prosaic sense – seeking that He may draw them to Himself.” (Taken from the Book “Music for the Soul”; pg. 201)

Seeking And Finding. “I will seek that which was lost, and will bring again that which was driven away.” (Ezekiel 34:16).

Alexander Maclaren, considered by almost every Christian preacher/teacher to be one of the greatest Biblical expositors of all times, believed strongly in the “wideness of God’s mercy”. He writes; “All and more than all, that they sought for in the many pearls is stored for them in the one Pearl of great price.” (Matthew 13:46) “The ancient covenant stands firm today as forever. “Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” (Luke 11:9)

But then there are others, like Paul on the road to Damascus; like Matthew, the publican, sitting at the receipt of custom, on whom there is laid a sudden hand, to whom there comes a sudden conviction, on whose eyes, not looking to the east, there dawns the light of Christ’s presence. Such cases occur all through the ages, for He is not going to be confined within the narrow limits of answering seeking souls, and showing Himself to people that are brought to Him by human instrumentality. However, far beyond these bounds, He goes, and many a time discloses His beauty and His sweetness to hearts that know not of Him, and who can only say, “Surely the Lord was in this place; and I knew it not”. (Genesis 28:16) “Thou was found of them that sought thee not.” (Romans 10:20) (Taken from the Book “Music for the Soul”; pg. 200)

George Fox (1624-1691) who suffered greatly for his faith in Christ, believed in the ‘infinite ocean of God’s Light’ that came to every person, giving opportunity to each person (regardless of circumstances) a chance to ‘come to the living God’ in true faith. He wrote in his journal, “I knew God experientially. I was as one who has the key that opens. I was taken up into the love of God. I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death. But I saw that there was an infinite ocean of light and life and love which flows over the ocean of darkness, and in that, I saw the infinite love of God. The Lord has opened to me by His invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ and I saw it shine through all; and they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became children of it.”

Rufus Jones (modern-day Quaker preacher/scholar, in the same tradition of George Fox) noted the following (about the ‘wideness of God’s mercy’): “It would be a profound mistake to assume that only one type of experience, and that a unique one, has the sole right to be called ‘a direct approach’ to God. In John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, there were gates of entrance on all sides of the foursquare city. Therefore, too, when many persons stand on the shore of the sea in a moonlight night the path of light comes across the water straight in front of each beholder, and meets him where he stands as though he were the only one to be favored with the lane of light. It is somewhat so with the ways which lead to God. There are many in number, and they are adapted to the need and the aptitudes of the different wayfarers who are to make the pilgrimage. Any way which brings a person home is a good way.”

“God’s Universal Love And Special Call For Each Unique Person!” It is wide enough to include skeptics of Christianity, and even outright atheists! The poet was right when he penned those famous words: “God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform!” There are countless ways that God uses to “reach” the hearts and the minds of sinners! Sometimes God uses the powerful and the verbal witness of a penetrating,

evangelistic Sermon. Many persons (including many at a great Billy Graham crusade) have responded to the "invitation" to "come forward" and to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord! But a countless number of other persons have come to Christ in a variety of other ways. Some persons (like Henry M. Stanley, 1841-1904) have been so influenced by a dynamic and loving Christian, that eventually (after being around such a godly person for a time), they have felt 'compelled' to give their life to Christ. The fruit of godly living was so appealing that the skeptic found himself powerfully drawn to the Christ that was so evident in the life of the beautiful witness! The fact that persons respond to the call of God's conviction in various ways, and under various circumstances, and through various 'instruments' of God – these facts simply demonstrate that there is a great "Wideness In God's Mercy"! Regardless of how or when or through whom God's mercy is experienced by all kinds of sinners, the important thing is that the "God of mercy" finds all persons! "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." God's mercy is so "wide" that it is available to every person who is willing to receive that mercy! God wants to give every sinner (young or old, finely bred or wretched) what no one deserves (mercy), not what everyone deserves (condemnation). Mercy, not justice! "Whosoever will may come!" Come to Christ – 'the water of life' and 'the bread of life'!

Even agnostics and atheists may come to Christ! Think of the miracle conversion of the agnostic/atheist Henry M. Stanley (mentioned above). It was the 'silent witness' of the famous David Livingstone, which influenced Stanley to surrender his life to Christ. Think now, briefly, who was Stanley, and take time to contemplate his amazing testimony, regarding his conversion, because of his careful observation of the godly (sacrificial) life of Livingstone! Livingstone was a British explorer and adventurer whose efforts led to an influx of missionaries in East Africa. His effort to find David Livingstone, whose whereabouts were unknown, resulted in his living with him for four months and being greatly influenced by him, resulting in his conversion.

I Was Converted By Livingstone's Life! "I went to Africa prejudiced as the biggest atheist in London. But there came for me a long time for reflection. I saw this solitary old man there and asked myself, 'How does he stop here – is he cracked, or what? What is it that inspires him? For months after we met I found myself wondering the old man carrying out all that was said in the Bible – 'Leave all things and follow Me.' But little by little his sympathy for others became contagious; my sympathy was aroused; seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how he went about his business, I was converted by him, although he had not tried to do it." (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages" by Esther Carls Dodgen; pg. 196)

"How Wide Is God's Mercy?" It is wide enough to 'save' the "Chiefest of Sinners" (and that is the title that the persecuting Saul of Tarsus gave 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" – eventually 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 to a God-honoring person! Someone said that the greatest proof of Christianity is its power to make a "bad man good"! When the slave-trader John Newton was drastically converted, he 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!

"HOW WIDE IS GOD'S MERCY? Wide Enough To Encompass Every Human Being – 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 repentants"! 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!

The famous Russian author and philosopher, Leo Tolstoi (1828-1910) 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 and on the way 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...I, like the thief on the cross was nailed by some force to the life of suffering and evil. And as, 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 me 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." (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages" by Esther Carls Dodgen; pgs. 170-171)

"THERE IS 'WIDENESS' IN GOD'S MERCY"! As recognized in the simple fact that God "deals" with each person individually and uniquely, in terms of God's "Call to Repentance" and God's chosen manner and circumstances by which He brings each person to a "Saving Knowledge" of Jesus Christ. This wondrous reality of God's expressed mercy and saving grace, given uniquely to every person is demonstrated in the insightful testimony of the well-known preacher, Henry Ward Beecher – (1813-1887).

He writes; "My education and surroundings have always been religious. The precise time of my conversion, I cannot tell. I never felt that burden of sin, which Bunyan describes, and probably never shall. Yet, I cannot for a moment doubt that I am a child of God.

Let every man come to God in his own way. God made you on purpose and me on purpose, and He does not say to you, "Repent, and feel as Deacon A. feels," or, "Repent, and feel as your minister feels", but "Come just as you are, with your mind, heart, education, and circumstances." You are too apt to feel that your religious experience must be the same as others, but where will you find analogies for this, certainly not in nature. God's works do not come from His hand like coins from the mint. It seems as if it were a necessity that each one should be in some sort of distinct from every other. No two leaves on the same tree are precisely alike, no two buds on the same bush have the same unfolding, nor do they seek to have." (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages," by Esther Carls Dodgen; pgs. 151-152)

