

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION!

by

Ronald G. Christian

An Indepth Devotional Study  
of the Basic Truths of  
Christianity



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TO  
HELEN IRENE CHRISTIAN

Devout Believer

and

Godly Mother

who taught me from my  
youngest childhood  
(II Timothy 3:15)  
to build my life upon Christ -  
"The Firm Foundation"



## INTRODUCTION

One of the great hymns of the Church is entitled "How Firm A Foundation". The title of this devotional book is named after this hymn. Notice the words of this hymn's first verse:

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

The Christian has a firm foundation upon which he may build his faith. It is no less than the foundation of God's Holy Word--the Bible.

In an age in which people are building their lives upon the crumbling foundations of the world's false philosophies, ideologies, and religious systems, it is encouraging to know that the Bible is a sure foundation. The heavens above and the earth beneath may pass away, but God's Word will never pass away.

In an age of confusion and chaos, both in the changing circumstances of life and in the hazy thinking of modern man, it is important to recapture the basic teachings of the Bible. As sincere persons who wish to live lives of integrity, we must "stoutly defend the truth which God gave, once for all, to his people to keep without change through the years." (Jude 3, Living Bible)

We are "no longer to be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different, or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth". (Ephesians 4:14, Living Bible)

He who builds his life upon Christ (the Living Word), as He is revealed in the Bible (the Written Word), is the one whose life is built upon a 'firm foundation'. Said Jesus, "All who listen to my instructions and follow them are wise, like a man who builds his house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents, and the floods rise and the storm winds beat against his house, it won't collapse, for it is built on rock". (Matthew 7:24,25, Living Bible)

This devotional book is intended to be a guide to 'Basic Christianity'. Because many devotional books are written primarily for 'dedicated' Christians, I have instead chosen to write a devotional book which is not only suited for the more mature believer, but one that is also designed to help the sincere nonbeliever, whose mind is open to investigate the claims of 'Basic Christianity'. I have sought to cover all the 'fronts' of 'Basic Christianity', from the most elemental stage of investigating the case for believing in God's existence, to the more advanced stages of fundamental Christian teachings--the Fall of Man, the personal Incarnation of God, the meaning of the life and death of Christ, the bodily Resurrection of our Lord, the reign of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Most, if not all of the basic teachings cited in the ancient 'Apostles Creed' are discussed in some detail in this devotional book:

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin mary, that for our sakes he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died,

and was buried; that he arose again on the third day, that he ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from which place he will come again, I believe in the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and everlasting life after death."

The book can be used in several ways. It can be used as a daily devotional guidebook, with the reader reading one page each day for approximately five months. Each page includes, along with the practically-oriented devotional reading, an appropriate Scriptural reference, a written Prayer for the Day, and a written Affirmation for the Day. Because the book is divided into twelve chapters, the layout of the book is designed in such a way that it can easily be used for an adult Sunday School Course. The individual chapters contain enough content, and yet are short enough in length, that they could also well serve as material for small midweek study groups within a local church. Because there is a developing theme throughout the book, it can also be used and read like any other 'regular' book.

Peter, the great apostle of Christ, wrote in his epistle, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence". (I Peter 3:15)

An intellectual understanding of Christianity is vital, for Jesus commanded us to love God with all our minds as well as with all our hearts. As one said, "My heart cannot rejoice in what my mind rejects".

An unexamined faith is not a faith worth having--and is indeed dangerous. One must know that his beliefs are based on objective truth, for it is the object of belief that determines the value of belief. To accept anything in an unthinking way is possibly to accept error. Also, to accept truth on the basis of dogmatic authority, without thinking it through yourself, is to accept a secondhand faith. A secondhand faith is a dying faith.

Often, if not always, the writing of a book is the result of the author's own intellectual or spiritual struggles. This book is no exception. My life has not been lived without the challenges of doubts, but I have learned to see that even doubting can be an ally rather than an enemy of my Christian faith. I am learning to work out my salvation with the aid of honest doubts which will lead me to the outcome of honest beliefs.

Once you have staked your entire life on God and His will and His revealed nature, then, using this commitment as your stable center, you can go as far afield in honest doubt as you need to in seeking a satisfying intellectual and soul answer to your questions. Develop a reasoned faith. Struggle to understand. Ask any honest question. Do not fear to probe. Develop a thorough inquiring mind. Only as you question will the answers be forthcoming. God encourages this process: "Come, let us reason together", saith the Lord. (Isaiah 1:18)

It is important for one to keep his mind alive and inquisitive. Honest doubts are compatible with an honest commitment to Christ, and in fact the degree of commitment to Christ will be reflected in the degree of serious thinking one does in finding a satisfying answer to the difficult questions of life. One will not find all the answers to life's questions, but not to find the answers is no sin. However, never to ask the questions is a sin against one's God-given intelligence, and is evidence of spiritual as well as intellectual sloth! One cannot fully live until he learns to accept the challenge of hard thinking.

Ask God for a tender heart and a tough mind--a heart tender in response to God's love and a mind tough to grapple with life's mysteries. We are not meant to understand all of God's ways or all of life's perplexities, but we would understand many more of them if we but had the courage to think and to ponder! Those mysteries that will never be unraveled by the reasoning process must be accepted by the tender heart of faith and receptivity.

All the mysteries and perplexities of life are not solved--even within the teachings of Christianity. However, there is no more satisfying system of thought than that of Christianity. But Christianity is more than a system of thought. Christianity is embodied in a Person--the Person of Jesus Christ. The purpose in writing this book therefore is not simply to present an intellectual defense of 'Basic Christianity', but to help persons to know the Living Christ!. Tough thinking regarding the truths of Christianity will hopefully lead one to loving fellowship with the Christ of Christianity!

It is my prayer that the positive Christ who has been altogether precious to me since my personal conversion on March 12, 1956, will use this earnest, but feeble effort of mine to help hundreds of people to place their feet on the solid foundation--Christ! "How Firm a Foundation!"

Ronald G. Christian  
Fort Collins, Colorado



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## Chapter 1

### MAN'S QUEST FOR MEANING

IS LIFE ONE BIG 'MERRY-GO-ROUND'?

What would life be like if God had not revealed Himself to mankind, if Jesus Christ had never come to earth? Life would be one big merry-go-round of futility, despair, cynacism and sorrow! There are many today who are trying to live life without God--and even though all may appear fine on the surface for them, reality shows that their lives are 'coming apart at the seams'. "Life is not what it is 'cooked up to be", is sometimes heard by these cynics. Many of these alienated people are saying, if not in actual words at least by their actions, "Futility of futilities, all is futile! Life is like chasing after the wind"! The utopian dreams of many modern-day secular philosophers have gone up in smoke, and talk of utopia has become now talk of oblivion! Listen to some of our modern-day philosophers:

"Brief and powerless is man's life. On him all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way." (Bertrand Russell)

"Current indications are that the world is bent on going to hell in a hand cart, and that is probably what it will do." (Gordon Rattray Taylor)

"You are the orphans in an age of no tommorrows." (Joan Baez)

"Today even the survival of humanity is a utopian hope." (Norman O. Brown)

These words are modern-day commentary on the ancient book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes, perhaps the strangest book of the Bible, describes what life is like without belief in divine revelation. Not all, but most of the book of Ecclesiastes, describes the philosophy or viewpoints of the cynic, skeptic, and pessimist. 'Futility of life without God'--this theme is ably carried out in the book of Ecclesiastes. A man who looks at life without the eyes of faith is likely to come to many of the same conclusions as the writer of this book.

The only relief we get in our heavy spirits as we listen to the pessimistic conclusions regarding life which the author describes, is the occasional flash of faith which he occasionally affirms in God whose inscrutable purposes will eventually prevail in spite of the inexplicable mysteries of life which he observes!

Have you ever travelled on a mountain road that was broad, beautiful and surrounded by evergreen trees, with the sparkling sunlight dancing all around you, but as you continued to travel, the road narrowed and became rocky, the sun became obscured from view as the clouds darkened and finally you came to the end of the mountain trail? The road, you discovered, was a dead-end road. All you could do was to turn around and go back from where you began!

"O God (if there is a God!), I have travelled many roads in life, most of which appeared to be broad, beautiful and full of pleasure, but the longer I have travelled these roads, the narrower they have become; and the less enjoyable they are. I have discovered by experience that these roads are dead-end roads! If there is an open-ended road which leads to increasing happiness and meaning, lead me to that road!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Amidst all the dead-end roads of life, there surely must be one road which, while it may appear narrow at first, increasingly becomes broad, expansive, more beautiful and full of purpose and destiny!

## THE WAY OF MATERIALISM

The book of Ecclesiastes describes several dead-end roads--the roads which many in all generations have travelled. Disillusionment and despair are at the end of each of these roads. In this chapter we must take a look at some of the popular dead-end roads which people by the masses are travelling today, and note that faith alone is the answer to the disillusionments which these ways inevitable bring. Four popular roads which the book of Ecclesiastes discusses are the roads of Materialism, Pleasure, Power and Knowledge.

Consider first the road of Materialism. Men are breaking their health and selling out their honor to make more money. Success in a secular culture is determined by a materialistic standard. The quantity of ones bank account is more important than the quality of ones life. Notes Evangelist Billy Graham: "A leading magazine carries an advertisement with this revealing paragraph: 'Is automation, the use of electronics to run machines, going to fill your home with pleasant surprises? Will magic eyes light each room? Will you own a portable piano, cordless electric clocks and a telephone you can answer without lifting the receiver? Discover how this exciting new development can make your life happier'". Asks Billy Graham, "Has happiness been reduced to portable pianos and the blinking of magic eyes?" (World Aflame, pg. 46)

Notes Mavis: "Modern man has a clear vision for secular goals, but dull vision for spiritual goals. It seems that some evil spirit, to use Kierkegaard's figure of speech, has put a pair of glasses on the nose of this generation. One of the lenses is a powerful magnifying glass; the other is an equally strong reducing glass. Our generation looks at the secular things through the strong lens and at the spiritual things through the reducing one". (Psychology of Christian Experience, pg. 103)

"In 1923, a very important meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Attending this meeting were nine of the world's most successful financiers." It is noteworthy to recognize what happened to these persons 25 years later. "Charles Schwab, the president of the largest independent steel company, died bankrupt and lived on borrowed money; Samuel Insull, the president of the largest utility company, died a fugitive from justice and penniless; Howard Hopson, the president of the largest gas company, went insane; Arthur Sutton, the great wheat speculator, died abroad insolvent; Richard Whitney, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, was finally released from prison; Albert Fall, a member of the President's Cabinet, pardoned from prison so he could die at home; Jesse Livermore, the greatest 'bear' in Wall Street, died a suicide; Ivar Kruegar, head of the world's greatest monopoly, died a suicide; Leon Fraser, president of the Bank of International Settlements, died a suicide!" (A Challenge to Men from Proverb; Foster, pg. 11)

"O God, deliver me from the futility of materialism! Help me to know from observation of others rather than from bitter personal experience, that accumulated wealth, instead of giving happiness, oftentimes is the chief thief of happiness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "Material things are regarded as the chief good in life only by those who do not have them." (William Sangster)

"THE SOUL IS AN IMMORTAL GUEST"

'Everything has its price. Money can buy anything. Unhappiness is caused because of economic deprivation.' This is the sentiment of many Americans. Too many think that more money would some way solve their problems. The wealth of America is sometimes a cause of envy in other lands, but it is revealing to know that the American best-sellers are books on how to be happy.

It was Hannah More who noted that "the soul on earth is an immortal guest, compelled to starve at an unreal feast; a pilgrim panting for the rest to come; an exile anxious for its native home".

Man's soul, unattended and ignored, becomes shrivelled and starved. The materialist is one who values temporal things more than spiritual things. Materialism may fatten the body, but it starves the soul. It may gratify the senses, but it will rotten the fiber of moral character. It may outwardly give fame and fortune but inwardly it imprisons the poverty-stricken spirit. The result of conforming to cultural standards is mediocrity. To be squeezed into the world's mold is to be formed into a stunted, dull and manufactured person.

The greedy materialist, who has grown fat on the accumulation of material goods, remains dissatisfied because of the leanness of his soul. To his bitter disappointment he learns that life does not consist in the abundance of things that a man possesses. His riches have only given ulcers to his stomach and taken peace from his mind. His false friends stand by to mock him, and his sad delusion turns to suicidal despair. The crackle of the dollar and the glitter of the coin have lost their appeal, for he finally learns that everything does not have its price and that there are qualities that have no monetary value. Sliding down the slope of life on his bed of perpetual pain, caused from his indulgent living, the disillusioned secularist realizes that he has been the subject of a cruel tyrant. The sweet wine of frivolous living has left a bitter taste in his mouth. The swinging music of his youth remains as a strange echo in his mind to mock him as a fool. Too many learn too late that "the lover of money shall not be satisfied with money nor the lover of wealth with his gain; this, too, is futility". (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

"O God, I have often eaten at earth's tables, only to be left starving. Let me feast at your table. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is my native home. I am only a pilgrim passing through, anxious for my heavenly home.

"CHERRIES ARE IN BETTER SHAPE THAN YOU"

There are many people in our modern world who would never outrightly deny the existence of God, but these same people are living as if there were no God! They are 'practical atheists'. They believe in no reality other than that which they can perceive through their five physical senses. They are the thoughtless, common people of today who live only for today! Of such people Paul wrote, "Their future is eternal loss, for their god is their appetite...and all they think about is this life here on earth". (Philippians 3:19, Living Bible) These people are earth-bound materialists!

Rev. Harold Brockhoff spoke one time on the nationwide 'Lutheran Hour' on the subject of 'Authentic Life'. He noted, "A minister in our neighborhood was out making calls one afternoon and he rang the bell of a certain house and a woman came to the door, her apron on, flour on her hands--she was holding a can of cherries. She very shortly told him that she didn't know anything about what he had come to talk about and that she wasn't interested in finding out either. Then after a few minutes of conversation, as she was about to close the door, the minister asked 'Do you mind if I ask you what you have in your hand?' And she answered 'A can of cherries'. He said, 'Do you mind if I ask you where you got them?' She said, 'Down at the corner, at the store'. And then he asked 'Do you mind if I ask what you're going to do with them?' Still polite even after this third question she answered 'Why, I am going to put them into a pie.' And then the minister said 'If you don't mind the observation, those cherries are in a better shape than you are. We know what they are--they are cherries. And we know where they came from--they come from the store. And we know where they are going. And from your conversation you have no idea of who you are, you don't understand your roots and where you came from and how you got here, and why you're here and you don't know where you are going, or why you're going there.' After a short moment of stunned silence, the good woman said 'Won't you please come in'."

Are you, like the woman in this story, living only for this life? Are you so preoccupied with the trivial things of time that you have forgotten the weightier matters of eternity? 'Only one life to live, t'will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last!'