"THE WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY!" It is demonstrated by the fact that God brings enlightenment, conviction, and spiritual conversion differently to each individual seeker, according to the specific temperament and background and education and 'openness' of each person (young and older). The 'all-wise' Spirit of God knows how best to 'reach' the mind and the heart and the will of each person, with the 'saving

knowledge' of Jesus Christ! The Spirit patiently 'woos' every person bringing sufficient 'conviction of sin' to convince each person that he/she needs the 'forgiveness of sins' and the 'new life of conversion' which God alone can give. Without 'forcing the will' the Spirit of God strongly 'draws every person' to the 'saving cross' of Jesus Christ. 'Strong persuasion' without 'divine coercion'! Not only is "the Wideness of God's Mercy" shown by the manner of the Spirit's gentle (yet persuasive) 'dealings' with sinners, but also by the way the Spirit applies His 'converting power' (transformation) in the life of each individual soul. That is to say, some persons (responding to the Spirit's 'dealings') experience the coming of God into their hearts and lives, very quietly and rather slowly (over a period of probably 'weeks'). There are many others, whose response to the enlightening and convicting 'work' of the Holy Spirit, who are very emotional, ecstatic, and dramatic! These can hardly believe that, as a result of their honest confession to God and true sincere surrender to Christ's Lordship, they can be 'instantaneously changed', changed from a 'captive to sin' to a 'child of God', transformed from a life in 'darkness' to a life of glorious 'light' and freedom! A conversion like that of Saul of Tarsus is indeed miraculous! There are millions of persons, in all ages and in all countries, who could testify to such a conversion! 'Instantaneous conversion' witnesses to the 'power of God's saving grace'! However, what about conversions that are not necessarily, accompanied with emotion or with dramatic upheaval'. Moreover, what about conversions that are (for some reasons) 'gradual' (and almost unnoticed for quite a period of time)? Are the 'non-dramatic' and the 'gradual' conversions just as 'real' and just as 'wonderful' as the 'instantaneous' (dramatic) conversions? Both are 'authentic' – IF the persons claiming this 'conversion experience' demonstrates some (or much) 'fruits of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22) in their lives (love, joy, peace, patience, etc.). Let it be repeated: the 'God of all mercy' applies His grace (unmerited favor) and His love to each individual (according to the unique traits of each person). Mercy for all, but mercy uniquely applied by the God of all understanding and love.

Considering the fact that each person (sinner) will receive the 'saving grace' of God differently and uniquely (according to individual 'temperament'), there seems to be a temptation for those 'dramatic, extroverted' persons to 'judge' (as inferior) those persons who receive conversion in a totally different manner (i.e., quietly, privately, slowly, thoughtfully). Let the 'dramatically-oriented' person who rejoices that he is 'instantaneously saved' guard against judging those 'quiet souls' who find God slowly over a long period of time. Both kinds of conversion are authentic!

The 'mercy of God', as received by an American Methodist minister, in 1868, resulted in a wonderful 'instantaneous conversion' (rather than a 'gradual conversion'). Here is his testimony to 'God's mercy':

"My conversion was a wonderful change, affecting my whole nature and newly creating my heart. I awoke in a new world, filled with new ideas, hopes, fears, and ambitions. The work was instantaneous, overwhelming, convincing, and giving me peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (By B.F. Crary)

Because of his own 'unique experience of God's saving power' in his own very young life, and no doubt because of his personal observation of God's special 'dealings' with sinners during his own very long 'ministerial career', the famous preacher (and prolific writer) Rev. Charles L. Allen, has written the following (about the 'wideness of God's mercy'): "I was five years old when I went forward on the invitation to join the Church. Some say that is too young. I can only answer it was not too young for me because I then wanted to live like Jesus as nearly as I could. According to some definitions of salvation, I was not saved, but if you consider one saved who is dedicated to the best he knows then I was saved, and so is every other person who has made a like decision."

God's mercy is all-inclusive (none are excluded), but God's universal mercy is uniquely applied to each person – including children who, while sinners, are, nevertheless 'sinners' with a small number of sins to be forgiven. Nevertheless, these innocent ones also need the Savior! God's Mercy, so very wide, includes all children! A medical doctor, D.A. Blaiklock, shares God's mercy to him, when he was very young.

"Christ and all He stands for have been real to me for over twenty-five years. When I was very young, I grasped clearly, what an allegiance to Him meant, with clarity indeed, which in some ways was brighter than the perception of many adult Christians. The simple and undefiled mind of a child, who comes from a home where Christ is honored and revered, is far more capable of understanding and feeling spiritual concepts than many sophisticated and entangled adults would be prepared to acknowledge. We must not despise another soul's youth, for it was childlike faith that Christ commended most."

"Why Do Many Persons (Sinners) Refuse To Accept The Gift Which God Offers?" For at least two reasons: The First reason is that they do not believe in the integrity (reliability) of the Giver. Satan, the great deceiver, works his works of deception in the minds of many persons. He tells people that God does not mean what He says, that God is not merciful but revengeful, that God is not kind but cruel, that God does not offer 'abundant life' but instead a miserable and a restricted life, that God has no power to change 'human nature' but that every human is hopeless and helpless in his present despicable condition, that God's offer of eternal bliss after physical death is a mere fantasy, that God's promise to restore human dignity and significance is a pipedream because divine power is not available to 'poor creatures' who wallow in the 'gutters of dissipation'. God's talk of mercy and conversion and reconciliation is only 'talk', for human beings are incapable of change!

Satan is the 'father of all lies'. He is a murderer! All that is unpleasant, miserable, unlovely and destructive of peace finds their origin in Satan! He is no friend of grace! He hates all humanity, and he is out to destroy as many as he can! Even though he is definitely a 'defeated foe' (defeated at Calvary and at the Empty Tomb), Satan is, nevertheless, a foe that is still actively 'sowing his seeds' of deception and death – until he finally is cast into the Lake of Fire!

Satan and God are antagonists – bitter enemies of each other. When Satan saw Jesus dying on the Cross, he thought that he had finally won his battle against God and His Son! But God raised Jesus from the dead! Man's final enemy – death – was conquered when Jesus (as the representative of the entire human race) demonstrated His power over Satan's power, which was the power of death!

Yes, the victory over Satan has been won, once-and-for-all through the 'empty tomb'! That is the objective fact – the most important fact of history! However, this objective accomplishment of Christ (victory over sin, death, hell, Satan, the powers of this darkened world) must become a personal and subjective realization in the life of every person (for whom Christ died). No! No one is automatically saved from the 'clutches' of evil, simply because they are members, not only of a 'fallen world', but because they are (through Christ's Finished Work on the Cross) members of a 'redeemed race'! What Christ offers, namely, freedom from sin's bondage, must be personally (individually) received! A gift of any kind which is intended for you and which is offered warmly to you, must be gladly and gratefully received by you! The gift of eternal life (the offer of Mercy) is extended to every person without exception, but each person must first believe in the good intention of the Giver, and must believe in the inherent quality of the Gift itself – before a person will (in faith) reach out and accept the Gift!

Satan tries to mimic the 'work of God'. He is an imitator of God! In place of 'Abundant Life', which only Christ can give, he offers deceived souls 'Worldly Pleasure' (which includes a variety of the sensual 'toys' of the world). Many persons (before finding Christ as their personal Savior) have followed 'Satan's leads' (to multiple 'pleasures of the flesh'), only to finally 'wake up' to spiritual reality (i.e., to the reality that Christ alone can satisfy the hunger of man's soul).

The earlier question that was posed was 'Why do many persons (sinners) refuse to accept the gift which God offers'? We said, first, because people are listening to the voice of Satan – the cunning 'voice' of Satan who (according to Scripture) deceives persons because of his ability to appear as 'an angel of light'! Until a sinner (by means of the help of the truthful Holy Spirit) realizes that Satan is a Master Deceiver who desires to steal and kill, a sinner will remain in 'spiritual darkness'. But when a 'poor sinner' steps into the 'light of truth' – the Light of Christ – he is transferred from a 'child of darkness and ignorance' to a 'child of light and truth'!

The Second reason for refusing to accept the gift must now be described: When a sinner learns that, the Gift is Christ Himself – and all those abundant qualities that Christ provides – then he quickly finds his way to the 'foot of the cross'! God says to the ignorant (spiritually deceived) sinner, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." There are, for certain, a number of God-allowed trials and tests and temptations for those who follow Christ, but Christ's 'Yoke' is easy (compared to Satan's 'Yoke' of sin's slavery), and Christ's 'burden' is light (compared to Satan's unbearable burdens of guilt and fear). When a sinner is convinced of the Inherent Value of the Gift (Christ and everything He provides), then this 'poor sinner' comes gladly and eagerly to

the 'rich Savior'! There are 'riches forevermore' in the Gift which every sinner is offered! Indescribable! For time and for eternity! For all times – easy times and very hard times in life! During the routine throughout life's journey, and when time shall be no more (at the time of one's death)! Christ is altogether adequate for all the 'changes and chances' of life, 'in seasons and out of season', when there is great laughter and when there are uncontrollable tears! At all times and in all places and under all human conditions! Christ is 'more than a Conqueror', and He shares His Victory with every one of His children!

The Inherent Value of the Gift is great and wonderful, but 'poor sinners' experience the 'blindness' of Satan's deception, covering their spiritual eyes. They do not see that the value of the Gift is incalculable (no price can be adequately placed on it)! Life is more abundant – rich, full, free and "Joy unspeakable and full of glory!" "Peace that passeth understanding!" "The peace that keeps one's heart and mind in Christ Jesus!" Resolution of all guilt! One's sins become hidden in the "Sea of God's Forgetfulness" – never to be remembered again! "Mansions prepared for you in heaven" – a special place prepared for you in heaven, by Jesus Himself! Strength to live for Christ each day – to fulfill your Special God-given call in a world of needy persons! Deep satisfaction when you discover and when you use your special gifts (talents) to 'lift up the weak' and 'to encourage the downtrodden', to befriend the lonely, to comfort the sorrowing, to enlighten the ignorant, to guide the confused, to evangelize the lost, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to give to the poor, to listen to the depressed, to heal the broken-hearted, to forgive the offender, and more!

Sadhu Sundar Singh 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." (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages" by Esther Carls Dodgen; pg. 279) There is 'Wideness' In God's Mercy! How Wide Do You Think It Is?

Unless And Until A Person Humbly Receives God's Gift Of Mercy, He/She Cannot Be Truly Happy! Living in sin, and directed by one's own self-centeredness (pride) brings untold sadness, brokenness, disillusionment, misery, and unhappiness! There may be 'pleasures' in sin for a 'season', but the season of sin's pleasure is short, followed by tragic unhappiness and dissatisfaction! "The way of the transgressor is hard" – so says the Bible! 'Hard' because 'sinning' is not the 'normal' way that God meant us humans to live! 'Hard' because sinning is going 'against the grain of the universe'; going against God's created order for His reality! 'Hard' because sinning "goes against" (is contrary to) the 'Human Constitution'. The physical and mental components of the human being take a 'great toll' when guilt and fear and hate and jealousy and lust get the "upper hand" (i.e., when sinning takes control of the human mind and emotions and will). The "way of the transgressor is hard" because the self-centered person (dominated by selfish pride) is a self-seeking person, oblivious to the needs of other persons and devoid of love and compassion for other needy persons. Thus, the self-centered person (God-denying person) increasingly becomes isolated from vital (loving) contacts with other persons.

Those who continue to seek the pleasures (material things) of this passing world are the ones whose preoccupation with the tangible, trivial, and unstable things of the world, keep them from connection with the lasting and important qualities of life. Such a hedonistic (pleasure-loving) person soon finds out that what once gave him pleasure, no longer satisfies his hungry soul. He finally will say about these self-centered pleasures – "I no longer have any pleasure in them. These pleasures have turned 'bitter' - even 'repulsive'!"

"How Wide Is God's Mercy?" God's mercy is even available to those disillusioned souls (sinners) who (like the 'Prodigal Son') are tired of all the 'pleasures of the World' ("wine, women, and song")! The mercy of God (i.e., the open arms of God's homecoming love) is extended to every disillusioned 'prodigal' (i.e., to every worldly-minded sinner who is dissatisfied with his 'foolish, lust-filled living').

But God's mercy is available only to those persons (sinners) who know they need God's mercy – as the only answer to their total lostness! "Come home (to Christ) all ye who are weary – yes, come home." But one can only 'come home' to Christ when he realizes that his only other 'option' is 'death' if he chooses (in self-centered pride) to 'stay in the far country' where there is only available 'slop fit only for pigs'! Humble repentance!

How can one best understand the Wideness of God's Mercy?"

- 1. God wills (desires) the salvation of all persons.***
- 2. God has provided the means (atonement) through His Son, by which every person can be rescued from hell, and saved for heaven.***

3. *The Spirit of God (i.e., The Holy Spirit) has been sent into this world, to convict all persons of their sins, and to convince all persons that they can be forgiven of all their sins, by exercising faith in Jesus Christ.*
4. *All persons are 'savable' (i.e., capable of being saved), regardless of the kind or the degree of their sins – conditioned upon exercise of repentance (godly sorrow for one's sins), and exercise of trust in Christ as Saviour.*
5. *Because God created each human with the capacity of exercising his/her 'free will' (volitional choice), to either accept or to reject God's merciful offer of forgiveness and reconciliation with God (and with one's fellowman), God will never 'force' (coerce) any person to become a 'follower of Christ' (Christian Disciple).*

"What About God's Mercy – The Theme Of This Entire Book?" "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), and 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!

There are millions of persons (sinners) who became disillusioned with the world's pleasures and involvements, and who came to their 'senses', and who left the 'far country' of sensual (fleshly and worldly) living, to come humbly to the Heavenly Father – the God who is lavish with His tender love, and who is abundant in His gifts of mercy and forgiveness! One such 'prodigal' (worldly-minded person) who tried the 'pleasures of the world' for a long time, but who finally discovered the meaning of life in Christ, is a man by

the name of Herman Cohen, 1821-1871. Here is his testimony of his discovery of Christ, after he wandered for so long in the 'far country'! A 'prodigal' come home!

"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?"

What is this happiness? God alone can satisfy the longing of the human heart. Moreover, 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." (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages" by Esther Carls Dodgen, pgs. 209-210)

"GOD LOVES HIS CREATION" Especially the Human Beings That Are Created In the 'Image of God'! Man is distinctive in many ways, but doubtless, the unique feature of humans is their ability to make moral choices (the capacity of 'free will'). Even though God intended for the human race to live forever, with a pure heart, innocent from all moral transgression, God had to provide a 'test' to man (Adam and Eve) to allow man to demonstrate his love and his obedience to his Creator. Love cannot be 'forced'; it must be chosen and there must be moral alternatives to provide an honest test for love's expression. Tragic indeed was Adam's choice to disobey the Creator! Man fell into sin, when he failed the great 'love test'.

God could have destroyed Adam and Eve (and thus, destroyed the entire race of humans). The greatest tragedy in human history was when the special race of humans that God had created for His glory fell from grace into gross sin (resulting in destruction of all connection from the Creator).

If God was only a 'just' God (that is, a God who rightly and fairly punished humankind for its deliberate violation of divine law), then, of course, the punishment of total destruction (death) would be exacted! However, the Creator God (whose essence in His Divine character is Love) could not destroy mankind. He did not have to, but He chose to offer a 'plan of salvation' (recovery from the bondage of sin). Of course, at the heart of God is Love, and Love spells Divine Mercy. Mercy is giving mankind what it needs (offer of forgiveness and restoration) – not what it deserves (sentence of condemnation and spiritual death)!

Because of His passionate love for mankind (as a whole) and for every sinner personally, God is relentless in His initiating Love for every last person! The God of Love and Mercy has no desire for anyone to perish, but God (Holy Spirit) brings awakening to every lost soul (i.e., the light that enlightens every soul). That awakening, motivated by God's mercy, brings great disturbance to sinners who seek to be complacent in

their disobedient lifestyle to avoid seeing how ugly they are as they 'wallow' in the mire of sin and selfishness.

The Holy Spirit (the 'Wind of God' – John 3) uses a variety of 'means and methods' to alert persons of their need for spiritual change (conversion). In the hearts of many lost persons, the Spirit create a deep, inner 'restlessness' (a yearning for meaning beyond all the 'world's categories').

A certain French Jew, who converted to Christianity, Raissa Maritain (1883-1960), speaks of her satisfaction in Christ (the release from her 'restlessness').

She notes the fact that there are many who are seeking to satisfy the deeper 'cravings' of their hearts. It is the deep restlessness in the human soul that the Holy Spirit uses to bring lost ones to the living, transforming God! She writes, "It was not enough for me to live, I wanted a reason for living and moral principles which were based on an absolute certain knowledge; God gives this unrest to those who do not know him in order that they will seek him." (Taken from "Glimpses of God through the Ages"; by Esther Carls Dodgen; pg. 270)

"There Are Many Idols In Our Society, But Perhaps The Worst Idol Is The 'Idol Of Self-Reliance'." _There is a right way and there is a wrong way to teach our children the concept of 'self-esteem'. The wrong way is to tell our children something like this: "You have great potential, and you can do anything you set your mind to do!" But why should we teach our children what Jesus Himself would never have taught them? It is true that God has created each person with "great potential", but the Bible also teaches that the human race is a "fallen race" – i.e., that every human person is subject to the pride of personal performance, that every person needs recovery from sin's toll, through repentance and through surrender to the Savior. There is no achievement worth having unless it is accomplished by, not only great human effort, but also by the enabling power of God's Spirit!