"O God, in thee I live and move and have my Being. Help me to know who I am, why I am here, and where I am going. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The God who created me, knows me, and knows why I am here. In finding God, I will discover my purpose for existence.

THE DEAD-END ROAD OF MATERIALISM

The road of materialism is a dead-end road, first, because of the inheritability of laboriously-gained riches. Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes, bitterly proclaimed this fact when he wrote, "And I am disgusted about this, that I must leave the fruits of all my hard work to others. And who can tell whether my son will be a wise man or a fool? And yet all I have will be given to him--how discouraging! So I turned in despair from hard work as the answer to my search for satisfaction". (Ecclesiastes 2:18-20, Living Bible)

The road of Materialism is a dead-end road, secondly, because riches cause sleepless anxiety. "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, Living Bible)

The road of materialism is a dead-end road, thirdly, because riches can be easily lost. "There is another serious problem I have seen everywhere--savings are put into risky investments that turn sour, and soon there is nothing left to pass on to one's son. The man who speculates is soon back to where he began--with nothing. This, as I said, is a very serious problem, for all his hard work has been for nothing; he has been working for the wind. It is all swept away. All the rest of his life he is under a cloud--gloomy, discouraged, frustrated and angry." (Ecclesiastes 5:13-17, Living Bible) Paul instructs us not to set our hopes "on the uncertainty of riches". (I Timothy 6:17, NASB)

The road of Materialism is a dead-end road, fourthly, because money cannot be taken with you when you die. "Do not be dismayed when evil men grow rich and build their lovely home. For when they die they carry nothing with them! Their honors will not follow them. Though a man calls himself happy all through his life--and the world loudly applauds success --yet in the end he dies like everyone else, and enters eternal darkness. For man with all his pomp, must die like any animal." (Psalms 49:16-20, Living Bible) "We didn't bring any money with us when we came into the world, and we can't carry away a single penny when we die." (I Timothy 6:7, Living Bible)

"God, help me to be a wise investor, laying up treasures in heaven, not on earth, living for eternity, not for mere time. Then my life shall be worth living!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is a way that seemeth right unto man--Materialism--but the end thereof is futility and utter frustration!

"I SMELL THE SCENT OF A FLOWER"

The road of Materialism is a dead-end road, fifthly, because material possessions do not have the ability to satisfy the inner longing of the soul.

Man is searching for reality. Earth's riches do not satisfy the questing soul of man. Said Jesus, "Beware! Don't always be wishing for what you don't have. For real life and real living are not related to how rich we are". (Luke 12:15, Living Bible)

Listen to the testimony of a young businessman, seeking satisfaction in earth's wealth, while all the time realizing that God alone can really satisfy him.

"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 words 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 make the same mistakes again. Oh, the tribulations of being an undisciplined child!"

"Fortunately my life is not always this way. I do feel growth frequently. I truly believe God has a plan for me, and even now his works are taking place. I long for greater understanding of his will here on Earth. It's as though I smell the scent of a flower and am trying anxiously to find it. I've only seen glimpses of it, but the fragrance is so strong and satisfying that I must continue to pursue. When I possess it (and I will), I will share its beauty with the world. I will promote it vigorously with the pleasure of knowing that it is truly right for those receiving it. In my heart I know that flower is worth pursuing even though the search is trying."

"The fragrant scent of the flower is so strong that I will not be satisfied until I find the flower! Please guide me to the Flower! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: However hard the search is, the 'flower' is worth pursuing!

"BORN THIRSTING FOR INFINITY"

Man is built for eternity! There is within every man a 'God-shaped vacuum' which seeks to be filled with God! Man cannot live by bread alone, but must live by the eternal Word of the eternal God. Man is restless until he finds his rest in God. Man is overbuilt for time; he is built for eternity.

"And here at last we find  
Strict diagnosis of our malady,  
Which is, in short, that man is heaven-starved  
--Men are born thirsting for infinity."

Inherent in every man is a basic desire to live--and to live happily and permanently. A well-known atheist in France confessed his most deep-seated urge: "I have in myself a great need of permanence. I mean a need of believing that there are products not subject to decay and degradation, works on which temporal changes have no influence".

Notes William Sangster, famed Methodist preacher in England, "Earth does not satisfy us. I cannot help but feel that that is an impressive fact. I warn you against supposing that, if only you had more of this or that, you would be completely satisfied. It is an illusion. Earth cannot satisfy you. William Watson--in his poem 'World Strangeness'--asked:

"In this house with starry dome,  
Floored with gemlike plains and seas,  
Shall I never feel at home,  
Never wholly be at ease?"

Never! You weren't meant to." (Sangster's Daily Readings, pg. 104)

Materialism is a perversion of the God-given acquisitive urge with which humans are born. The Creation Story (Genesis 1-3) talks about God's will for man to dominate and to manage. Sin has turned this basic urge into the desire to possess and to own, rather than to manage. Sin blinds man to the meaning of material things, causing man to forget that he is steward of material possessions and God alone is the owner of all things.

Faith in God is the only answer to the challenge of Materialism. Regarding Materialism, Faith says: (1) Contentment does not depend upon the abundance of material things which a person possesses (read Luke 12:15; I Timothy 6:8; Philippians 4:11b-12); (2) Earthly resources are to be used, not selfishly, but unselfishly to help others (read Ephesians 4:28; I Timothy 6:18-19); (3) Don't worry about things; rather, trust God to supply all your needs (read I Timothy 6:17; Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:25-27; II Corinthians 8:13-15, 9:10-11); (4) Focus on heavenly treasures, not earthly treasures (read John 14:1-2; I Timothy 6:7).

Real life is found only in Christ who is the very essence of Life. When you have Christ, you have life and are enabled to live to the full. Without Christ, you merely exist!

"O God, don't let me be disillusioned into thinking that earth's treasures can satisfy me. Let me see Reality. Let me see You! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am made by God and for God. Therefore, I will give myself to God.

THE DELIGHTS OF MEN - 'WINE, WOMEN AND SONG'

The second road we must consider is the Road of Pleasure. Solomon travelled the road of 'wine, women and song'. Wrote Solomon, "I explored in my heart to stimulate my body with wine and to lay hold of frivolity....I acquired singers, both men and women and the delights of men--mistresses galore". (Ecclesiastes 2:3,8)

There are many people today who are 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God'. The philosophy of many is: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die". Such pleasure-obsessed persons engage in endless attempts to gratify their lusts, only to find themselves forever frustrated and heaven-starved. Feeding on the sensual husks around them, they could be feeding on heaven's satisfying manna. God created mankind, male and female, and intends for the human couple to find fulfillment within the bonds of a God-established marriage. But, seeking to be free from the restraints of marriage, many have found themselves slaves of passion--lonely, isolated, unloved and guilt-ridden!

The road of Sensual Pleasure is a dead-end road! Wrote Solomon, "Of laughter I said, 'It is madness', and of amusement, 'What does it accomplish?'" Solomon found out that the temporary sweetness of sensual pleasure turned to the bitterness of remorse.

Says Millard Sall, Christian psychologist, "The modern 'free love' philosophy that states that 'any act is all right as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else' is false. Immoral acts always hurt someone else besides hurting the person who commits them, although he might not recognize it at the time. A perfect example is that of Sally and Mike:

'We love each other; we want to express that love sexually; nobody else is being hurt, so why shouldn't we go ahead?' said a young man of nineteen to his girl friend. A few months later Sally came to my office broken and confused. She said that Mike and she had engaged in sex relations and at the time she could not see how anybody could be hurt. She had thought that the idea had just been a carry-over from her Puritan past. 'Now' she said, 'I am beginning to see it differently. As soon as Mike got what he wanted, he no longer seemed to be interested in marrying me. I also began to become confused as to my feeling about him. Did I really love him for himself or were we just using each other? Another thing that bothers me now is whether I could trust Mike to be faithful to me after we were married. I never thought I would be guilty about this, but now that I have done it I can see I really am. I'm terribly upset.'

The effect of these acts may not show up immediately, but the disintegration of the person's self-image and character occur eventually". (Faith, Psychology and Christian Maturity, pg. 43)

"God, you created sex to be enjoyed within the sacred confines of marriage, not to be abused outside of marriage. May I respect your laws and delight myself in your gift--given to me to be used at the right time and in the right way. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Sex is mighty dynamo--either to create endlessly or to destroy totally. I will allow the Creator of my urges to control and to cleanse my urges!

FAITH'S ANSWER TO PLEASURE PURSUITS

There is pleasure in sin only for a short time (Hebrews 11:25). Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'". One who continues to pursue the world's pleasure, independent of God, will eventually awaken to the fact that the 'evil days' have come and he no longer has pleasure in them. These words will come from the disillusioned sensualist: "Laughter is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" (Ecclesiastes 2:2)

Said John Lennon on one occasion, "The dream is over. I'm not just talking about the Beatles, I'm talking about the generation thing. It's over and we gotta--I have personally gotta--get down to so-called reality".

The road of Sensual Pleasure is not the way of reality; rather, it is a dead-end road! The temporary sweetness of sensual pleasure turns to the bitterness of remorse.

Following the ways of Christ leads to genuine pleasure and lasting joys. A joy that is unspeakable and full of glory! Notes William Sangster: "The fact that there is a cross at the heart of the Christian faith, and that following Christ involves some rigorous self-denials, does not alter - and cannot alter - this central truth; the fruit of the Spirit is joy....Tertullian said 'The Christian saint is hilarious'....The summons to rejoice is sounded no less than seventy times in the New Testament.... Honest men at Pentecost thought that the apostles were drunk and, whenever the living water has burst fresh from the rock again, the same exuberant gladness has been manifested". (Daily Readings, pg. 144)

Said Jesus, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete". (John 15:11) "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete." (John 16:24)

Wrote the apostle Paul: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment". (I Timothy 6:17) God is the source of real enjoyment in life! The Holy Spirit is the Agent of joy: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". (Romans 14:17)

The way of Christ is the way of joy and peace and pleasure. "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

"O God, I must confess in all honesty that it is not only a statement of faith but a clear observation of life that the lives of the righteous are filled with joy that lasts, in contrast to the fleeting pleasures of sin which I have too often bitterly experienced! Help me to find real and lasting joy!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is pleasure in sin only for a short time, but there is lasting and real pleasure in living for Christ!

"I FEEL A DESERT IN MY HEART"

The third road we must consider in this chapter is the road of popularity and power. One famous psychologist believes that the motivating drive of all human beings is the drive to power. It is true that the 'will to power and popularity' is very strong in many persons. Of course this drive is selfish and thus sinful, but it needs to be recognized that this power drive is a perversion of a God-given instinct--the instinct to be known and accepted by others. Selfish pride is a perversion of the self-esteem urge. "The search for significance is not wicked in itself; no evil dwells in the desire for achievement. To improve our performance adds to self-esteem while making us more productive in the process. If our climb is over the dead and mutilated bodies of other people, then the aspiration for significance has run amuck.... The world has been saturated with blood by madmen scrambling for the top. The desire to get ahead, to move up, can incite the worst degrees of selfishness and cruelest forms of ruthlessness within us. The evil that flows from the quest can make our desire for significance nothing more than an animal-like lust to dominate... The quest for worth can become a lust for power; the desire for significance can make us egomaniacs, blind to everything but our own success". (The Search for Dignity; Sproul, pg. 21)

Everyone needs to feel important and all need to feel accepted and recognized by others. But power struggles, strife, competition, envyings and jealousy are the results of a man who is driven by selfish ambition. (Galatians 5:20, 21) "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work". (James 3:16) Popularity contests are not uncommon in our society. Many feel that if they were well-known, recognized and applauded, they would be happy and satisfied.

However, the road of popularity and fame is a dead-end road. Fame is elusive and short-lived. The Miss America of last year is soon forgotten, as a new Miss America takes her place. One's accomplishments, even though they are spectacular, are soon forgotten by future generations which become preoccupied by their own selfish interests. The world's fame is subject to the whims of the shallow-minded crowd. One who is popular to the crowd today, may be dispised by that same crowd tomorrow. What is 'In' today may be 'Square' tomorrow! The world's styles, tastes and modes are constantly changing. A ballerina dancer was asked if her fame had not given her much pleasure. 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". A popular 'rock-and-roll' recording artist, whose record sales numbered in the millions, was asked what he thought about his unusual success. He replied, "I feel like 'warmed-over death! ". A great actor was dying and said, "Let down the curtain, the farce is over. There is no reality in life; it is a farce".

"God, I see that the modern-day 'success syndrome' leads to bitter disillusionment. Help me to seek, not my happiness, but Your honor; not my power, but Your praise! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will seek, not the applause of men, but the approval of God!

## GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN'S POWER STRUGGLES

Why do men desperately seek power and popularity? Perhaps because these power pursuits are attempts to gain recognition and acceptance and remembrance and permanence. Inherent in every man is a basic God-created desire to live--and to live happily and permanently. How can this God-created urge for permanence be satisfied? Not by seeking the world's recognition through power struggles, but by surrendering to Christ and living for Him--even if this means serving Him in obscurity, unrecognized and unapplauded. He who serves the Lord God, not seeking the world's applause, will surely be recognized by the God of the Universe! "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." (I John 2:17) Here is the answer--faith's answer--to the misguided struggles for power and recognition which are so often observed in the world of worldly men!

The power struggles which Jesus condemns are seen, not only in the world of worldly persons (Galatians 5:19,21), but they, unfortunately, are at times witnessed within the company of professing believers! (Read Mark 10:35-45)

He who leads all must serve all. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phillipians 2:3-4)

How do we find ourselves? How do we guarantee that we shall have lasting identity? Is it through the method of fighting for our own advancements, looking out after Number One (Self)? No! A resounding No! Said Jesus, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". (Matthew 10:39) We gain by losing, we find ourselves by giving ourselves away!

We are to serve God with no motives of gaining power or recognition, but we can be sure that the God-created urge of wanting permanent identity (which the worldly power struggles seek to fulfill in perverted ways) will be granted to the believer. "He who does the will of the Father shall abide and remain forever!" (I John 2:17) To the one who has been faithful in serving the Lord, in the spirit of love and humility, the Master will someday say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23) There is a God-given drive to power which is often perverted among worldly-minded persons--both unsaved persons and carnal Christians (Phillipians 1:17), but this drive to power and rulership will someday be rightfully satisfied when humble Christians will share Christ's rulership in the hereafter. (Read Revelation 20:6, 21:7, 22:5; II Timothy 2:12a; Matthew 25:23)

"God, help me to find myself, not by asserting myself, but by surrendering myself to you and to others."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Any old 'dead fish' can float downstream, but it takes a 'live fish' to swim upstream. I will swim against the popular current of worldly power pursuits and be a real servant of God!