Human pride is the 'hub' of all sin; that is to say, every sin is a manifestation of self-centered pride! 'Pride' declares that it can do anything it desires to do, independent of the Creator/God! Repeatedly, the Bible declares that God hates pride, for the prideful person has replaced God with the 'human ego' on the human throne, where God alone has the 'divine right' to sit! The prideful person is attempting to live against God's created order for His Universe! The world was created by God, and for God, and God created mankind as the 'crown of His creation' (a creature made in God's "own image" – altogether unique). By right of His creation, and by right of His redemption of mankind through Christ's death – God owns every human being! "Ye are not your own; ye are purchased with the blood of Jesus. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which belong to Christ!"

Why does the self-sufficient, proud, self-confident, independent-minded, self-directed person bring such contempt from God? Why is God's anger provoked by a self-driven, worldly-minded, conceited person? Be-

cause such a person is “blinded to reality”! Because such a person is ignorant to the fact that he has sins to be forgiven, that he has a wicked heart to be cleansed, that he is a person who is self-centered rather than God-centered and service-oriented, that he is ingrown in his materialistic pursuits rather than outgoing in his loving and caring projects. The proud (self-centered) person thinks only about himself, rather than thinking about others. He thinks only about the passing affairs of this brief earthly life, rather than thinking about getting ready for eternity (through repentance, confession, humility, surrender, restitution). Instead of responding to the “call of repentance” by “weeping and wailing” (Book of James) over his sins, the self-sufficient (complacent) person pursues worldly pleasures (“eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!”).

“How Wide Is God’s Mercy?” It encompasses all mankind – the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, the enlightened and intelligent and the darkened and ignorant, the young and the old, the religious and the wretched, persons of all races and cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Jesus died for all; therefore, His mercy is extended to all!

However, why were there those persons, while Jesus dwelt on earth, which refused to accept the offered mercy of Jesus? Jesus wept over His own people (Jews) who refused to accept His offer (just like Jesus weeps today when persons resist God’s conviction of sin and Jesus’ offer of forgiveness mercy)! Why did these persons during Jesus’ time on earth refuse Jesus’ offer of mercy? Because pride (self-sufficiency) “blocked” the entrance of Jesus and his mercy into their lives! Mercy (forgiveness) can only be received from God when there is a “broken and contrite heart” – a heart that is tender towards God’s offer of mercy, a mind that surrenders itself to the transforming truth of God (i.e., God’s Word). In one word, Humility! There is no enjoyment of God’s mercy without the humbling of one’s self, at the ‘foot of Christ’s Cross’! When one recognizes that he is, within himself, totally helpless to save himself from his ‘lost condition’, then he is ready to pray, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”

It was not the proud (self-righteous) Scribes and Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) who became members of Christ’s Kingdom. Rather, it was the degenerate lot of mankind (the helpless, the despised, the broken, the despairing, the immoral, the unclean, the rejected, the dishonest, etc.), who came often to Jesus for mercy and deliverance and salvation, and healing and hope and transformation and friendship! Jesus said the ‘harlots and publicans’ enter the Kingdom of Heaven, before the respectable Scribe and Pharisees! Pride barred the latter, and humility opened the door to the former!

Mercy is extended to the ‘high and the low’, to the ‘morally nice’ and to the ‘immorally repulsive’, but often the former are too proud to come to Christ to humbly confess their sin! Tragic, indeed, when a human (sinner) refuses to humble himself before Christ’s Cross, to receive the forgiveness of the Savior!

“How Wide Is God’s Mercy?” Wide Enough To Include Every Person (Sinner) Who Will Humble Themselves Before The Savior Of All Mankind! Samuel H. Hadly (1842-1906) was an American worker with the Water Street Mission, who preached and found homes for the outcasts. The following is an account of a man (a wretch) who found his way to the ‘foot of the Cross’! Christ changed him wonderfully – a change that lasted for his lifetime!

“One Tuesday I was sitting in Harlem, a homeless, friendless, dying drunkard. I had pawned or sold everything that would bring a drink. I had not eaten for days, and for four nights, I had suffered with delirium tremors from midnight until morning. I had often said, ‘I will never be a tramp. I will never be cornered. When the time comes I will find a home in the bottom of the river.’ But when the time did come, I was not able to walk a quarter of the way there.

Along toward evening it came into my head to go to the Jerry McAuley Mission. The place was packed, and it was with difficulty that I made my way to the space near the platform. McAuley arose and told his experience. I found myself saying, ‘I wonder if God can save me?’ Then I listened to the testimony of twenty or thirty others, every one of them saved from rum. I made up my mind that I would be saved too, or die right there. When the invitation was given, I knelt down with a crowd of drunkards. What a conflict was going on for my poor soul! Something within me said, ‘Come.’ Something else said, ‘Be careful.’ I hesitated for a moment, and then with an aching heart I cried, ‘Dear God, can you save me?’ Never can I describe what happened.

Up to that moment, I had been filled with utter darkness. Now the brightness of noonday seemed to stream around me. I was a free man again.” God’s grace (God’s unmerited favor towards a sinful race), and God’s mercy (God’s willingness to forgive all repentant sinners) – these, of course, are God’s wonderful gifts to ‘fallen creatures’ (every person). What God offers, every person’s needs. God wills (desires) for every person is to receive these gifts of love. A ‘GIFT’ is something that no one can ‘earn’, ‘purchase’, or ‘deserve’. The ‘condition’ for receiving God’s gift of forgiveness is simple (yet profound) – namely, ‘deep humility’. “In my hands no price I bring, simply to thy Cross I cling!” As a sinner (with no ‘righteousness’ of my own to offer to God as a ‘purchase price’), I must declare my own ‘moral bankruptcy’, and I must simply plead the ‘work’ of Christ as my only hope for Salvation (forgiveness, cleansing, reconciliation)! Salvation means ‘Christ alone’ and ‘Faith alone’ in the ‘finished work’ of the sinless Son of God (the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ). There is no hope for eternal life (in heaven) outside of faith in Christ. “On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand!” “There is no one else who can rescue us, and there is no other name under heaven given to any human by whom we may be rescued.” (Acts 4:12, the Voice Bible)

Mercy is extended to all persons, but that any human being cannot purchase mercy. God’s mercy, offered to all, is a gift from God’s heart of love. But, even though Mercy is a gift, it must always be remem-

bered that this gift is the most expensive gift in the universe! To offer this gift to the human race (and to every person therein), cost God the terrible giving up of His Son to die on an 'old rugged cross'. Death by crucifixion was most painful physically. Jesus' death on Mt. Calvary provided the horrible context where Jesus took the sins of the entire world upon himself – the only pure and perfect (sinless) sacrifice in the Universe! Jesus' Sacrifice appeased God's wrath against sin, vindicated God's righteous justice, and, most amazingly, demonstrated God's eternal love!

The generous God offers His Mercy to every person, for God is not willing that any should perish (be lost eternally)! God willed, from all eternity (as well as from the time of mankind's 'fall' in the Garden of Eden) that all should be 'saved'! Yes, that 'will' for universal salvation of a lost race of humans, was God's 'perfect will'. Mercy sufficient for all, because what God eternally 'willed, Jesus (in history) provided, through His atoning death. As far as God is concerned, He desires (wills) that none should perish, but that all should go to heaven when they die. This fact is reiterated, time and time again, in the Holy Scriptures. God loved the entire world, God wishes to save the entire world, and Jesus died for the entire world! What more could God do for the human race than what He has done? The offer of God's mercy is extended to every person who will ever live on the face of this planet!

Even though the loving offer of God's mercy is available to every person, the sad reality is that not every person (sinner) enjoys the gift of God's mercy! As wonderful (and needed) as the gift of God's mercy is, there are some who do not sense their need for God's mercy! If a person does not sense his need for forgiveness (because of his violation of the revealed Laws of God), obviously he will not humble himself in 'godly sorrow' before the living God to receive the most cherished gift of mercy! The mercy of God is indescribably great, but this great gift can only be received by those who sense their great need for forgiveness (for which, alone, mercy is offered)!

'Great mercy' is only available for 'great sinners' – and for no one else! If you think you are, in and of yourself, sufficiently 'fit' and 'righteous' enough to live a 'good' life (and to make it to heaven eventually, if there is such a place), then, of course, you will deny that you have any 'real guilt' to be forgiven by a 'higher divine power', and you will have no sense of urgency in seeking 'divine mercy'!

But, even with all the complacency and indifference among the most of mankind, God lovingly and relentlessly seeks to save the 'lost' and 'broken' ones!

Someone said that there are 'many stairs' by which many different persons find their way to heaven. In fact, each person has a 'unique stairs' by which he/she finds his/her 'way to heaven'. Of course, there is only one-way to heaven, and that is the 'way of Jesus', for no person comes to the Father but by Jesus

Christ. But, nevertheless, God has a 'unique stairs' for each person to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Because no two persons are alike, there are no two stairs that are identical by which persons find true Spiritual reality! What appeals to one person, does not appeal to another person. God's appeal (to repent and to receive God's wonderful Mercy) is 'custom made' for each person! The content of salvation's appeal is always the same, but the manner by which that appeal is made is distinct and unique and personal! This speaks to the fact of God's unique creation of each person, and this speaks to the fact of the Spirit's personal and unique love for each person! There has never been a person in the past just like you or in the future just like you, and there never will be the exact kind (manner) of approach by the Holy Spirit regarding the 'call to salvation', as the Spirit gives to you! The same Mercy (of God), but a unique offer of that glorious mercy to each person!

It would be impossible to enumerate all the various (different) "stairs" which people (sinners) experience in their quest and their discovery of God! But a few 'stairs' come to mind. Some use the 'stairs' of general revelation (accepting God as they best understand Him, through the order and beauty and power and magnitude of Nature). Some use the 'stairs' of 'great literature' (and find God's truth meaningfully, but incompletely, by the glimpses of spiritual and eternal reality revealed by profound literary works.) Some climb the stairs towards God whom they read about in the Torah (Old Testament Law, wonderful in cultivating respect for God, but short of revelation of Jesus). Some climb the stairs towards God by careful obedience to their conscience (a helpful, but not very reliable, guide for morality and the will of God). Some climb the stairs towards God by adherence to ethical living in many cultic and world religions (like Mormonism or like the worldwide religion of Islam; these have much good to offer sincere souls, but they are incomplete and even faulty in terms of sound doctrines). Some climb the stairs through a non-churched life of sincere and pure-hearted involvements in social issues – like feeding the poor, and much more. These are obeying Jesus' commands to care for "the least of these." Some climb the stairs by imitating Godly Mentors (seeking to live for Christ by closely following persons who are exemplary of the vital Christian life).

Some climb the stairs by becoming baptized, and as a result claiming personal acceptance of God's grace and mercy (forgiveness) at the time of baptism; these sincere persons grow through the ongoing liturgy of the liturgical Church.

Some climb the stairs towards God when they hear an evangelist, followed by 'going forward' to an altar of prayer where they are led through a definite 'sinners prayer' (confession, belief, acceptance).

There are some (from a strong Christian home) who climbed the stairs very naturally and spontaneously, as a result of the constant and loving Christian introduction, which they received from their very caring (godly) parents. Children from such homes accept the way of Jesus at such an early age (with no resistance

to Christ at all). They grow up deeply loving Christ, and they cannot remember a time when they never loved Christ! Of course, the commitment to Christ must be more deeply made, as these fortunate children grow older (when more mature understanding is gained regarding the meaning of Christian discipleship).

One of the strangest 'stairs' that many persons have found, in their quest for God, is through God-given Dreams. It has been reported that there have been many persons of the Muslim Faith (generally very closed to Christianity) who have been converted to Christ, as a result of Christ visiting them through dreams!

There are many in our world today who are climbing their 'stairs' toward God (whether they realize it or not) because of their disillusionment with the passions and power and performance and promise of the 'world' of time and matter, and these weary, heartbroken, disappointed souls are desperate to find some satisfaction and fulfillment and purpose in their lives. They are 'purpose-driven' souls who have found no peace or hope or understanding or assurance, in the face of earth's cruel treatment of them, and in the face of their fears as they anticipate their own eventual and impending death. Is there meaning for this life (beyond 'wine, women, and song'), and is there any assurance that there is a happy life beyond physical death? Great are the numbers of persons who are, at the same time, disillusioned with earthly existence, and who have doubts regarding the possibility of finding purpose in this life. They also have doubts as to the reality of eternal life (heaven) after this brief, physical existence has expired. These persons (even with their multiple doubts) have a great restlessness, and they, therefore, are "climbing their stairs" towards God (as best as they understand God). The true God will honor their 'sincere quest'. God looks at man's heart – not at his level of intellectual understanding, regarding God ways. They have never been told (simply and clearly) what it means to be 'saved' through Christ's atoning death, but they, nevertheless, are responding to God's 'inner light' as best as they can. As these 'honest souls' (disillusioned with the 'husks of worldly pleasures') continue to 'walk in the light of truth' (i.e., they continue to 'climb their individual stairs'), God will see to it (by the caring Holy Spirit) that they will finally 'reach the top of the Stairs' which leads them through heaven's door – to enjoy eternal life! Such seekers are ignorant of Spiritual truths! God is very merciful!

There are many who find themselves on the 'Staircase' towards God, as a result of deep disillusionment and sadness, because they have not found any meaning or purpose for living – in spite of the fact that they have seemingly experienced all that earthly life can offer. Material wealth, physical comfort, worldly pleasure, personal status, educational degrees, career achievements, athletic recognition, social connections, political correctness, and more! Aggressive involvement in all of these for many years, and yet an aching void and deep dissatisfaction within! Many questions, but no answers during life's incessant quests!

When one looks at the history of mankind's desperate 'search for reality', the careful observer discovers that multitudes of persons are finally realizing that the 'happiness' which the world has long promised is elusive and false and unfounded and fabricated (a lie)! All the 'roads' of the world (as vividly described in

the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes) are 'roads' that lead to a 'Dead-end'. Many disillusioned persons who have been 'chasing after the wind' (i.e., chasing the false ideologies of this passing world), have 'come to their senses' (through the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit), and these spiritually awakened persons (sinners) are now 'climbing the stairs' towards God (i.e., their disillusioned life has brought them to an awareness of God as the true answer) (Satisfaction of their lives).

Why did Jesus say that the 'publicans and harlots' go into the 'Kingdom of God' before the Scribes and Pharisees (religious leaders of Jesus' day)? Those who pride themselves in their personal morality and their religious positions of honor – these self-righteous persons find it almost impossible to see the corruption of their own hearts! Why do they need to confess their sins to God, for what sins do they have to confess? Questions from the lips of proud persons!

"How wide is God's Mercy?" As wide as the world (every person), potentially! But God's mercy is offered only to those who deeply sense that they need mercy! Who are those who are ready to receive mercy? Only those who know that, because of their many sins, they are helpless and hopeless within themselves and that therefore they desperately need God's mercy (forgiveness). Only the one who has declared personal 'moral bankruptcy' will receive the 'gift of heaven' – the treasure of forgiveness and reconciliation and regeneration, and eternal life! A proud person (self-righteous) cannot receive Mercy!

God's mercy is for all persons – for the 'cultured sinner' and for the 'despicable sinner', for the 'up-and-out' sinner and for the 'down-and-out' sinner, for the 'religious' sinner and for the 'pagan' sinner, for the 'knowledgeable' sinner and for the 'ignorant' sinner, for the 'refined' sinner and for the 'crude' sinner, for the 'young' sinner and for the very 'experienced' sinner!

The offer of God's mercy (salvation) goes out to every person, for God is not willing that any should perish. "How Wide Is God' Mercy?" The merciful 'Arms' of God reaches around the entire world – to every continent, to every tribe, to every ethnic group, to every person in all kinds of conditions!

An interesting and important question: "Why do the 'down-and-out' persons (publicans and harlots) tend to come to Christ for salvation before the 'up-and-out' sinners?" Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that these (despicable) persons more readily recognize the depth of their own sins (bondages), and the reality of their own weakness and helplessness! They more keenly sense their need for 'outside help' (namely God)!