REIGNING WITH CHRIST IN GREAT POWER

What a thrilling thought to contemplate: Humble Christians will share Christ's rulership in the hereafter. Wrote Paul, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?... Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:2a,3a) What this means I do not know, but at least we can say that the saints will exercise great power someday--not because they are seeking that power, but because they are humbly seeking to serve Christ faithfully here on earth! Christians may be called upon to suffer on this earth, but it is certain they shall reign with Christ in great power hereafter. "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

What about the person who has renounced worldly power and who has accepted a humble servant role? Will there be no recognition, no rewards, no fulfillment of that God-created urge for permanent identity, no satisfaction of that God-given instinct to power? For the answer to that important question, re-read today's scripture--Matthew 19:27-30!

Rewards--unspeakably great rewards, including the exercise of dominion and bestowal of honor--await the humble servant of God. No work done in Jesus' name will go without its reward. Said Jesus, "And if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward". (Matthew 10:42)

The story is told of a missionary who returned from the mission field to America by ship. Standing on deck after getting off the returned ship, he noticed a huge crowd of people standing on deck welcoming the President of the United States who had just returned from an overseas trip. The crowds were acclaiming the American President, but there was not one person who was present that day to welcome home the American missionary. The American missionary began to feel sorry for himself: "Lord, here is this large crowd of people welcoming the President who has been gone a few days from the States. Lord, I have been gone from the States for years, laboring hard for you, in a difficult area of the world and there is not one person here today to welcome me home"! Then the quiet, understanding voice of the Holy Spirit spoke to the missionary: "But, Henry, you are not home yet"!

For the one who has renounced worldly fame and fortune to take the 'way of the cross' in humble service to his fellowmen, there awaits a 'Grand Homecoming' in heaven! The crowds in heaven, as well as Jesus Himself, will be on hand to welcome the faithful pilgrim! That is the day of true popularity!

"God, help me to serve you because you deserve to be served, not because of some reward which I will receive for serving you. And yet, let me know that my deep need for recognition, power, permanence and identity will abundantly be met by you, both in time and in eternity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is in debt to no man. It has not entered into the mind of man what rewards God has prepared for those who humbly and faithfully serve Him.

KNOWLEDGE OF MEANS WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING OF ENDS

Many feel that Knowledge and Education is the answer to man's problems. Wrote King Solomon: "Look at me, how I have increased and added wisdom more than all who ruled Jerusalem before me, and my heart has observed an abundance of wisdom and knowledge". (Ecclesiastes 1:16)

Modern man has increased in knowledge in a most incredible way! The total knowledge of man is now doubling every few years! Howard Snyder, in his popular book "The Problem of Wineskins", notes that more significant change takes place within one year than occurred in literally hundreds of previous years. He further notes that the few years between now and the year 2000 will see more change than has occurred since Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. He says that it will be as though all the political, scientific, industrial, social and religious revolutions of the past four thousand years were crowded into one short lifetime. (The Problem of Wineskins; Howard Snyder, pg. 180)

There is a great flux of knowledge. Current knowledge is soon old information--irrelevant, antiquated, incomplete. Great attempts are made to 'keep up' with the ever-increasing growth in knowledge and discoveries. Solomon found such an attempt frustrating, even in his time: "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". (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18, Living Bible)

The road of Knowledge is a dead-end road. Knowledge is not to be despised, but knowledge apart from God is both dangerous and futile.

There was a time when sociologists believed that ignorance was the main cause of crime. A general increase in knowledge would automatically result in a decrease in the crime rate. But this naive theory has often been disproved. It is a well known fact that often times the average IQ of prison inmates is higher than the average IQ of the general American populace. Increased knowledge can simply make an increasingly dangerous criminal! The Chief Executioner of the Jewish people in Hitler's reign had a PhD degree!

The road of knowledge is a dead-end road, for knowledge separated from God leads to madness and folly. Man has never had greater knowledge than he has today, but that knowledge can become man's curse! Knowledge of Means without understanding of Ends can result in mankind destroying itself! Science, divorced from Morality and Theology, can result in the total destruction of the human race!

"God, never allow my mind to be educated beyond the understanding of my heart. In finding human knowledge, let me also receive divine wisdom, in order that all knowledge may be used for right ends. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My quest for knowledge will be matched with my thirst for wisdom!

## UNYIELDING DESPAIR OR UNENDING HOPE?

For too long the 'sacred cow' in the West has been Science. Science as a methodology is fantastic, but science as a god is folly! An 'emancipated' Hindu who repudiated the ancient gods of his people and turned cynically against all religion, said, "The real gods worshipped in the West are chemistry, electricity, nuclear fission. Let us fall down and worship them". However, as Sangster reminds us, "The swift and terrible destruction of all our civilization is at the end of that road". (Sangster's Daily Readings, pg. 81)

Those who have bowed at the shrine of Science have thought that Science could produce the 'Abundant life'. They have believed that there was "no sin at all--just a bit of selfishness which time would correct; that the Golden Age was inevitable and that, by gradual steps, man would move unaided to perfection....And then we woke up. First in 1914, and then again in 1939, we found ourselves in hellish war....a world of atomic submarines, air-raided shelters, gas-masks for babies, guided missiles, and hydrogen bombs ....The incredible folly of it; the ignorant conceit; the puffed-up egotism"! (Ibid, 217)

When will man learn that he is not the 'master of his fate' or the 'captain of his own soul'?

Notes E. Stanley Jones, "Some of the makers of the atomic bombs called together the ministers around Chicago and in a two-days' conference announced: 'Frankly, we're frightened. We can produce the means in atomic energy, but we can't produce the ends for which those means are to be used. Unless you ministers can produce the moral and spiritual ends for which atomic energy is to be used, then we're sunk'. Science turned to religion and cried, 'Save us or we perish'". (Conversion, pg. 25-26)

Wars and rumors of wars, famines, the threat of nuclear conflict, a changing economy, the general instability of life, and the unfulfilled promises of Science--these have all combined to create a general sense of despair in many.

The "USA Today" newspaper reported that the cost for military defense in the United States has soared in recent decades. Before World War II, the average cost for defense per person in America averaged out at \$75 per year. In 1984, the cost per person per year for military defense was approximately \$850!

Knowledge without God can lead to man's eventual annihilation! Notes R.C. Sproul, "If we compare the degree of destructive power of the primitive bow and arrow with the atomic bomb that dropped on Hiroshima, we begin to see something of the 'progress' of human ingenuity. It required eons of time for man to advance from the bow and arrow to nuclear power. What is terrifying is that in the space of fourteen years, from 1945-1959, the gap was bridged again. That is, the bombs developed by 1959 were as many times more powerful than the atomic bomb which fell on Hiroshima as the Hiroshima bomb was more powerful than the bow and arrow". (In Search of Dignity, pg. 86-87)

"Is there no hope for modern man? None at all--except in Christ! Outside of Christ, there is unyielding despair! In Christ, there is unending hope! God of the Universe, forgive me for worshipping matter rather than the Creator of matter."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will honor the methods of Science, and enjoy the benefits of Science, but I will never turn Science into a god!

THE ESSENCE OF TRUE WISDOM

Paul wrote concerning God's wisdom in contrast to man's worldly notions and ideas: "I know very well how foolish it sounds to those who are lost, when they hear that Jesus died to save them. But we who are saved recognize this message as the very power of God. For God says, 'I will destroy all human plans of salvation no matter how wise they seem to be, and ignore the best ideas of men, even the most brilliant of them'. So what about these wise men, these scholars, these brilliant debaters of this world's great affairs? God had made them all look foolish, and shown their wisdom to be useless nonsense. For God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find God through human brilliance, and then he stepped in and saved all those who believed his message, which the world calls foolish and silly". (I Corinthians 1:18-21, Living Bible)

Paul further wrote to the Colossians: "Don't let others spoil your faith and joy with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built on men's thoughts and ideas, instead of on what Christ has said". (Colossians 2:8, Living Bible)

Mere knowledge without wisdom leads to despair and disillusionment. Said the brilliant historian H.G. Wells, a non-Christian, shortly before he died: "A frightful queerness has come into life. Hitherto events have been held together by the golden cord of gravitation. Now it is as if that cord has vanished and everything is driven anyhow, anywhere, at a steadily increasing velocity. The writer is convinced that there is no way out or round, or through the impasse. It is the end".

However, knowledge is not to be despised, for all truth is God's truth. Noted the warm-hearted, yet tough-minded Wesley: "You are in danger of enthusiasm (i.e., fanaticism) every hour--if you lightly esteem reason, knowledge, or human learning; everyone of which is an excellent gift of God, and may serve the noblest purposes. I advise you never to use the words, wisdom, reason or knowledge by way of reproach. On the contrary, pray that you yourself may abound in them more and more. If you mean worldly wisdom, useless knowledge, false reasoning, say so; and throw away the chaff, but not the wheat".

The book of Proverbs highlights the great benefits of finding God's wisdom: Knowledge of God (2:5); Protection from God (2:7-8,11); Guidance from God (2:9); Prosperity and pleasure in your soul (2:10); Rescue from wicked ways and wicked men (2:12-19); Steadfastness in righteous living (2:22); Physical health from the Lord (3:7-8); True riches (financial and spiritual riches alike) (3:13-18). True knowledge and wisdom and understanding are God's gifts!

"God, give me a sensitive spirit which is intolerant to falsehood and error, and a diligent mind which is pursuant of truth and knowledge. Help me to throw away the chaff of worldly philosophy and cherish the wheat of divinely-inspired wisdom."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will seek to be teachable without being gullible, and broadminded without being shallowminded.

FAITH'S ANSWER TO LIFE'S DISILLUSIONMENTS

We have seen in this chapter that the person who seeks meaning in life without God will only find disillusionment and despair. The way of materialism is a dead-end road. The writer of Ecclesiastes denied himself nothing which his eyes desired--treasures of all kinds, houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, fruit trees, well-watered plantations, herds and flocks. Americans today are also walking the road of materialism--affluence, culture, fine homes, appliances, cars and campers, clothing, fine foods, property, bank accounts, investments, etc. But the way of materialism is futile.

And the ways of pleasure and power and knowledge are all likewise futile. God alone can enable one to turn materialism into compassion for the poor, to turn self-centered pleasure into self-giving sacrifice for the needy, to turn the pride of power into the humility of service, and to turn worldly pursuits of knowledge into godly pursuits of wisdom.

Faith is the answer to despair and disillusionment. Living by faith means revering God and keeping His commandments.

The writer of Ecclesiastes could find meaning in nothing except God. God, he declared, was his only hope. "To sum up the whole matter, all that was heard; revere God and keep His commandments, for this is every person's duty. For God shall bring every work into judgment, even everything hidden, whether it be good or bad." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

To revere God is to profoundly venerate, worship, adore, and respect Him. The ways of God and the happenings of life are sometimes past finding out--incomprehensible. Nevertheless, man is to submit to God and to serve Him. (Ecclesiastes 8:17, 11:5)

We are to keep God's commandments, despite oppression, for God sees the unrestrained oppression to the lonely. He knows that there are many injustices, that right too often goes unrewarded and wrong often goes unpunished. But God is still Ruler and He ultimately directs circumstances: "In the day of prosperity enjoy life, and in the day of adversity observe that God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not uncover anything that will be after him". (Ecclesiastes 7:14) Be assured that God will redress wrongs and that He will 'balance the books'. "Again I observed under the sun the place of judgment--there was wrong; and the place of righteousness--there was wickedness. I said to myself, 'God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.'" (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17) "Although the sinner commits evil a hundred times and his life is prolonged to him, even so I know that it will be well with those who revere God, who are in awe before Him. It shall not be well with the evildoer; he shall not prolong his days as a shadow, because he does not revere God." (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13)

"God, help me to find faith amidst my doubts, to find your truth amidst the world's falsehoods, to accept your mercy despite my sins, to believe in your justice despite the moral inequities in the world."

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The awesome fact of final moral accountability will motivate me to live morally, responsibly and righteously!

CHRIST--THE OPEN-END ROAD

The roads of the world--the road of materialism, the road of Sensualism, the road of worldly Fame, the road of Knowledge--are all dead-end roads! These roads appear to be broad and expansive and delightful. But, in reality, they increasingly become narrow and finally lead to nowhere. They all come to an end!

The man without Christ is a loser. He loses in this life and he will lose eternally! "The way of the transgressor is hard." But, in contrast to the roads of the world, the road of Christ leads to a happy end! The road of Christ is easy compared to the roads of sin! Said Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". (Matthew 11:28-30) Christ's yoke is our yearning, and His burden is our blessing!

After Solomon had travelled the hard roads of the world, he wrote: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment....Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them". (Ecclesiastes 11:9, 12:1)

The day comes in the life of the unbeliever when he no longer has pleasure in his sins! The roads of the world are dead-end roads!

The man without Christ is the man whose life increasingly becomes filled with boredom and monotony. Life loses its glow and becomes gray. All of life grows weary with repetition. The excitement which each new day should bring is gone! With a sigh of weariness, the man of the world exclaims, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us". (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10)

But in walking the 'Christ Road', there is always newness and freshness! The Bible reads of "a new song, a new heart, a new spirit, a new name, a new covenant, a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth....God is a God of newness. On the one hand he is the Ancient of Days, 'the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change' (James 1:17), and Jesus Christ is 'the same yesterday and today and for ever'. (Hebrews 13:8) "But this does not mean that God is static or stationary. The history of God's people in the Bible and the history of the Christian Church show just the opposite. In every age the true biblical gospel is a message of newness and renewal." (New Wine Skins, pg. 15)

"Christ, all other roads but yours lead to disappointment and death! Help me to look straight ahead--to You, who art 'The Way'."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will watch my step. I will not side-track. I will stick to the right Path and be safe! (Proverbs 4:25-27, Living Bible)

THE JOY OF "BECOMING"

On the Christ Road there is always a chance for a new beginning. Past mistakes or sins can be used by God to teach lessons for the future. Stumblingblocks can become stepping stones for future growth.

On the Christ Road there is always a new adventure. When Christ gets a man's attention, Christ gives a new vision of new opportunities. Every problem becomes a project. Around every corner there is a new challenge and a new opportunity. Hidden resources and potential are tapped by God.

On the Christ Road there is always new work. Man is created to be creative. Man is made for work. To work for God is man's greatest privilege. Reward for work well done is more work to do.

On the Christ Road there is always new friends. Christ promised that He would never leave nor forsake His children. Because the believer is never alone, he need never feel lonely. And because the believer is a member of the great growing family of God, he is given the privilege of broadening his friendships while at the same time he is ever deepening his friendships. Every new believer is a potential new friend. One of the greatest joys of the Christian life is to cherish old friends and to form new friendships in Christ. The Christ Road is open-ended because of constant newness which is found in Christ.