History records the testimonies of countless 'down-and-out' sinners who have personally found the 'Higher Power' (namely, the Living God). Many of these helpless 'wretches' (morally 'undone' and physical-

ly 'spent' sinners) have found their way (eagerly) to the 'foot of the Cross' where they have wept their many repentant tears, and where they have 'cried out for God's Mercy and Forgiveness'! Touched by Christ's transforming power, these helpless persons got up from the 'mourner's bench' (the altar of surrender), and, with a changed heart and a renewed mind and a spirit-empowered will, they found their joyful place in the 'ranks of Christ's Army'. Learning to obey the 'voice of the Holy Spirit', these 'new creations in Christ Jesus' (true believers) began to discipline themselves in 'holy habits' (scripture reading, regular prayer, Church attendance, loving service to the lives of needy persons).

One person (of countless millions of persons) who was transformed by God was Melvin Trotter. A bad man became a good man! A habitual drunkard was instantaneously delivered from his bondage to alcohol – and he never drank the remainder of his life!

MELVIN TROTTER (1870-1940). Just One Glimpse! A humanly hopeless and helpless drunk until his conversion when he became a mighty preacher. There was not anything that I knew about that I had not gone through. I had taken cure after cure. I had taken everything known to science. I had made resolution after resolution. I could no more stay sober than I could fly. When my liberty depended upon it, I would lose my liberty, because I would break my pledge. I have signed the pledge with my own blood. I promised the judge never to drink to the last day I lived. I went right out and did it over again. But just one glimpse of Jesus Christ, and I have never wanted a drink from that instant to this!

Think of the power of Christ's transforming 'touch' in the life of Melvin Trotter, up from the gutter of drunkenness to the heights of spiritual power and Spirit-empowered ministry! From the loneliness of a profligate life (alone and miserable in the bondage of alcohol), to the freedom of Christ's love (preaching with compassion to multitudes of needy persons)! From the life of a dreadful drunk to the joyful life of a mighty preacher! Once a 'wretch' (wallowing in sin), to become a free and an emboldened preacher of the Gospel! Only the transforming power of God can accomplish this in the life of any lost person! To God be the glory! "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation! Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new!" Not human reformation (temporary change), but divine transformation (God-wrought, permanent change within the human heart)!

As we have noted, there are numerous and different kinds of 'stairs' that many 'seekers' (sinners) are climbing, in their pursuit of the true and living God. One 'stairs' that many are climbing could be described as the 'Stairs of great loss and grief'. Following great losses (death of a loved one, or dissatisfaction in one's life's career, or a bitter struggle in an attempt to find answers to life's mysteries, etc.), I say, following great losses in one's life, there many times follows an earnest searching for ultimate Reality! Persons of all kinds of backgrounds and temperaments and religious and intellectual capacities have the same life experience,

namely, the suffering of great losses and heart-wrenching grief's. Persons of all different circumstances are found on the broad steps (stairs) of sorrow, and all of these broken and empty persons are seeking healing for their brokenness, and fulfillment for their aching emptiness! Because of God's great mercy – a mercy that is offered to all persons who sincerely and who humbly are seeking 'help outside of themselves' – there are healing and transformation and reconciliation!

“HOW WIDE IS GOD’S MERCY?” Wide enough to cover every soul who is honestly seeking the 'divine one' (as best as they understand Him)! Some intellectually - oriented persons, unfortunately, are “too smart for their own good.” These self-sufficient persons who believe that they can understand all of reality by means of their own brain (intellectual faculties), will never come to God until they realize their own limitations intellectually, and their own corruption (of their hearts) spiritually! Such self-reliant and self-centered (proud) persons believe they have no sin to be forgiven, and, therefore, the idea of them humbly accepting the gift of God's mercy and God's forgiveness is alien to them! Many of these self-driven, success – oriented, worldly-minded, pleasure-obsessed, independent-minded, secular-living persons (persons with a highly trained intellect, and also other persons with a rather common IQ) – these persons, just described, have not yet been 'toppled' from their 'lofty tower of superiority'! They have, thus far, been basically 'cushioned' from life's tragedies, losses, and crushing disappointments! But when life deals them some 'hard' and 'brutal' blows – when these persons lose loved ones, when they lose a coveted job (career), when they lose their friends, when they lose a portion of their health, when they lose their fortune in a 'bad economy', when they lose those things that are 'near and dear' to them – when circumstances and people 'lay them on their back', symbolically or literally (terminal cancer) – I say, when, when, when various problems come, and when the 'false prides' of self-accomplishment are destroyed – then many of those one time 'prideful persons' (now crushed underneath the load of life's multiple burdens) – I say when tragedies strike many of these 'prideful persons' will start climbing the 'stairs' which ultimately will lead them to God! Only when complacent, God-rejecting persons experience the bitter struggles of life (i.e., the hard adversities of life's troubling circumstances) will their attention be drawn away from their own brokenness to seek 'outside help'! The futility of being a self-serving person, leads many depleted souls to the Living Savior! The 'pleasures of sin for a season' is terminated for them, for 'sin's pleasurable season' is so very short! The day has come when the pleasure-seeking sinner declares that he no longer has pleasure in a sinful lifestyle! The 'pleasure' has turned to misery! The deception of sin has finally been discovered! There is no future in this sensate (fleshly) lifestyle, for (fortunately) the sinner has finally learned God's statement of truth: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life”!

The sooner a human being recognizes the reality of his sinful condition, and his consequent need for a Savior, the better! A child, who is saved when he is young, is saved from having to experience the 'bitter consequences' of 'sowing a lot of wild oats'! It is better to be 'saved from living a wild life of sin', rather

than having to be saved after living a 'wild life of sin' for many years. The 'preventing grace' of God is as great as the 'rescuing grace' of God!

MARTHA SNELL NICHOLSON (1886-1957) "What is life without God: Pointless, fruitless, unfinished, and actually not yet begun. I do not know the day or the way God in His great graciousness and tenderness made Himself known to me. I wish that I could remember. I must have been six or seven when the tremendous event transpired and I became – as well the daughter of Mr. and Ms. Snell – a child of the living God!

Not only a child of God, but also a joint-heir with Christ! All His riches became my riches. My sins were washed away in the precious blood of Christ. I had a great High Priest who would pray for me and present me faultless before the throne of God. I had the promise that nothing could ever touch me without His permission, the absolute certainty of a heavenly Home lovely beyond all my dreams of beauty, where I would dwell forever through eternity.

I only know that my passionate little heart was flooded with love for God and especially for the Lord Jesus. I loved Him so; that I thought of Him by day and dreamed of Him by night...A small lonely soul venturing for the first time into the vast realms of the infinite cannot be satisfied with something dim and distant. The heart's deep cry is for someone near and dear with whom to tread the paths. And so, my Lord and I began to walk together, my hand resting trustingly in His." (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages" by Esther Carls Dodgen; pgs. 271-272)

While there are multitudes of boys and girls who are spared the horrible consequences of a broken life of sinning, (praise God), there are probably many more persons (adults) who have tragically 'sowed many wild oats' (i.e., adults who have committed many 'sorts of sins' for many years) who desperately need God's 'rescuing grace' (i.e., the grace and mercy of God which saves and which transforms persons who have long been devastated by the cruel ravages of sin).

As stated earlier, it is the losses (grief's and sorrows) of life that God has used to turn the attention of these lost souls to the Living God! These lost souls – some of whom are bitterly struggling in their spiritual desperation – have found themselves on the 'stairs' that lead to peace and reality and transformation! Many are on the 'stairs of grief', and the Mercy of God is offered to these seeking lost souls!

One such seeking soul who found himself on the 'stairs of bitter struggle' was the famous scientist, Victor F. Hess (1883-1964). Victor Hess was an American professor of physics and Nobel Prize winner in 1936 for the discovery of cosmic rays. He wrote,

“Real Faith, for me as a scientist, as for anyone else, is often a matter of bitter struggle. The victory must be won – or each one in his own soul must discover the fight. It often takes the personal experience of grave danger or death to bring conviction and to prepare the way for Faith in Divine Providence. What is certain is that, when Faith comes, there follows a great serenity of soul and a deep peace in the human hearts.” (Taken From “Glimpses of God through the Ages: by Esther Carls Dodgen; pg. 270)

The mercy of God is extended to all persons, in all circumstances, to the up-and-out and to the down-and-out persons, to the young and to the old, to those childish sinners who have hardly started life, and to those experienced sinners who have long built their ‘mountain of sin’. To the young sinners who are initially feeling God’s conviction of sin and to those older sinners who have often felt and resisted God’s conviction of sin! God’s mercy is as wide as the entire human race. No sinners excluded, for there is no sin stain that is so ‘deep’, but what the ‘blood of Jesus’ goes deeper yet! All persons need the mercy of God. Because every person is a sinner, both by choice (free will) and by nature (corrupt willfulness that is the heritage of every person, for all are members of a ‘fallen race’).

It is not only true that brilliant scientists, like Victor F. Hess, who have a ‘bitter struggle’ in their quest for God, but there are one-time pagans (like Sadhu Sundar Singh) who experience desperation in their quest (search) for the Living God! Our merciful God (who wishes none to perish eternally) comes to the ‘rescue’ (sometimes verily ‘in time’) of broken and desperate persons!

SADHU SUNDAR SINGH (1889-1933) Indian Christian mystic who was raised a Sikh. A mighty conversion to Christ, whom he had ridiculed, took place after great despair from the death of his mother. He cried out, “Oh God, if there were a God reveal you to me tonight.” If God did not speak to him before morning, he planned to lay his head on the rails and wait for a train. At 4:45 a. m. a bright cloud of light suddenly filled his room and out of the brightness came the face and figure of Jesus who said, “How long are you going to persecute me. For you I gave my life. You were praying to know the right way, why do not you take it. I am the Way.” That moment he believed. (Taken From “Glimpses of God through the Ages” by Esther Carls Dodgen; pg., 279)

The number of persons who have turned to the Holy Bible for guidance and comfort, in the worst of their lostness, is an incalculable number! There are many searching souls today, who find themselves on the ‘Stairs of The Bible’. Persons who are finding great encouragement from the scripture’s admonitions and instructions (promises, conditions, warnings), as they carefully and open-mindedly read from the Word of God. They are enlightened, convicted, convinced, as they ascend the ‘Stairs’ (of revelation) during their serious quest for God. Wonderfully, there are many who find the true God (personal conversion), because of

their persistent quest for truth. One such (well-known) person who found God as a result of his sincere quest is the former President George W. Bush. When he was about 40 years old, his life was in a downward spiral (of despair). The evangelist Billy Graham asked him if he 'knew God'. He said that he did not, but that he wanted to know God. After George Bush read the Bible for about one entire year, he found a personal relationship with God (that changed his entire life). From that time onward, his life had a forward - movement and a great meaning and a great energy. He soon became the governor of Texas and finally he became the President of the United States for 8 years! God's powerful use of the Holy Scriptures in the life of this man!

DAWSON TROTMAN was founder of the Navigator Organization (with a focus on Bible Memorization). Troutman found Christ as a result of Bible memorization! As a young person (rather confused and at times rather 'wild'), Troutman was challenged to take part in a memorization contest. His brilliant mind met the challenge, and he quickly memorized the 10 assigned Bible verses for the contest. During the next week, he memorized 10 more verses! Eventually he committed scores of Bible Verses to his memory. His life was literally changed! He was wonderfully converted to Christ, and eventually he founded the Navigators (an international ministry to thousands of seeking Christians and non-Christian alike)! A great discipleship-training ministry!

JACOB DESHAZER, who fought in World War II, was raised in a Christian home, but he had not become a follower of Christ himself. When he became a 'prisoner of war' (in a rough Japanese prison camp), he was deeply embittered with hatred for his Japanese guards. He was reduced to 'skin and bones' as a result of harsh treatment during the 40 months that he was imprisoned. Physically and spiritually, he lay 'very low' – verily surviving! But he had a 'praying mother' and a 'merciful God', even though he was not consciously thinking about these important realities.

Miraculously, a Japanese guard was used by God to do a 'saving act' for Jacob DeShazer! This act of mercy probably saved DeShazer's mental sanity and certainly, it saved his spiritual life. The guard gave DeShazer a copy of the Bible. To occupy his time, DeShazer started to read and to memorize large portions of the Scriptures! Through that activity (day after day, for months) this awakened and embittered man was converted to Christ! He climbed the stairs to a relationship with God (Christ) through reading (memorizing) the Bible. God changed Jacob DeShazer totally! After his conversion, the guards could not understand why DeShazer expressed such love for them! When DeShazer was finally released from prison, he felt God's call upon him, to eventually return (after Bible training, etc. in America) to Japan to be a missionary to the very people who had so cruelly treated him! His work (for decades) in Japan was so effective that, finally, an interesting movie was produced and featured in theaters across America!

ETTY HILLESUM (1914-1943), One more example of how God uses the power of His Word to *bring transformation to human lives*. *Etty was another person who found the Scriptures as the 'Stairs' by which God was wonderfully found, and was a little known young person . Etty was a young Jewish woman living in Amsterdam in 1942. During that time, the Nazis were arresting Jews and hauling them off to concentration camps. As she awaited arrest, with a fear of the unknown, she began to read the Bible, and there she met Jesus. She embraced God and found courage and confidence. She died at Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of twenty-nine. (Taken From "Glimpses of God through the Ages" by Esther Carls Dogen; pg. 292)*

Again, the question must be asked – "How Wide Is God's Mercy?" Our God is so merciful that He is willing to use countless experiences in the lives of people to put them on the 'stairs' that has the ability to lead them to the very 'feet of the Savior' (Salvation and New Life).

When all seems to be "going well" with people (sinners), there is a tendency for these self-reliant persons to "go on their merry way" with little or no serious thoughts about God, death, eternal accountability. These persons, proud as they are of their personal accomplishments and financial security and physical health, think that they can "make it on their own" in life! As self-centered and pleasure-oriented persons, they have no time for prayer, worship, Church, and the Bible! Because they are living only for the world of time, with no serious belief in a 'hereafter' (heaven or hell), these 'hallow' persons are essentially 'practical atheists'. In other words, they are living as if there was no God!

How does God 'reach' the mind, the heart, the spirit, and the will of these complacent, indifferent, and 'hardened' sinners? God, of course, is Sovereign – that is, only God can discern the thoughts, desires, intentions, and barriers in the life of every person. However, experience (observation) shows that one method which God uses to knock the props out from underneath these God-rejecters is to send (or to allow) serious illnesses to pervade the bodies, minds, and spirits of these God-rejecters (self-centered sinners).

Thus, serious illness is something 'used' by God to awaken the complacent ones, to soften the hearts of the hardened ones, to enlighten the minds of the mentally-darkened ones, to destroy the complacency in the spirits of the proud ones!

Spiritually speaking, it is amazing the changes that sometimes take place in the entire lives of hardened sinners when they are 'laid low', on their backs (almost helpless physically) in a hospital room! Away from the 'hustle and bustle' of their busy (self-centered) life, and separated from their worldly business associates, these persons have lots of time to reflect on their lives (lives that have pursued the 'material' interests with no time or thought to eternal matters)! Some persons in the 'laid low' condition (of physical debilitation) are possibly facing the inevitability of their 'final hours'! When one is gravely ill, or when some (worse

yet) are counting days until their terminal illness (cancer, etc.) will bring their death – it is during these times that people (sinners) often “cry out to God for mercy”!

It is better for one to give his life to God when he is a mere child, but God many times has to resort to “drastic measures” to awaken persons (sinners) from their “state of complacency”! God is not in the “business” of causing the death of children or of bringing cancer to the bodies of people. While God is not the author of bad things, the all-wise God sometimes uses the losses of life to awaken persons of their need for the living Savior!

Through the “Stairs of Physical Infirmities”, some people begin pursuing reality, truth, and God Himself! Through serious illness, some people actually discover God!

J.C. PENNEY, one well-known person who discovered the reality of the precious Saviour, as a result of a serious illness, was. Here, briefly, is an account of his discovery of God (in the small chapel of a hospital).