The Christ Road is open-ended because of the 'Joy of Becoming'. The believer is a 'Christian-in-the-making'. The believer is a person who is constantly becoming. Writes veteran missionary E. Stanley Jones, "Every stage of being is a stage of becoming. It is open-ended....I have been ascending, am ascending, and shall forever be ascending. I believe that heaven is a place of growth, the finite forever approaching the infinite, but never becoming that infinite". (Song of Ascents, pg. 18)

The 'Joy of Becoming' includes the totality of man's mind, emotions, and will. Take the mind, for example. Christ took a young school boy who was considered the slowest student in his school, and made him into a great commentator. That slow-minded school boy became the keen-minded Adam Clarke! Christ took a small boy who did so poorly in his school work that he was passed, several different years, on probation. But he studied hard, memorized Scripture and God quickened his mind. He graduated from high school with honors and did well in college. He became the great teacher of hundreds of thousands. He is the popular Christian seminar teacher, Bill Gothard!

"Christ, you are the only open-ended road! To go with you is to go on a glorious journey and to anticipate a wonderful destiny! What a thrilling Companion You are!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The greatest of all joys is the 'Joy of Becoming' --becoming more and more like Christ!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'MAN'S QUEST FOR MEANING'

1. In what way is the ancient book of Ecclesiastes such a relevant commentary on modern day skepticism and pessimism?
2. How is 'success' in a secular culture measured, and how does the world's definition of success differ from the Biblical viewpoint of 'success'?
3. From your personal experience and observation, illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Modern man has a clear vision for secular goals, but dull vision for spiritual goals".
4. In what ways does the way of materialism lead to disillusionment in the life of the one who worships things and money?
5. Why is the road of materialism a 'dead-end road'?
6. What is meant by the statement: "Materialism is a perversion of the God-given acquisitive urge with which humans are born".
7. What is Faith's answer to the challenge of materialism?
8. Why is the road of sensualism and pleasure a 'dead-end road'?
9. What is the difference between sensual pleasure and Christian joy?
10. What is Faith's answer to Pleasure's pursuits?
11. Why is the road of Popularity a 'dead-end road'?
12. The 'power drive' in man is a perversion of what God-given instinct?
13. What is God's answer to man's power struggles?
14. Why is 'knowledge of means without understanding of ends' so dangerous?
15. What is the 'sacred cow' in the West, and in what ways have the worshippers of this 'sacred cow' become disillusioned?
16. What is the Biblical attitude toward knowledge, and what are the benefits of wisdom, according to the Bible?
17. In the midst of a world filled with despair and disillusionment, what does Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 mean to you personally?
18. In what ways is a sinner a 'double loser', in contrast to a believer who is a 'double winner'?
19. What are the benefits of walking the 'Christ Road' in life?

## Chapter 2

### OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES TO FAITH

IS GOD A 'CELESTIAL SANTA CLAUS'?

If you had to choose only three words to describe God, what would they be? The three words I would choose to describe God would be these: "God is Love". No greater description of God can be given!

However, in saying this, we must describe what we mean by 'love'. Some say things like this about God: "God is a God of love, therefore, he understands my human weaknesses and sins and he will overlook them. After all, it is his business to forgive"! Or others are heard to say, "God is a God of love, therefore, He will never send anyone to hell"!

It is true that God is a God of love, but as mercy is one manifestation of God's love towards those who respond in repentance to God, so it is also true that judgment is another manifestation of God's love towards those who spurn God's mercy! To reject God's mercy is to reap God's judgment, and both mercy and judgment are manifestations of God's holy love!

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

When I repented of my sins, I was motivated not only by God's love which invited me to go to heaven, but also God's wrath which would keep me out of heaven if I failed to repent of my sins! Love may be--and, indeed, is--the chief motivation for repentance ("the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance"). But the strong secondary motivation for coming to Christ is the 'fear of the Lord'--not just the terrorizing fear of hell, but the reverential respect for God who said, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".

The 'fear of the Lord' is not mainly referring to the terrorizing fear which results in moral paralysis; rather, the 'fear of the Lord' refers to that 'fear' which is better described as 'profound veneration, respect, worship, adoration'.

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that the whole duty of man is to 'fear God and keep his commandments'. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) The fear of the Lord is the duty of man, and the beginning of all true wisdom.

The book of Ecclesiastes describes the obstacles and incentives to faith, showing the futility of earth's ways and the importance of fearing and reverencing the living God. This book tells us that we are to fear the Lord in spite of the doubts which assail us because of life's obvious inequities, injustices, and mysteries, and in spite of the fact that God's ways are many times past finding out. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10)

"God, give me a wholesome reverential respect of you. You hold the keys to life and death and you will judge all men in the end. Help me to respond now to your loving call of mercy, that I may never have to face your call to terrifying judgment!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The 'fear of the Lord' is a great cleansing agent for my life, cleansing me from flippancy and fantasy and folly!

## FACING LIFE'S INJUSTICES

One of the great obstacles to faith is life's injustices. Facing life's injustices caused the writer of Ecclesiastes to become disillusioned (or so at least it seems). Listen to his words, for they sound like the words of a modern-day cynic. "Moreover, I notice that throughout the earth justice is giving way to crime and even the police courts are corrupt..... Next I observed all the oppression and sadness throughout the earth--the tears of the oppressed, and no one helping them, while on the side of their oppressors were powerful allies. So I felt that the dead were better off than the living. And most fortunate of all are those who have never been born, and have never seen all the evil and crime throughout the earth." (Ecclesiastes 3:16, 4:1-3, Living Bible) Faith in God is greatly challenged when it seems that evil triumphs!

One sinner or a small group of sinners can cause so much suffering in our world. "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one rotten apple can spoil a barrelful." (Ecclesiastes 9:18, Living Bible) The tyrants of the world have caused untold suffering! It is said that if Joseph Stalin, a leader of the Communist Revolution, had done nothing else all his life but to write the names of his innocent victims, his life would not have been long enough to finish the job!

Faith in God is further challenged when it seems that so many times righteousness goes unrewarded and evil goes unpunished. "In this silly life I have seen everything, including the fact that some of the good die young and some of the wicked live on and on....There is a strange thing happening here upon the earth; Providence seems to treat some good men as though they were wicked, and some wicked men as though they were good. This is all very vexing and troublesome!" (Ecclesiastes 7:15, 8:14, Living Bible) It is no wonder that one great man, George Tyrell, once set it down boldly: "To believe that this terrible machine world is really from God, in God, and unto God, and that through it and in spite of its blind fatality all works for good--that is faith in long trousers". (quoted in Prayer and Life's Highest; Paul Rees, pg. 95)

In light of life's injustices and evil's seeming triumph, it is important to remind ourselves (as the writer of Ecclesiastes reminded himself) that eventually the righteous man will be vindicated and the evil man will be punished. "But though a man sins a hundred times and still lives, I know very well that those who fear God will be better off, unlike the wicked, who will not live long, good lives--their days shall pass away as quickly as shadows because they don't fear God." (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13, Living Bible) "Stop your anger! Turn off your wrath. Don't fret and worry--it only leads to harm. For the wicked shall be destroyed, but those who trust the Lord shall be given every blessing." (Psalms 37:8-9, Living Bible)

"O God, when the wrong seems oft so strong, convince me that you are still the Ruler. Help me not to fret myself because of evil doers, for as surely as you are God, just as surely will all evildoers be punished and all righteous persons be eternally rewarded."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A just God will right all wrongs and will morally 'balance the books' in the end!

## FACING LIFE'S INEQUITIES AND MYSTERIES

Life's inequities are formidable challenges to some men's faith in a living and just God. The writer of Ecclesiastes faced life's inequities and struggled to maintain his Faith in God. He felt that it was unfair that good men were sometimes not given opportunity by God to enjoy their God-given gifts, describing a situation in which a good man dies prematurely, leaving his good possessions to another to enjoy. "Yes, but there is a very serious evil which I have seen everywhere--God has given to some men very great wealth and honor, so that they can have everything they want, but he doesn't give them the health to enjoy it, and they die and others get it all! This is absurd, a hollow mockery, and a serious fault." (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2, Living Bible) He further feels that life is unfair when he observes fools being elevated to power while worthy men are humiliated. "There is another evil I have seen as I have watched the world go by, a sad situation concerning kings and rulers. For I have seen foolish men given great authority, and rich men not given their rightful place of dignity! I have seen servants riding, while princes walk like servant!" (Ecclesiastes 10:5-7, Living Bible)

The mystery of human suffering seems to be a continuing theme throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. Circumstances of life leave many unanswered (and shall we say, unanswerable) questions! In his autobiography, William Barclay shares some of his unanswered questions regarding the painful death of his godly mother. "She died in 1932, of cancer of the spine, an agonizing death--and left me facing the theological problem that to this day I have never solved. Why should my mother, lovely in body and in spirit, good all through, have to die like that? She died just when I was being licensed a preacher. 'You'll have a new note in your preaching now', my father said to me through his own tears--and so I had--not the note of one who knew the answers and had solved the problems, but the note of one who now knew what the problems were." (A Spiritual Autobiography, pg. 6)

When a rather young couple (with whom I had shared the Gospel and who had become believers) were tragically killed in a car accident (they were hit head on by drunk teenagers), they left a family of several children. I shared some words from William Barclay at their funeral: "What then can we say at a time like this? We can say that God is as grieved as we are, that he is sharing in our sorrow and our grief....We can say that Christianity has never pretended to explain sorrow and suffering. It may often be that in any tragedy there is traceable an element of human fault, human sin; in any disaster the reason may well lie in human error. Yet even when all such cases are taken into account, there remains much that is sheerly inexplicable". (In The Hands of God, pg. 126-127)

"O God, I confess that I don't understand the mysteries of human suffering--why good men suffer and evil men prosper. But I choose to believe--'in spite of' life's mysteries, realizing that you hold the key to all understanding. I will know 'by and by'."

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because God's ways are perfect, I can find rest for my heart even when my mind is restless with unanswered questions!

## LOOKING AT HUMAN SUFFERING

During the double funeral service for the couple which I referred to in the last devotional, I further shared these words with the large host of stunned people who came to mourn: "Christianity offers no cheap and facile explanation. In face of such things, we have often to say: 'I do not know why this happened'. But what Christianity does triumphantly offer is the power to face these things, to bear them, to come through them, and even to transform them so that the tragedy becomes a crown. We can say that God has it in his power to make it up to those who are taken too soon away, and to those to whom sorrow and suffering has tragically come. If God is justice, and if God is love, I am as certain as it is possible to be certain of anything, that there is a life to come. And in that 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". (The Hands of God; William Barclay, pg. 126-127)

When my brother's 15 year old daughter--a beautiful, vivacious Christian--suddenly died in an accident, needless to say, my brother's heart was broken and grief-stricken, but his faith in God remained strong and enduring. He declared, the night of his daughter's death, "God makes no mistakes". This is not the answer of philosophy which tries to explain suffering or the answer of Christian Science which tries to explain away suffering, but it is rather the answer of Faith which continues to believe in an all-wise and all-loving God even when circumstances defy reason!

If Christianity cannot deal with the problem of human suffering, then Christianity has no basics for offering hope amidst despair, joy amidst sorrow, peace amidst conflict. What is the Christian answer--an answer that goes beyond the pondered mysteries as described in the book of Ecclesiastes? What was Jesus' attitude toward suffering? "He accepted the fact of human suffering. He neither explains it nor explains it away. If he had attempted to explain it, his message would have been merely another philosophy, for a philosophy has to have an explanation for everything. His was a gospel--Good News--even 'in spite of'. A philosophy explains, but it does not change. The Gospel may not explain, but it does utterly change. Jesus transforms suffering by using it. The victim may become victor....A Christian expects to take things as they come, good, bad, or indifferent, and use them for a witness to Jesus. That puts a positive Yes upon every No that comes to a Christian. Everything furthers those who follow Christ. Just as an airplane goes up against resistance, against the wind, so the Christian rises on the wings of resistance." (The Divine Yes; E. Stanley Jones, pg. 100-101)

"O God, I know there are no easy or 'pat answers' to the mysteries of life, and especially to the mystery of human suffering. Christianity does not try to answer all my 'Whys', but it does answer the 'Hows' of life--'How' to use life's tragedies to produce lasting good in my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I cannot always solve life's mysteries, but I can use life's mysteries (including human suffering) to make me better instead of bitter, to drive me to God instead of driving me from God!

ACCEPTING GOD'S 'INCOMPREHENSIBILITY'

'God' by definition is the Supreme Being who cannot be fully grasped by an finite conception. God says of Himself, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts". (Isaiah 55:8-9) Throughout the Old Testament, God's incomprehensibility was acknowledged. (Read Psalms 92:5, 145:3; Job 11:7-9, 36:26)

The writer of Ecclesiastes also acknowledged that God's ways were past finding out. "Everything is appropriate in its own time. But though God has planted eternity in the hearts of men, even so, man cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11) "In my search for wisdom I observed all that was going on everywhere across the earth--ceaseless activity, day and night. (Of course, only God can see everything, and even the wisest man who says he knows everything, doesn't!)" (Ecclesiastes 8:16-17) "God's ways are as mysterious as the pathway of the wind, and as the manner in which a human spirit is infused into the little body of a baby while it is yet in its mother's womb." (Ecclesiastes 11:5, Living Bible)

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

It is true that no man is able fully to understand the ways of God, but on the other hand, we are commanded in Scripture to have the mind of Christ within us! "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5) How is this possible? It is only possible because God has revealed Himself to mankind through the Incarnate Christ--the one who dwelt in our world for over 30 years! What Jesus was in human form--love, compassion, mercy, longsuffering--God has always been in eternity! Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God". (Colossians 1:15) "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus)." (Colossians 1:19) To see Jesus (as He walks through the pages of the Gospels) is to see God! The cross on Mount Calvary is the unveiled cross that had always been on the heart of the eternal God!

So, while mankind can never comprehend all the thoughts of God, mankind can experience the love of God as revealed in the Son of God and as shed abroad in the human heart by the Spirit of God. (Romans 5:5) The Bible often speaks about the possibility--indeed, the necessity--of 'knowing' God. So, while God is 'incomprehensible', He is also knowable and capable of being experienced. According to scripture, it is not presumptuous to claim 'to know' God--and to know Him with all the intimacies of a husband 'knowing' his wife or with all the warmth of a trusting child 'knowing' his loving Father! The Bible teaches both the necessary 'incomprehensibility' of God and the possibility of an 'intimate fellowship' with God!

"How great thou art, O God, Your greatness cannot be fathomed. Your limits are higher than the heavens and deeper than the seas. My finite mind can never comprehend your infinite wisdom. And yet, I thank you that you are not only big enough to rule the Universe, but that you are also small enough to live in my heart!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My mind is not equipped to understand the mysterious ways of God, but my heart is made to experience the intimate fellowship of God!

## BECOMING A WISE MAN

The Bible says that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". (Proverbs 9:10) It is the wise man who fears the Lord, who profoundly venerates, worships, adores, and respects the person and work of God!

We are to fear the Lord in spite of the doubts which assail us because of life's obvious inequities, injustices, and mysteries, and in spite of the fact that God's ways are past finding out. God, by the very definition of 'God', is incomprehensible, and His ways are mysterious. However, God has revealed Himself in the person of His Son--Jesus Christ--in such a way that all men are without excuse if they do not deeply reverence and venerate Him. He cannot be fully understood with the head, but this is no reason not to revere and fear Him, for his presence can be personally known and enjoyed in the heart, through the ministry of His Holy Spirit.

Why fear and reverence the Lord? The book of Ecclesiastes (as well as many other books of the Bible) gives several reasons: (1) Because of man's moral responsibility; (2) Because of sin's moral consequences (Ecclesiastes 12:1); (3) Because of God's Unfailing Goodness (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 3:13, 5:19-20, 8:15, 9:7); (4) Because of Man's Spiritual Capacities (Ecclesiastes 3:11); (5) Because of God's Sovereignty (Ecclesiastes 3:14, 7:14, 9:1); (6) Because of God's Punishment (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7); (7) Because of Man's Ultimate Accountability (Ecclesiastes 3:15,17, 11:9, 12:14).

If there are certain obstacles to faith, there are also certain incentives to faith. The wholesome fear of the Lord is one of the greatest incentives to faith. We must now look at the several stated reasons to fear and reverence the Lord.

First, because of man's moral responsibility. God has given responsibility to mankind to search out and to explore wisdom. Wisdom is available to all and makes its appeal to all, but each person must heed wisdom's call and find wisdom's ways. (Proverbs 1:20-33) Diligence in seeking God's wisdom involves wholehearted concentration, devotion to truth, and honesty. The truth of God objectively has been revealed to mankind, but the truth subjectively enjoyed involves the teachable spirit and the disciplined search for wisdom. There is no substitute for patient persistence. We ought to fear God, for God has laid upon each human being the responsibility to search out and to find the truth, and those who fail to apply themselves to that task of searching for wisdom will be held responsible before God someday.

The possibility of knowing God and of being able to 'think His thoughts after Him' is a great incentive to faith. However, God will not be found by the casual and careless, but He will be found by the diligent. Says God, "You will find me when you seek me, if you look for me in earnest". (Jeremiah 29:13)

"O God, pour out the spirit of wisdom upon me, and make me wise. Help me always to reverence and respect your will and ways."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To spurn the counsel and reproof of God is to court the wrath of God; to submit to the will of God is to enjoy the wisdom of God!

THE HIGH COST OF NOT SERVING GOD

There are both positive and negative incentives in maintaining a strong faith in the living God. Contemplating sin's moral consequences is a negative incentive to maintain faith, and contemplating God's unfailing goodness is a positive incentive to maintain faith. We must look at the former first.

Why maintain a profound reverence and respect for the living God? Because, if you don't, life will come apart at the seams! Your days without God will become so unbearable that you will eventually declare, "I find no pleasure in them". There is "pleasure in sin for a season"--but only 'for a season', for sin's pleasure turns soon into sin's miseries, like a green leaf turns into a brown and shrivelled leaf! To live against God is to live against yourself, for you were made by God and for God. To go against the grain of God's will and way is to go against the grain of reality, and you can't go against the grain of reality without going against the grain of your own being! To refuse to serve God is to deny yourself joy and pleasure, for there is no lasting or real pleasure except in the will and the plan of God. To remember your Creator is to respect yourself, for it is in the remembrance of your Creator that you find realization of your own personhood. Finding the Saviour, you find your own truest self. Everyone in this life gets either negative consequences for wrong moral choices, or positive results for right moral choices!

Why fear and reverence and obey the living God? Because we are living in a moral universe that favors those who remember the Creator of the Universe and that resists those who reject the Creator of the Universe! If God is for you, who can be against you, but if God is against you, the whole world could be on your side and you would still be a loser! "God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble." To reject the Saviour is to 'cut your own throat'! The way of the transgressor is hard--'hard' because no one was created to live without fellowship with the Creator. It is like a fish trying to live without water; like a stomach trying to exist without food; like a pair of lungs trying to function without oxygen! As the heart was made for love, so the soul was made for God, and the soul of man remains restless until it rests in God!

Said one man to me--a man who had been brought up in a devout Christian home, but who had resisted God for years--as he was seeking to become a Christian: "I was made to be a Christian. I am tired of trying to live a life of deception"! The brilliant 19th century actor, Oscar Wilde, who won highest academic honours, fell to the temptation of unnatural vice, and finally came to prison and disgrace. In spite of his brilliance and literary fame, he sowed seeds of sin and eventually reaped a harvest of shame. He wrote, "I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore, what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top....I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace". (quoted in Victory Through Surrender; E. S. Jones, pg. 13)

"O God, help me never to forget that I live in a moral universe. Help me to remember that if one 'sows to the wind' he will 'reap the whirlwind', that no one can really break the moral law of God; one can only defy that moral law, and in the process, get broken morally."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There may be a high cost in serving God, but there is a higher cost in not serving God.

## GOD'S UNFAILING GOODNESS

Why fear and reverence the living God? Not only because of the negative consequences of sin which you want to avoid, but also because of the positive results which you want to enjoy because you are serving the Lord!

Fear the Lord, not only to avoid the misery which sin brings into life, but also to enjoy the pleasures which serving God brings to life. Over and over, the writer of Ecclesiastes notes that God is a God of grace and good gifts, that He is a God who gives meaning and satisfaction to man amidst life's toils.

The Psalmist declares repeatedly that God's loving kindness continues forever. (Psalms 136) God gives mankind all things richly to enjoy. He is the Giver of all good and perfect gifts--gifts like food, drink, clothing, material wealth and possessions, love of family, contentment in labor, wisdom, knowledge and happiness. God is always on the giving end and man is always on the receiving end.

God's goodness is manifested in many ways. He is the giver of food and drink. "I decided that there was nothing better for man to do than to enjoy his food and drink, and his job. Then I realized that even this pleasure is from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy apart from him?" (Ecclesiastes 2:24, Living Bible) Man should "eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of his labors, for these are gifts from God". (Ecclesiastes 3:13)

God is the giver of wisdom and knowledge and joy. "For God gives those who please him wisdom, knowledge and joy." (Ecclesiastes 2:25)

Health and wealth and contentment in one's daily work are all gifts from God. "It is very good if a man has received wealth from the Lord, and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and to accept your lot in life--that is indeed a gift from God. The person who does that will not need to look back with sorrow on his past, for God gives him joy." (Ecclesiastes 5:19-20)

Domestic happiness is a God-sanctioned and even a God-given gift. "So go ahead, eat, drink, and be merry, for it makes no difference to God! Wear fine clothes--with a dash of cologne! Live happily with the woman you love through the fleeting days of life, for the wife God gives you is your best reward down here for all your earthly toil." (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9)

One of the strongest motivations for repentance of sin and for serving the Lord is the goodness of God. The goodness of the Lord is meant to lead people to repentance. The goodness of the Lord should be a strong incentive faithfully to serve God, amidst all the changes and chances of life and in spite of all of life's injustices, inequities, and mysteries. In light of God's shower of blessings upon undeserving mankind, anything less than gratitude and love in man's response constitutes a gross sin!

"God, you are unfailing in your goodness to me, giving me all things richly to enjoy. In serving you, there is a joy that is "unspeakable and full of glory", a contentment that is deep and meaningful. What a motivation to serve you!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The God of all grace will grace my life with heaven's best gifts--as I serve the Giver!

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Thus far we have looked at three reasons or motivations for respecting and reverencing the living God: because of man's moral responsibility, because of sin's moral consequences, because of God's unfailing goodness.

Why fear the living God? Because, fourthly, God "has set eternity in the hearts of men". (Ecclesiastes 3:11) Man is built for eternity! There is within every man a 'God-shaped vacuum' which seeks to be filled with God alone! Man cannot live by bread alone, but must live by the eternal Word of the eternal God. Man is overbuilt for time--he is built for eternity. Someone said that "Men are born thirsting for infinity". That thirst for infinity is evidence that God "has set eternity in the hearts of men". (Ecclesiastes 3:11) Inherent in every man is a basic desire to live--and to live happily and permanently.

If man is basically a spiritual being, created with capacities which call for a spiritual fulfillment, it is easy to see that only those who serve the divinely-created capacities and aspirations call for a fulfillment which God alone can give. God has "set eternity in the hearts of men". (Ecclesiastes 3:11) Nothing can fill the God-shaped vacuum but God himself. Eternal capacities can only be filled by the Eternal One. This is another positive incentive for man to serve the living God.

Why fear or revere the living God? According to Ecclesiastes 3:14, 7:14, 9:1, because God is Sovereign! By this term we mean that God is in complete control of His world, of history with its events, and of human beings with their experiences and choices. It is true that God has created human beings with freedom to choose and that humans can and often do choose wrongly, that is, make choices that are against the will of God. Pharaoh, in the Old Testament, for instance, 'hardened his heart' against God by resisting God, in that he did not allow the children of Israel to leave Egypt. However, the Bible declares that "God makes even the wrath of men to praise Him". That is to say, that even though men reject God's will and try to go their own way, God in the end will have the 'final word'! God can use even the evil of men to accomplish His ultimate will! God used the evil actions of Joseph's brothers to accomplish His purpose. Said Joseph to his repentant brothers who had treated Joseph so wrongly: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives". (Genesis 50:s0)

God used the evil acts of men who crucified Jesus as the means, whereby God made possible the salvation of mankind. Dark Friday was turned into Good Friday because of Bright Easter Sunday Morning! The day of mankind's most evil cruelty--the crucifying of the Son of God--turned out to be the day of mankind's brightest hope--the salvation of the sons of men! The darkest day of tragedy turned out to be the brightest day of triumph!

"O God, even though wrong seems so strong, You are Ruler yet! You are loving enough to allow mankind freely to choose among moral alternatives, and yet you are powerful enough to interweave mankind's wrong moral choices into the fabric of your ultimate and eternal will and purposes!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If God can make even the wrath of men to praise Him, how much more can He make the love of men to praise Him! I will love Him!

"GOD HAS EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL"

The sovereignty of God is one of the chief motivations for reverence and fear of God. If God is going to have 'the final word' at the end of life (regardless of the wrong moral choices of mankind on earth), then it is wise to be 'in step' with God on earth rather than 'out of step' with God in eternity! If in eternity every knee shall bow before God and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is God, then it is wise to bow the knee and to confess with the lips now--in other words, to revere and reverence God now!

Ecclesiastes 3:14 notes that God is Sovereign, for He is Controller over His own works: "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it, so men will revere him". The actions of man, good and bad, based upon man's free will choice, cannot ultimately alter God's eternal purposes! Do what you will, but God will ultimately have his way--this is a good motivation to fear and to reverence the living God! God permits mankind to choose to go against His perfect will, resulting in sin's havoc, but God will exercise His Sovereign Power when He brings all sin to judgment. Even mankind's wrong moral choices which God permits cannot ultimately altar God's eternal purposes--the establishment of an eternal kingdom of righteousness! "Everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it, so men will revere him." (Ecclesiastes 3:14)

The Sovereignty of God is described in the book of Ecclesiastes in terms of God being the Controller, not only over His own works, but also the Controller over man's life. (Ecclesiastes 7:14, 9:1) "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." (Ecclesiastes 7:14, Living Bible)

Man can choose wrongly, but God will sovereignly determine the negative moral consequences which that man must suffer! Man can choose rightly, but God will sovereignly determine the positive moral results which that man will enjoy! A moral universe demands the exercise of both the free will of man and the sovereign will of God. The two may seem contradictory, but in reality the two are complementary to a proper understanding of moral realities within a moral universe. God has both a perfect will and a permissive will. "Since everything that happens is necessarily within the bounds of God's will, yet (according to 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....Thus, it is evident that there are two aspects of the will of God with respect to sin: His permissive will allows it, but His perfect will forbids it and will bring all sin into judgment." (Life in the Son; Robert Shank, pg. 349-348) Man may choose freely because God permits the exercise of free will, but God will justly punish and reward ultimately because God, as Sovereign, exercises final control in a moral universe! "So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands." (Ecclesiastes 9:1)

"O God, because you will punish willful sin and reward willing obedience in the end, I am motivated both by fear and love to serve you, all the days of my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "My times are in Thy hands, whatever they may be, pleasing or painful, sad or glad, as best may seem to Thee."

MAN'S ULTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Why revere and fear God? Not only because God is sovereign and thus will finally 'balance the books' and have the 'final say' at the end of life, but also because God will bring judgment and punishment for wrongdoing during this present lifetime.

God is in heaven and we are on earth, but this does not mean that God is far removed from this earth and oblivious to mankind's moral actions. There is an 'all-seeing Eye' watching every move of each human being, an 'unseen Person' listening to every conversation, and an all-knowing Judge scrutinizing every secret motive hidden in every man's heart!

Therefore, Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 commands you to live carefully, to "guard your steps", "to go near to listen" and "not be quick with your mouth". This scripture implies that we are to fear the Lord, for God will bring punishment to irreverent men of hasty words.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 further exhorts us to "stand in awe (fear) of God" because God will bring punishment to indifferent men of rash vows!