I was broken nervously and physically, filled with despair, unable to see even a ray of hope. I had nothing to live for. I felt I had not a friend left in the world that even my family turned against me.

(Then he entered the little hospital chapel and heard the words of a song, “Be not dismayed what’er be-tide, God will take care of you,” and listened to the Scripture reading and to the prayer.)

Suddenly something happened. I cannot explain it. I can only call it a miracle. I felt as if I had been instantly lifted out of the darkness of a dungeon into warm, brilliant sunshine. (In 1929 when the Great Depression hit, Penney found himself in crisis. He began to worry about his financial losses and soon he was unable to sleep. He developed shingles and was hospitalized. He expected to die and wrote farewell letters to his wife and sons. He later called those moments in the chapel “the most dramatic and glorious twenty minutes of my life.”)

The creativity by which God gets people’s attention (regarding spiritual ‘concerns’) is truly amazing! God, in His infinite wisdom, knows what will best awaken persons’ attention to their ‘need for God’ – what will shake a person from his complacency, what will best arrest a person from his indifference, what will be the best set of circumstances that will bring deep conviction to the spirit of a lost person, what situations will best quicken the deadened conscience of a hell-bent sinner! Yes, the Holy Spirit uses many different forces to bring lost souls to the “Stairs” of Spiritual Searching!

One 'Stair' that God effectively uses to create a deep search for God, is the stairs of nature, that is, the stairs of God's Amazing Creations. One of the many atheists, who began to think about God because of honestly observing God's creations, is the well-known, former Communist Soviet spy Whittaker Chambers. Here is his account of his initial awakening to spiritual reality (i.e., his acknowledgment that there had to be a 'Grand Designer').

WHITTAKER CHAMBER (1901-1961). An American, a Former Communist and Soviet Spy! "THE FINGER OF GOD WAS LAID UPON MY FOREHEAD!" My daughter was in her high chair. I was watching her eat. She was the most miraculous thing that had ever happened in my life. I liked to watch her even when she smeared porridge on her face or dropped it meditatively on the floor. My eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear – those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind: "No, those ears were not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature (the Communist view). They could have been created only by immense design. The thought was involuntary and unwanted. I crowded it out of my mind. But I never wholly forgot it or the occasion I had to crowd it out of my mind. If I had completed it, I should have had to say, Design presupposes God. I did not then know that, at that moment, the finger of God was first laid upon my forehead.

A Woman Physician (Her Name Unknown To Me) had a similar experience, and as a result of her carefully observing the works of God's creation (namely, the human body), she came into a much closer (intimate) relationship with God! This is her amazing testimony! Another stair, (means), God used to bring her alive spiritually!

I came into an anatomy room to study. The dead body meant nothing at all to me. I could not visualize the man or woman it might have been. Life left few records on these immobile faces. For weeks I worked and each day the wonder grew and then one day I was working on an arm and hand, studying the perfect mechanical arrangements of the muscles and tendons – how the sheaths of certain muscles are split to let tendons of other muscles through, that the hand may be delicate and small and yet powerful. I was all alone in the laboratory when the overwhelming belief came; a thing like this is not just a chance, but also a part of a plan, a plan so big that only God could have conceived it. Religion had been a matter of form, thinking without convictions, and now everything was an evidence of God; the tendons of the hand, the patterns of the little blue butterfly's wings – it was all part of a purpose.

Repeatedly, we have noted that God 'deals' with each person uniquely. No two persons are identical (in personality, etc.), and there is a special 'ladder' (stairs) that each person finds himself on, in his search for God and in his ascent to God (and finally in his entrance to heaven). Also, God has many different 'calls' for persons, as there is the total number of persons in the world! God, obviously, loves 'creativity' and 'variety'

as seen in the created works of Nature, and certainly as seen in the 'creativity' and 'variety' that is supremely demonstrated in the 'Crown of God's creations' (human beings). Each person (created by God with special and unique temperaments and talents and backgrounds) responds to God's call (first to the call of conversion and later to the call to a unique ministry). As noted previously (several times), there is a unique 'stairs' that each person chooses (or, by circumstances, is chosen by God for humans). But this phenomenon of unique 'stairs' applies not only to a sinner's search for new life, but it also applies to a believer who is searching for God's specific 'call' to Christian Service.

BONNIDELL CLOUSE (1928 -)American Professor of Educational And School Psychology, Author. *Bonnidell Clouse very well, sees one person's experience, which demonstrates these truths, in the following testimony. So 'transparent' and so 'refreshing'! She was an American Professor of Educational Psychology, in the early part of the 20th century.*

God knew the plans he had for me. Dedication to God's service surely means different things to different people. Each of us is unique and God calls us in a variety of ways. Going in front of the Church after a service may be all right for some people, but it never appealed to me...God's call to Jeremiah was different. This was One-on-one. No altar calls. No singing of the twelve verses of Just as I Am. This was just the Lord and Jeremiah getting it all sorted out. Regardless of the circumstances and regardless of the consequences, Jeremiah knew he had to serve the Lord. He had to do what God had called him to do. And then there was the wonderful promise given to Jeremiah:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11) HOPE AND A FUTURE. What could be more exhilarating? Seeking to know God's will, and to do it, brings with it a promise that is better than anything offered by anyone or anything else.

"CHANGING THE ANALOGY FROM STAIRS TO WIND!" What can we say about the activity of the Holy Spirit? Said Jesus, "The wind blows all around us as if it has a will of its own; we feel and hear it, but we do not understand where it has come from or where it will end up. Life in the Spirit is as if it were the wind of God." (John 3:8, The Voice Bible)

The 'Wind of God' – The Spirit of God – 'has a mind of itself' (Himself)! You cannot predict what He will do, or where He will go! God (the Spirit) is sovereign, which means that He is all-powerful and all-wise and all loving! He knows what is best, He wants to do what is best, and He is able to do what is best! His ways are past finding out! He (the Spirit) will take requests from any sincere person (whether or not that sincere, God-seeking person has yet discovered the Living Christ), yes, He will take requests from any sincere person,

but no human being (regardless of his human status) can command the Spirit! No human being dare 'quench' or 'resist' the Mighty Spirit, for such ill behavior will bring human hurt and divine disfavor, and consequently the 'work of God' will in some way suffer!

The 'Wind' of God (Spirit) has multiple 'functions': convict the sinner of his need for God; convince everyone of the righteousness of Christ; comfort the broken-hearted and bring healing of body and mind and spirit; Teach all believers the ways of Truth; Impart Strength to the weary believers; Remind all persons that there is a judgment to come where the 'deeds done in the body' will be evaluated! AND MUCH MORE!

B.H. CARROLL, infidel turned Bible teacher and scholar, who were converted after he returned home wounded from the Civil War. The following testimony of a one-time infidel, who was suddenly 'awakened' by the 'Wind of God' (Holy Spirit), is most encouraging!

Suddenly there flashed upon my mind, like a light from heaven, this Scripture. 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' I seemed to see Jesus standing before me, looking reproachfully and tenderly and pleadingly, seeming to rebuke me for having gone to all other sources for rest but the right one, and now inviting me to come to Him. In a moment I went, once and forever, casting myself unreservedly and for all time at Christ's feet, and in a moment the rest came, indescribably and unspeakably, and it has remained from that day until now, brighter than the sunlight and sweeter than the songs of birds. Now, for the first time, I understood the Scripture, which I had often heard.

The 'Wind of God' (that is, the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity) is all pervasive, all present in our world. He is not barred from any place, and He is actively seeking the lost ones everywhere. He has multiple ministries (to both believers and to non-believers), but all of His ministries are focused on one grand purpose – to exalt Christ and to draw the attention of all persons to the transforming Christ, to the Christ who is full of mercy and who offers the gift of forgiveness!

"How Wide Is God's Mercy"? It is wide enough to include every man, woman, boy, and girl! God's mercy, objectively, is available for all persons. None need question as to whether or not they are included in God's offer of Mercy! It is a universal offer, because Jesus' atonement is unlimited in its 'scope' (power). However, humble and grateful persons – by persons who desire and who need the gift, must individually receive a 'gift' (as great and wonderful as it is)! Only those who are convinced that they are 'great sinners' will receive the 'great gift' (of mercy) from a 'great Savior'!

Ron Christian 