There is a strong motivation to fear and reverence God when we realize that God will punish irreverent men of hasty words and indifferent men of rash vows. (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7) (Read the following: Matthew 5:37, 12:36-37; Psalms 19:14)

Ecclesiastes 3:17, 11:9, 12:14 teach us that man is ultimately accountable for his moral actions. "God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:14) It is not all of life to live or of death to die, but after death comes the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27) There is a hell to shun and a heaven to gain. Moral choices in life determine one's moral destiny in eternity! It is a fixed destiny. (Ecclesiastes 11:3b)

Death is both inevitable and unpredictable! "Death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." (Ecclesiastes 7:2b) "No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death." (Ecclesiastes 8:8a) "Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them." (Ecclesiastes 9:12) The writer exhorts us, in light of the inevitability of death, to remember and to revere our Creator. (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7) The worldly man who dies not believing in a hereafter will have the grimmest of all grim days to face when he dies and then faces God at the Great White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15) "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31) Therefore, the conclusion of the whole matter is this: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil". (Ecclesiastes 12:13b-14)

"O God, help me to fear you so much that I will walk obediently before you, and to love you so much that I will fellowship intimately with you. If I am ready to die, I am then ready to live--and to live abundantly!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON "OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES TO FAITH"

1. What is the primary and secondary motivation for responding to God in repentance of sin?
2. What is meant by the Biblical phrase 'the fear of the Lord'?
3. What Biblical truths should a believer call to mind when he observes or experiences life's injustices and evil's seeming triumph?
4. What were some of the specific inequities in life that greatly distraught the writer of Ecclesiastes?
5. What is the Christian answer to the problem of unexplained tragedy and human suffering?
6. In light of the fact of the incomprehensibility of God, is it presumptuous for a mere human to claim personal knowledge and intimate fellowship with the eternal God? Why or why not?
7. Name seven reasons or incentives (according to the book of Ecclesiastes) to 'fear the Lord'.
8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We are living in a moral universe that favors those who remember the Creator of the Universe and that resists those who reject the Creator of the Universe." Give scriptural support for your answer.
9. Illustrate from your personal observations or experience the truth of the following statement: "There may be a high cost in serving God, but there is a higher cost in not serving God."
10. What are some of the specific positive results and benefits (according to Ecclesiastes) from serving the Lord?
11. What evidence is there that God has "set eternity in the hearts of men" and that there is a "God-shaped vacuum" in the heart of man which nothing can fill except God Himself?
12. What is meant by "the Sovereignty of God", and how can God's sovereignty be maintained and, at the same time, man's free will be exercised? (Illustrate the dynamic interplay of these two realities, using the examples of Pharaoh and Joseph in the Old Testament, and of Jesus in the New Testament.)
13. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Man can choose rightly or wrongly, but God will sovereignly determine the negative moral consequences or the positive moral results, in His moral treatment of free moral agents".
14. What is meant by "God's perfect will" and "God's permissive will"?
15. In light of the fact that God will bring punishment to irreverent men of hasty words (Ecclesiastes 5:1-3), and to indifferent men of rash vows (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7), what should the sincere believer be motivated to do?
16. What basic truths regarding Death does the book of Ecclesiastes teach us?



## Chapter 3

### WHY BELIEVE IN A PERSONAL GOD?

INTELLIGENT ORDER POINTS TO INTELLIGENT CREATOR

Thus far in our spiritual quest we have assumed the existence of God. We have not tried to prove God's existence. In the strictest sense, God's existence cannot be proved. The Bible simply declares, "The fool hath said in his heart 'There is no God'. "No attempt is made in the Bible to prove the existence of God. Religion in general and Christianity in particular assumes the existence of God. It is not the task of religion to debate; rather, it is the task of religion to share. Religion says, "Taste and see for yourself that God is, and that God is good."

It is the task of philosophy, not religion, to present evidences for God's existence. Philosophy examines, evaluates, and explains. Says William Temple, "Religious faith begins exactly where the argument leaves off....what are for philosophy the ultimate questions are for religion the primary assurances".

God is a primary assurance to the man of faith, but to the man who is searching, God is the ultimate question!

Philosophical arguments alone cannot create faith in God; they can, however, help destroy some of the intellectual obstacles which undermine faith. Philosophy can help remove the barriers of honest intellectual doubts. Therefore, the disciplines of logic and apologetics have their place.

We must glance at some of the philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

First, the existence of an intelligent order points to an intelligent Creator. In his great commentary on the Gospel of John, William Barclay helps us to see the significance of this basic evidence for God's existence. "When we look at the world we see an amazing order. The planets keep to their appointed times....Clearly there is order in nature, and therefore, equally clearly there must be a mind behind it all. Further, that mind must be greater than any human mind because it achieves results that the human mind can never achieve....Therefore, the mind in nature is far above the human mind in man. If then in the world there is order, there must be mind; and in that order there are things which are beyond the mind of man to do, then the mind behind the order of nature must be a mind above and beyond the mind of man--and straight way we have reached God." (Daily Study Bible, Gospel of John; Volume 1, pg. 36-37)

"Become for me, O God, my primary assurance rather than my ultimate question! I see you in the heavens. Let me experience you in my heart!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My quest will lead to my discovery, and my questions will be turned into exclamation marks!

## UNIVERSAL MIND BEHIND UNIVERSAL ORDER

E. Stanley Jones convincingly argues for the existence of God. A universal order argues for a universal Mind. "How could this universe come by chance into a cosmic orderliness that stretches from the molecule to the outermost star, and controls everything between? And how could this orderliness just happen to stay by chance through millions of years? That would be a stark materialistic miracle--universal chaos by chance gives birth to universal order! The one who believes that must spell his 'chance' with a capital 'C' and mean by it--God. How long do you think it would take for you to throw up a font of type into the air and have it come down by chance into a poem of Browning? I asked a printer that question and he replied, "Both you and the type would wear out first".

"Someone has figured out how many chances to one it would take for the world to have happened by chance, and the figures go round the world 35 times. 'A preposterous figure', says Dr. Millikan, the scientist. Sir James Jeans had figured out that it would take a hundred million years for a hundred thousand monkeys, packing at random a hundred thousand typewriters, to happen by chance upon the plays of Shakespeare. And then, after they had happened upon the arrangement of the letters, they wouldn't know what the letters meant!"

"When I pick up a book and see that there is intelligence in it--that sometimes does happen!--then I know that behind that intelligence is an intelligent mind expressing itself through that intelligence. When I look at the universe, I find that it responds to intelligence--it can be intelligently studied. Intelligence has gone into it--into its very structure. Then the simple conclusion must be that behind that intelligence, which is built into the structure of things, is an intelligent mind, and since that built-in intelligence seems to be universal, I will have to spell it in capitals--a Universal Mind." (Abundant Living, pg. 5)

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of his craftsmanship. Day and Night they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world." (Psalms 19:1-3, Living Bible)

"It is both saner and easier to believe in the divine miracle of a God-created orderly Universe, than it is to believe that order came from disorder and that Character came from Chance! The orderly universe is driving me to an orderly God. I surrender my personal disorder to your Divine Order. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is reasonable and wise to believe that my mind came from the great Mind of God. I will therefore subject my petty thoughts to His powerful thoughts!

## ONE-TO-ONE CORRESPONDENCE

Perhaps the simplest of all arguments for the existence of God as we have noted is the fact that an intelligent order points to the existence of an intelligent Creator.

Secondly, as convincingly shown by Dr. Elton Trueblood, there is a one-to-one correspondence between internal logic and external laws, which amazingly points to a common source of origin, namely God! There is a one-to-one correspondence between man's mind and the predictable laws of nature, both of which point to a common Source. What man sees and knows best can be figured out because internal logic has external laws as its parallel counterpart. This phenomenal kinship between mind and nature points to One who is the Designer of both. Were it not for this consistency in nature and the ability of man's mind to logically comprehend it, the discipline of Science would be impossible. God has made a comprehensible Universe! Astronomical discoveries serve to demonstrate this truth.

Scientists, with a knowledge of scientific principles and laws, figured out in their minds where a new planet should be found in the solar system. Details of the new planet's orbit, as well as predictions of its future positions in the sky were calculated, even before the actual planet Uranus was located with a telescope. After the planet Uranus was found by 'accident' in 1781, it was calculated that the planet took about 84 years to make one complete revolution around the sun. For about 40 years, predicted calculations proved to be completely accurate, but then discrepancies were noted. It was then that two separate scientists predicted the position of an unknown body in space which was pulling Uranus slightly out of the predicted path of revolution. Separately these scientists' predictions were tested and a faint object, which proved to be the eighth member of the sun's family--Neptune--was discovered!

Thus, this discovery only served further to illustrate that there is a one-to-one correspondence between internal logic and external laws, which points to a common source of origin--God! The God who created man's mind created a universe which is subject to man's predictions. Man's ability to predict and to find that his predictions come true, shows that the facts exist independent of man's mind and yet man's mind corresponds with nature's laws, pointing to the fact that internal logic and external laws have the same Designer!

"The outer expanse of the universe and the inner expanse of my mind come from a common source--God! O thou, who dost fill the Universe with Thyself, fill the inner universe of my mind with Thyself! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Just as there is naturally a one-to-one correspondence between internal logic and external laws, I will seek supernaturally a fellowship between my spirit and God's spirit!

## WINDER OF THE CLOCK

Thirdly, there is a principle in Nature which is well known to every scientist, the principle of entropy. Notes Trueblood, "As the useless energy increases, the useful decreases by the same amount. This ratio of useless to useful energy is called entropy. The law of entropy states that the ratio is constantly increasing. This means that the amount of energy available for the energizing process of the world is ever growing less". (Philosophy of Religion, pg. 103) This principle shows that there will be an ultimate dissipation of all energy, if Nature remains as it is now.

Notes Dr. Inge, as quoted by Trueblood, "If the universe is running down like a clock, the clock must have been wound up at a date which we could name if we knew it. The world, if it is to have an end in time, must have had a beginning in time". (Ibid, 104) But the principle of entropy points not only to a beginning of energy, but logically demands a source of energy. The clock was wound in the beginning, but there had to be a Winder of the clock!

"The universe as we know it, by the aid of modern science, could not have originated without the action of a creative Source of energy outside itself, and it cannot be maintained without it." (Idid, 105)

This principle may lead to a discussion of Purpose. A may be explained by B, but unless the explanations are pushed to the ultimate reason--Z (Z being something which is its own reason), your knowledge is incomplete. Example: If a nail is being driven, we ask 'Why'. Answer: "The nail goes in because the hammer hits it. The hammer head moves because it is moved by the muscles of a man's arm. The arm muscles move because they are directed by nerve impulses". (Ibid, 97) But these are secondary causes or reasons why the nail is driven. They are not the real reason. "But the whole enterprise takes place because a man has a reason for driving a nail in a board. Perhaps he wants to build a house for his friend." (Ibid, 97) We ask the question of why energy is lost and someone says because of the principle of entropy. That is a secondary reason. The real reason must be explained in terms of God's creation of the energy and His purpose for creating matter. The principle of entropy shows, not only that energy had a beginning, but that energy must have a source. In talking about causes, one must go to the uncaused Cause who has purpose for all things.

"The more I observe the Universe, the more I am driven to the conclusion that there is a Personable Force who created Energy, that there is a great Designer who produced Beauty, and that there is a great Mind who initiated Purpose. I am beginning to see, O God, that as you began it all, so you will sometime end it all!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: May the God who is 'out there', become the God who is 'in here'--even in my heart!

## QUEST FOR A PERSONAL GOD!

Arguments from Science give plausible evidence for God's existence. The existence of an intelligent order points to an intelligent Creator. The one-to-one correspondence between internal logic and external laws points to a common source of origin--God. The constant decrease in the quantity of energy in nature points to an original source of all energy--God. But simply to establish the existence of a Being which is the highest in a series, is not to establish an object worthy of Man's worship, allegiance, or love. It is necessary, not only to be assured of the existence of a Supreme Being, but to know that that Being is Personal and Approachable.

To equate God with 'Beauty', 'Love', 'Power', 'Aspiration', or even with the 'Absolute' is to reduce God to an impersonal essence. Some equate God with 'Ultimate Reality' or with that to which a person will devote his total energy or devotion. To do this would make God a mere subjective experience with no objective reality. God must have an existence independent of a person's own notions, ideas, experience, or awareness.

The true concept of God has been inseparably connected with His Personality. God most convincingly manifested Himself through His great historic acts. God is the God who acts in human history! In delivering Israel from Egypt, He revealed His love, and in speaking to Israel from Mount Sinai, He displayed His holiness. In conquering their enemies and in controlling nature (miracles), He visibly showed His mighty power. The Creator God lived among mankind for over 30 years, so say the Christians. Further, the God of the Christian reveals, not only Man's wickedness, but He also expresses His love and mercy through His forgiveness and abiding Presence. Christians assert that God is all-wise, all-powerful, and all-knowing, that He is a God of Purpose and that He is a God who is Personal. He gives meaning, not only to human history in general, but to individual history in particular!

The God whose existence is evidenced in Science, is the God who is revealed through Man's conscience and especially through direct religious experience.

There is sufficient evidence that God is not simply an Impersonal Being or Force or Essence. The arguments from Moral Experience and from Religious Experience both point to the existence of a Personal God. We must spend time investigating these two types of experiences.

"Can it be possible that the Infinite is interested in the Finite, that the Universal is concerned with the Particular, that the Force behind the Universe is a Personable Friend in the World? My prayers to you, O God, are affirming such daring faith!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am a personal being; I must serve a Personable God!

## UNIVERSAL MORAL OBLIGATION

There is evidence from Man's Moral experience that God not only exists, but that God is Personal. In our careful examination of Man's Moral experience, we must first examine the evidence for the independent existence of an Objective Moral Order, which in turn will eventually lead to the conclusion that there is a Personal Moral Lawgiver behind the Moral Order.

Prerequisite to a discussion of the meaning of and the evidence for an objective Moral Order, is an appreciation for the Universal sense of moral obligation. It can be generally said that Universally Man has a consciousness of being under obligation, regardless of the influence of his particular society, and independent of his own likes or dislikes. Universally, man feels the demands of the moral laws which is no respecter of persons. "That to which all bear testimony is the fact that a man who genuinely says 'I ought' means 'I ought, though the heavens fall'. The command is not conditional, but categorical....It is beyond dispute that the human animal is concerned very largely with what he ought to do. In this enterprise he is, no doubt, frequently confused and baffled, but he goes on asking the question. To describe man without this question would be ridiculous....To say 'I ought to do this' is not the same as to say 'it is to my advantage' or 'it is prudent' or 'it is customary', or it is commanded by the state' or 'I desire it'. In fact, we habitually decide between all of these and what we think we ought to do. Frequently, there is a clash between them." (Philosophy of Religion; Elton Trueblood, pg. 108-110)

This universal sense of moral obligation points to an objective moral order. Those who hold that there is an objective moral order hold that there is a moral order that is real and binding upon all men, independent of man's whims and notions. Such persons are ethical realists. "The case is strictly parallel to that for physical realism. There are the same reasons for believing in a moral order, to which our judgments may or may not conform, as there are for believing in a physical order to which our scientific judgments may or may not conform. The moon has a definite size even when men differed about it." (Ibid, pg. 112) In contrast, the ethical relativist believes that nothing is objectively or really right or wrong, but that right and wrong are simply determined according to the situation or circumstance or personal moral opinion or interpretation.

"Is it possible that I may find you, O God, in the inner workings of my conscience, as well as in the outer wonders of the Universe? Does my sense of moral oughtness come from You? My conscience bears witness of your personal existence!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I 'ought' to do right, even when it is inconvenient or difficult to do right!

OBJECTIVE MORAL ORDER

We have noted that a universal sense of moral obligation points to an objective moral order. We must look carefully at life to gather the evidence which supports belief in an objective moral order.

First, think of Man's conscience. Although Man's conscience must be morally trained if it is to be a safe and mature moral guide in decision-making, it is interesting that 'instinctively' all persons seem to know that some actions or attitudes are always 'wrong'. But this universal sense of right and wrong points to a universal moral standard. The Conscience can only judge an act or an attitude to be 'wrong', if there is an objective standard, not subject to time or circumstances, by which to judge the act or attitude. "The modern mind has been infected by the poison of subjectivism. Subjectivism is the view that one's own personal outlook is the end of every matter. Therefore, every person is as qualified as any other individual to call something true. If it is true to him, then, no matter how inconsistent it may be with other facts, it is true indeed....By this subjective standard, Christianity is, of course, true, but so is atheism, communism, sexism and the notion that the moon is made of green cheese. All things are true to someone, the modern mind would declare. Nothing is therefore false or true by any of the old definitions....The result is that communication is being lost between people and nations, for no standards of straight-thinking carry over from one to the other. The mind of any one person therefore becomes a remote island, separated from any other mind by the trackless seas of indefinability." (Why is Christianity True?; Dave Breese, pg. 3-4)

Second, think of the widespread use of ethical terminology in common conversation. Even atheists use words which mean nothing if their ethical content is extracted. The attitude of the atheist who claims to be 'honest' cannot be explained without acceptance of what he himself rejects --an objective moral order--for there is no such thing as truth or falsehood unless there is an objective standard to determine truth and falsehood. "The practice of the honest atheist frequently denies the conscious import of his words, because he is acting in a way which makes no sense unless his conscious conclusions are untrue." (Philosophy of Religion; Elton Trueblood, pg. 115)

"The 'ethical atheist' is a contradiction in terms, for an atheist denies all objective moral standards, from which ethical statements originate. O God, I see that I cannot have the 'fruits' of moral good without the 'roots' of Moral Objectivity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My strong convictions, regarding 'Right' and 'Wrong' are useless convictions, unless they are born out of the Objective Moral Law!

## "THE MORAL LAW TELLS THE TUNE"

We are gathering evidence to support belief in the existence of an Objective Moral Order.

Third, listen to the quarrelling, excuses and defenses of people. Notes C.S. Lewis, "Everyone has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kinds of things they say. They say things like this: 'How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?'--'That's my seat, I was there first'--'Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm'--'Why should you shove in first?'--'Give me a bite of your orange, I gave you a bite of mine'--'Come on, you promised'. People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups. Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about". (Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis, pg. 17)

Quarrelling between people is meaningless unless there is objective moral reality. 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 personal behaviour if one hasn't felt that he has failed to 'live up' to a certain, real standard for conduct?

Fourth, think of the unselfish moral decisions which persons make. When one makes a moral decision in the presence of two conflicting impulses, he is aware of an overriding guiding principle, which if he obeys, causes him to side with the impulse which results in unselfish action. Notes C.S. Lewis, "Supposing you hear a cry for help from a man in danger. You will probably feel two desires--one, a desire to give help (due to your heart instinct), the other, a desire to keep out of danger (due to the instinct for self-preservation). But you will find inside you, in addition to these two impulses, a third thing which tells you that you ought to follow the impulse to help, and suppress the impulse to run away. Now this thing that judges between two instincts, that decides which should be encouraged, cannot itself be either of them. You might as well say the sheet of music which tells you, at a given moment, to play one note on the piano and not another, is itself one of the notes on the keyboard. The moral law tells us the tune we have to play; our instincts are merely the keys". (Mere Christianity, pg. 22)

"When I have had to make a moral decision in the presence of two conflicting impulses, I have often sensed the presence of a Guiding Principle. Is that guiding principle You, O God?"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: In making moral decisions today, I will side with my impulses which will result in unselfish actions!

## GENERAL MORAL AGREEMENT

We continue to gather evidence to support belief in the existence of an Objective Moral Order.

Fifth, observe the Judgment-making that regularly is exercised among persons--common persons and specialized persons alike. The fact that one makes moral judgments everyday is evidence that there is an objective moral standard. People blame and praise one another, and that with great conviction! People even judge their own actions and motives. One knows what he 'ought' to have done even though he often fails in moral performance. Even when one is down morally, he tends to look up to an ongoing aspiration! Not only are personal judgments made, but it is common to hear people pronounce judgments on history or on national moralities or policies. Democracy is declared to be better than totalitarianism. Even historians pronounce moral judgments upon heartless dictators who have committed unspeakable atrocities. It is quickly recognized that certain actions are wrong, even when national policy or majority rule in a nation have allowed certain things. Most, if not all, historians declare that Lincoln's attitudes toward American slavery reflected 'moral reality', even when his views were unpopular. Unless there is an Objective Moral Order, one cannot pass moral judgments, but can only express his own personal opinion, which is really no better than Hitler's opinion!

Sixth, acknowledge the general moral agreement among different cultures. To a remarkable degree, there is general agreement of what is right or wrong, even among people of very different cultures, which is another evidence of a universal moral law. Notes C.S. Lewis, "I know that some people say the idea of a law of nature or a decent behaviour known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference....Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two make five. Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to--whether it was only your own family or your fellow countrymen or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked". (Mere Christianity, pg. 19)

"I am seeing that there is one set of moral standards for all persons, in all ages, in all nations, for all times. Can it be that this abiding moral law reflects the very nature of a loving moral lawgiver?"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because my nature demands both justice and mercy, it is reasonable to believe that a loving God governs a lawful universe!

THE PERSONAL SUPERHUMAN MIND

There is evidence that there is a personal moral lawgiver behind the moral law! The moral law must have a superhuman origin since it didn't originate in man or in society, both of which obey its demands oftentimes against personal interests or desires. "This means that the only focus of the moral law is a superhuman mind. That it must be a mind is clear when we realize that the law has no meaning except for minds, and that it must be superhuman is clear when we realize that it cannot be ours. Therefore, the recognition of an objective moral law drives us to the belief in God, without whom that law would have no significant being." (Philosophy of Religion; Elton Trueblood, pg. 115)

Further, the superhuman mind behind the moral law must be personal, if an adequate explanation can be given for the feeling of those scientists who think of themselves as materialists, is highly mysterious if the real world they seek to know is unconscious matter or force, for it is the same kind of feeling we know best when there is real communication between two finite minds. The joy that comes in the effort to know the truth and the reverence for it which makes good men spurn the temptation to deceit are not intelligible if the only consciousness is at one end of the transaction, but they are completely intelligible if truth is the meeting of mind with Mind." (Ibid, pg. 115) The person who invests all the powers of his being in obeying the moral law, is acting as if the universe was not governed by impersonal law, but rather by a personal moral lawgiver who cares whether men obey it. The universe must be governed by a Personality, not an impersonal Force.

Further, the nature of human personality demands a Personal God. 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. If this were so, the creature would have higher qualities than the Creator Himself! "Did (man's) intelligence come out of the nonintelligent? If so, that is a materialistic miracle. Nature brought forth something she didn't have. Again, you and I have purpose--we choose. Did that purpose come out of a nonpurposive universe? That too would be a materialistic miracle." (Abundant Living; E. Stanley Jones, pg. 6)

"The God of all wisdom has used reason to drive me into the arms of a personal God. The moral lawgiver behind the moral law has turned out to be a personal and personable Mind who seeks communication with my mind! O God, what love you have unveiled!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is beginning to unveil His loving personality to me. I am excited to meet that personality!

## THE ARGUMENT FROM DIRECT RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

During the last few days we have looked at the Moral Argument for the existence of a Personal God. Considerable evidence was examined which supports belief in the existence of an Objective Moral Order, which helps explain the sense of universal moral obligation among mankind. Convincing is the evidence further that the moral law originates in a superhuman mind. The greatest discovery, however, is the discovery that this superhuman mind is personal and personable, ever seeking communion with Man's mind!

It seems accurate to say that God has revealed Himself through 'Moral Law', but is it possible to experience God more directly and intimately? Millions throughout history have answered this question affirmatively! Many in all ages have uniformly testified to a personal fellowship with God! Direct testimonies, religious autobiographies, hymns and prayers are the main sources for reporting religious experience.

Millions in all ages have testified to a personal experience of God! One spoke of his personal encounter with God in terms of personal love and joy: "Ah, my Lord God, most faithful lover, when thou comest into my heart, all that is within me doth joy! Thou art my glory and the joy of my heart, my hope and my whole refuge in all my troubles". (Imitation of Christ, written 500 years ago) The amazing thing about this testimony of personal fellowship with God is the fact that millions have testified similarly! Notes Elton Trueblood: "The fact that a great many people, representing a great many civilizations and a great many centuries, and including large numbers of those generally accounted the best and wisest of mankind, have reported direct religious experience is one of the most significant facts about our world". (Philosophy of Religion, pg. 145)

In light of these multiplied reports of direct religious experience, both ancient and modern, what conclusion can we draw? Only one of two conclusions can be drawn. Either these testimonies are true reports and God is real, or these reports are false and God is an illusion! If God is an illusion, then all great men, as well as Jesus himself were victims of self-delusion!

But there is strong evidence to support the conclusion that such testimonies of God's reality are true!

"God, the evidence is convincing that you exist, and that your existence is personal. Is it possible for me to know you personally, to commune with you, as friend with Friend? I leap with joy to think of such a possibility!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because millions in all ages have claimed to know God personally, I will personally seek to establish such an intimate relationship with God!

"CONSIDER THE HAPPINESS OF THE RELIGIOUS"

Evidence favors the conclusion that reports of personal experience of God are true. Elton Trueblood shares the following evidence.

First, the number of reporters are many. "What is reported by only a very few could be objective, but chances are against such a conclusion." (Philosophy of Religion; Trueblood, pg. 156) In the case of direct religious experience, the reporters compose a vast company!

Second, the character of the reporters is varied but trustworthy. The profession of some reporters has obviously been higher than the character has been exemplary. However, among the vast number of reporters have been some of the most trustworthy and noble characters in history.

Third, the agreement of the reports is not complete but substantial. "Complete agreement is not required for validation. If it were, science would be destroyed. What is required is a substantial core of agreement, with increasing agreement in proportion to developed sensitivity." (Ibid, pg. 157) The agreement of the reports is not agreement in terms of religious information, but in terms of a sense of new life. "What is revealed is not propositions, but a Presence." (Ibid, pg. 153) The saints of all ages have had remarkable agreement in their reports of a divine Presence and Power in their lives.

Fourth, the consequent change in lives is most convincing in the validating process. When lives which claim direct experience of God are similarly changed, this fact alone points to a common Power which produces those changes. "One of the most remarkable features of so much of religious life is its consequent joy in the face of pain and hardship. George John Romanes, the eminent naturalist and associate of Darwin, for whom the Romanes Lectures are named, was turned from agnosticism to theistic conviction, not because of his own personal religious experience, but because of his observation of the lives of others who reported such experience. The crucial consideration to one who tried to be fully scientific was as follows: 'Consider the happiness of the religious--and chiefly of the highest religious, i.e., Christian belief. It is a matter of fact that besides most intense, it is most enduring, growing and never staled by custom. In short, according to the universal testimony of those who have it, it differs from all other happiness not only in degree but in kind. Those who have it can usually testify to what they used to be without it. It has no relation to intellectual status. It is a thing by itself and supreme'." (Ibid, 158)

"Is it possible that I may experience a happiness that does not depend upon my happenings, a happiness that is different both in degree and in kind from the mere happiness that I have experienced! O God, what you have done for others, you can do for me! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is not religious propositions that I will debate, but it is the Living Presence that I will experience!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'WHY BELIEVE IN A PERSONAL GOD'

1. How does the task of religion and the task of philosophy differ, in regards to the subject of 'God'?
2. If philosophical arguments cannot create faith in God, what is the purpose of examining arguments for the existence of God from a philosophical viewpoint?
3. How is the existence of God (from a philosophical viewpoint) further evidenced by the one-to-one correspondence between internal logic and external laws?
4. Define and illustrate the scientific principle of Entropy and explain how this principle serves to demonstrate the existence of God.
5. What evidence is there from various dynamic acts in human history that God is a personal Being?
6. Cite as much evidence as possible for the independent existence of an Objective Moral Order.
7. What does an "ethical relativist" believe? Why do the beliefs of an ethical relativist make intelligent and meaningful moral dialogue impossible?
8. From a study of Man's conscience, what evidence can be derived to establish a belief in an objective moral order?
9. How does the widespread use of ethical terminology point to the existence of an objective moral order?
10. Why is quarrelling between people so meaningless, unless there is an objective moral order?
11. During a difficult moral decision, why do people often side with the impulse within them which results in unselfish action?
12. Do you agree or disagree: "Unless there is an Objective Moral Order one cannot pass moral judgments, but can only express his own personal opinion, which is really no better than Hitler's opinion!" Why/why not?
13. In the study of various cultures, what evidence is there that there is a general moral agreement regarding most moral actions, and how does such evidence help establish a belief in the existence of an Objective Moral Order?
14. Why does recognition of an objective moral law inevitably drive one to the belief in God as a superhuman mind?
15. Why must the superhuman mind (behind the moral law) be personal?
16. How does the nature of human personality demand the existence of a personal God?
17. What evidence can you cite from the reality of personal religious experience that points convincingly to the existence of a personal and personable God?

## Chapter 4

### GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION

GOD'S GREATEST CREATIVE ACT

The greatest creation of the personal God, of whom we have been thinking in the last chapter, is Man. Man may not be the strongest animal or the fastest animal or the largest animal, but Man is the only animal who asks ultimate questions and who seeks ultimate meaning in life. Man is unique because man was uniquely created. God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness". (Genesis 1:26)

That man is a self-conscious, self-determinative creature is clearly revealed in the Biblical account of Man's creation and fall. (Genesis 1-3) The nature of man, as revealed in these chapters, can be seen from various perspectives, all of which we must examine: (1) Man's Dominance; (2) Man's Limitation; (3) Man's Freedom; (4) Man's Rebellion; (5) Man's Fall; (6) Man's Hope. The Genesis record states Man's unique creation, reveals Man's deliberate wrong choice, and unveils God's merciful provision for Man's predicament.

When Genesis uses the word 'Day' in reference to God's creation, does it literally mean 24 hour days as we know of them or does it symbolically represent eras of time? This is a question which has been unfruitfully debated for a long time. The important thing is not how or how long God actually took to create and to organize, but the important thing to realize is that God actually is the creator of all things. The orderly universe is not an accident or chance happening. It is the intelligent handiwork of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." (Psalms 19:1) It is much more difficult to believe that the orderly universe is the product of accident and chance, then it is to believe that the orderly universe is the amazing product of an intelligent and personal God.

Man is different from all other creatures because he is made in God's own image. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7) God is a Tri-une Being; Man is a Tri-une being as well. God is a Being of intelligence (Omniscience), and so man is created a rational being. God is a Being of temperament (Love), and so man is created an emotional being. God is a Being of action (Omnipotence), and so man is created a volitional being with the capacity to act. God, whose dominance is supreme, has shared that dominance with mankind.

Look first then at Man's dominance. God is creator and Lord of the earth, but God put Man in charge of the earth. Man must exercise his dominance over the earth with a constant sense of his stewardship before God. (Read Genesis 1:28) God gave man dominion over all things, not to abuse the world of nature, but to govern and creatively to use the world of nature to serve mankind and to glorify God. Man is not to use his call to domination over the world as an excuse to exploit the world's natural resources, such as lumber, coal, oil and the soil. God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts. Man is to receive those gifts gratefully and selflessly. God's creatorhood reveals His grace and love.

"Creator God, help me to be creative, not destructive, in the use of the raw materials of creation which you have put under my control."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is the Giver and I am the Receiver of all good things. I will henceforth live gratefully!

FRIGHTENING FREEDOM!

We are looking at the nature of Man from various perspectives, as recorded in the early chapters of Genesis.

Second, look at Man's limitation. God placed one limitation upon Man. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

This tree represents God's sovereign knowledge which belongs to God alone. Man must depend completely upon God and not try to assert himself as God's equal. The tree reminds Man that God alone is all-knowing, and that Man must acknowledge his utter dependence on God, who as creator, is infinitely greater than the creature.

Third, look at Man's freedom. Only as man could freely choose to obey and to serve God, could man's love for God be proved and developed. A slave is forced to obey and serve his master even against his will. The attitude of the slave's resentment for his master is vastly different from the attitude of love with which a son willingly performs duties for his father. Only the son, who has the power of choice, can prove his love for the father.

Love could not be tested without the presence of a standard by which to determine obedience or disobedience. God's commandment forbidding Man to eat from the tree was the standard by which to either praise Man for his obedience or to condemn Man for his disobedience.

The fact of Man's freedom is well described by Suzanne de Dietrich: "The thing that makes us uniquely human is that, unlike the other creatures, we are able to say both 'yes' and 'no' to God. Man does not do the will of his Creator by necessity. The stars in the sky follow their prescribed orbits, the animals of the field obey their instincts, but man has this unique and frightening ability--he can refuse to be obedient to his Creator. For God does not want slaves, but sons". (God's Unfolding Purpose, pg. 36)

Obedience or disobedience means nothing if there is no objective standard by which to judge. The tree in the Garden provided that standard, making possible the exercise of Man's frightening freedom!

"Thank you for my freedom to choose. My freedom of choice allows me to ascend to the highest heights of moral development or to descend to the lowest depths of moral degeneracy. Help me to choose the Right. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is both frightening and fantastic to be a creature of freedom. I will exercise this freedom responsibly!

MAN'S LOST GREATNESS

Fourth, consider Man's rebellion. Man, possessed with the freedom to choose, determined his own destiny. Man yielded to the subtle temptation of Satan and was enticed by Satan's allurements.

Satan implanted the seeds of doubt into Eve's heart. Appealing to the gratification of Man's desire, Satan succeeded in getting Man to overstep his God-imposed limitation, and thus to challenge God's sovereignty.

Satan, whose own fall is attributed to the drunkenness of pride (Ezekiel 28:1-10), became the instigator of Man's pride, which caused Man's fall. When Man ate of the tree, he declared his independence of God and his desire to "run his own life".

When Man invaded God's territory of personal knowledge through eating from the tree, Man yielded to the temptation to play the part of God. Man's relationship to the Creator was made to be one of servant to master. Man attempted to usurp God's mastership when he yielded to Satan's evil suggestions.

Fifth, recognize Man's fall. Man's disobedience to God led to Man's fall. Man failed to stand the test and thus prove his love for the Creator. Man fell from the height of splendor to the depth of despair, from the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion, from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation, from the freedom of innocency to the bondage of guilt, from the strength of health to the weakness of disease, from the glory of life to the corruption of death, from the richness of an heir to the poorness of an outcast, from the fullness of knowledge to the shamefulness of ignorance.

Sin replaced innocency with guilt and caused man to clothe his nakedness. No longer could man reveal himself as he really was, but he was compelled to hide his true identity.

Sin also caused man to run from God's presence and hide. (Genesis 3:8) No longer could Man enjoy intimate fellowship with God, but Man instead became an alienated, estranged rebel afraid to face God.

Neither was willing to accept personal moral responsibility. The man blamed his actions on the woman and the woman, in turn, blamed her actions on the serpent. The transgressor often scapegoats, blaming his actions on his background or friends or society or heredity. Man seeks to sooth his conscience through rationalization, but God cannot be fooled.

"Legitimate physical appetites were exploited by Satan to cause Adam and Eve to sin. Help me, God, to obey you and never to allow my appetites to rule my life."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: With every right moral choice, there are wonderful moral results!

BRILLIANT RAY OF HOPE

Sixth, see Man's hope. Immediately following Man's fall, a brilliant ray of hope shown over the horizon of Man's history, revealing God's future plan for Man's salvation. That ray of hope was found in the curse God pronounced on the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman; also between your offspring and her offspring; He will crush your head and you will crush his heel". (Genesis 3:15)

This prophecy refers to Jesus who was born of the virgin Mary, a descendant of Adam and Eve. Although Satan inflicted injury on Jesus the Son of God, through crucifixion Jesus crushed and destroyed the works of Satan through His redemptive death on the cross, and proved to be victor over Satan through His glorious resurrection. (Hebrews 2:14-15) Man's bondage to Satan was broken through the conquering power of the resurrected Lord. Through the seed of Eve, Man would be reconciled or brought back to fellowship with God. Through Christ, Man would be "born again" and receive a new nature.

What general conclusions and applications can be drawn from a brief study of Genesis 1-3?

(1) God is the Creator of all of life; therefore, God has the right to rule in each man's life. Each person is responsible to use his body and soul and mind for God's glory. To abuse one's body, mind or soul is to sin against one's creator.

(2) Man's call to domination over the earth is not a call to careless exploitation, but to responsible stewardship. The God-granted power to dominate can become a temptation to 'lord over' other people and to exploit the world's resources for selfish use. Man's lordship over the earth is subject to God's lordship over all of created matter.

(3) Satan often tempts man by calling into question the truthfulness of God's Word. (Genesis 3:1)

(4) Sin can be defined as disobedience against the known laws of God and rejection of the revealed love of God. Because God, by nature is just, wrong moral choices always result in tragic moral consequences. The penalty of sin is death.

(5) Because God is a loving redeemer by nature, He has provided a redemptive plan for mankind's salvation.

"O God, because of your creative power, I was born for greatness; because of my willful disobedience, I lost my greatness; because of Christ's redemptive love, I can regain my greatness. Thank you! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What God has promised, He has provided, and what He has provided, I will receive--Redemption! Glory!

## MAN--CREATURE OF FREEDOM OR FATE?

We said in the last devotional that, because God is a loving redeemer by nature, He has provided a redemptive plan for mankind's salvation. In seeking to understand God's redemptive plan for mankind, one of the best Biblical chapters to study is the first chapter of the book of Ephesians. Particularly in the first 14 verses of this amazing chapter, we see exposed both the positive purpose of God in redemptive provision and the positive freedom of man in personal faith and salvation.

In looking at both the free provision of God and the free appropriation of salvation by Man, some of your basic questions should be answered. "Are you a creature of freedom or a creature of fate? Are you free to determine your own eternal destiny or was your eternal destiny fixed by some divine decree before the foundation of the world? Did God only choose to save only certain human beings or did God choose to save the entire human race?"

We must spend some time seriously examining the truths of Ephesians 1. This chapter tells us that the positive purposes of God have been wonderfully revealed to mankind. The ordination of God's eternal purpose is understood in terms of sonship through Christ (verse 5). The operation of God's progressive purpose is understood in terms of unity in Christ (verse 10). The consummation of God's perfected purpose is understood in terms of total redemption through Christ (verse 14).

Think first of the ordination of God's eternal purpose. "His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to!" (Ephesians 1:5, Living Bible) Sonship through Christ is God's eternal ordained purpose. Was it God's eternal purpose only to ordain a limited, fixed number to become adopted sons or was it God's eternal purpose and intention to adopt all persons as his children? Who does 'us' refer to in Ephesians 1:5? A chosen number of individuals, determined by divine decree, or the total corporate human race? If only a select number by divine decree, then how can we say 'in love' He predestined? Is divine love consistent with a divine decree to damn those to destruction who were not chosen for adoption as sons?

From a serious study of the book of Ephesians (and all of scripture) we conclude that God predestined (or determined) that 'us' should include the entire human race. God predestined the entire human race to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. God's will is that all persons be saved. God does not will that any should perish! (Read I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9; John 3:16-17; Titus 2:11)

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

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The God who wills to save all is able to save all--including me!

GOD'S POSITIVE PURPOSE REVEALED

In the last devotional we noted that the ordination of God's eternal purpose is understood in terms of sonship through Christ. We can say next that the operation of God's progressive purpose is understood in terms of unity in Christ (verse 10). "This was his purpose: that when the time is ripe he will gather us all together from wherever we are--in heaven or on earth--to be with him in Christ, forever." (Ephesians 1:10, Living Bible)

God's eternal purpose is that all persons should be adopted as spiritual sons (verse 5), but divine intention and purpose to adopt all as sons could only be made possible through the blood of Christ (verse 7), which atoning blood makes possible man's release (redemption) from sin's bondage and relief (forgiveness) from sin's guilt. God's eternal purpose to save the human race could not be realized without the atoning work of Christ on the Cross. "So overflowing is his kindness towards us that he took away all our sins through the blood of his Son, by whom we are saved." (Ephesians 1:7, Living Bible)

That which God has ordained (universal salvation) becomes possible through Christ's accomplished work on the cross (unlimited atonement). Because Christ died, God's eternal intention can be fulfilled, namely, the salvation of all mankind. Christ's atoning sacrifice places all persons in a saveable relationship.

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

If Ephesians 1:5 speaks of the ordination of God's eternal purpose--sonship through Christ--then Ephesians 1:10 speaks of the operation of God's progressive purpose in time--the uniting of all persons to Christ. It is God's purpose to unite all persons in Christ. (Ephesians 2:13-18)

Ephesians 1:14 speaks of God's perfected purpose consummated--namely, the total redemption of those who are God's possession. "His presence within us is God's guarantee that he really will give us all that he promised; and the Spirit's seal upon us means that God has already purchased us and that he guarantees to bring us to himself." (Ephesians 1:14, Living Bible) Christ provided an unlimited atonement, making forgiveness and redemption possible for all (verse 7). God's grace has been lavished upon the human race (verses 7b-8a). God's objective intention is to save the human race corporately (verses 11-12).

"God, how wonderful to know that you are not vindictive in your general treatment of mankind, nor arbitrary in your specific choice of men for salvation. You have sent your Son to seek and to save the lost--and that includes all persons of all times! Thank you for the revelation of such loving purposes!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's objective intention to save all mankind marks me as a saveable person because of my human genealogy and as a saved person because of my spiritual regeneration!

A POSITIVE RESPONSE TO A POSITIVE PURPOSE

We have noted that God's objective intention is to save the human race corporately. The Bible clearly declares this truth: "God longs for all to be saved and to understand this truth". (I Timothy 2:4, Living Bible) "He isn't really being slow about his promised return, even though it sometimes seems that way. But he is waiting, for the good reason that he is not willing that any should perish, and he is giving more time for sinners to repent." (II Peter 3:9, Living Bible) "For the free gift of eternal salvation is now being offered to everyone; and along with this gift comes the realization that God wants us to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures and to live good, God-fearing lives day after day." (Titus 2:11-12, Living Bible) "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, Living Bible)

But while it is God's intention to save all, it is only those who hear the Gospel ('word of truth') and who believe the message of salvation that become a part of God's new race of people (the body of Christ). Those who hear and believe (verse 13a) are those who receive God's promised Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who is responsible to fulfill God's saving purpose in the lives of those who respond to God's saving purpose.

After we personally placed our confidence in Christ and in His saving message, we were "stamped with the promised Holy Spirit as a pledge of our inheritance, until the day when God completes the redemption of what is his own; and that will again be to the praise of His glory". (Ephesians 1:14, Phillips)

So, in light of our study of Ephesians 1 thus far, we must again ask: "Is man a creature of fate or a creature of freedom"? Man is made in God's own image and as such, is free!

(1) God freely chose to save mankind corporately, even before the time when mankind (in Adam) freely chose to fall into sin!

(2) Christ freely chose to come to earth to voluntarily die for the sins of mankind, thus placing all mankind in a saveable relationship through Christ's unlimited atonement.

(3) Each person can freely choose to accept or to reject God's salvation. Man is free to accept or to reject God's salvation, but man is not free to accept or to reject the consequences or results of right or wrong moral choice. To choose positively--that is, to choose Christ--is to choose forgiveness and redemption and ultimately a heavenly inheritance which is presently guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who seals the believer's heart.

"O God, your positive purpose is salvation for every person, made possible because of the atoning blood of your Son. Help me to make a positive response of faith in Christ, in order that I may enjoy personal salvation! Thank you for your powerful provision and for the possibility of a powerful appropriation!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What God has positively intended and positively provided, I will positively enjoy--salvation from all my sins!

FREE TO BE SONS, NOT SLAVES!

We have looked at God's positive purpose revealed: (a) God's eternal purpose ordained--sonship through Christ (Ephesians 1:5); (b) God's progressive purpose operative--unity in Christ (Ephesians 1:10); (c) God's perfected purpose consummated--total redemption through Christ (Ephesians 1:14).

In light of God's positive purpose revealed, let us now look at man's positive freedom exercised: (a) freedom to be sons, not slaves (Ephesians 1:5-8); (b) freedom to be united, but divided (Ephesians 1:9-10); (c) freedom to be confident, not fearful (Ephesians 1:11-14).

In first considering man's freedom to be sons, not slaves, we must look at three aspects of this truth: (1) adoption as sons (v.5); (2) redemption from bondage (v.7); (3) forgiveness from sins (v.7,8a).

Freedom to be sons of God speaks of spiritual adoption. Even before the foundation of the world, God determined to adopt us--the human race--as His children. The mark of God's ownership is stamped deeply on the soul of every human being. God claims the right to be our Father, and we His children. "He determined in His love before time began to adopt us to Himself through Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 1:5 Barclay's translation)

God has destined us to be sons, not slaves! To be called children of God is to be called the objects of God's special care, love, and attention! "What is man that thou art even mindful of him?" But, just think, "What is man that thou art willing to make him a son of the living God!" "We were absolutely in the power of sin and of the world; and God, through Jesus, took us out of that power into His power; and that adoption cancels and wipes out the past and we are made new. We have passed from the family of the world of evil into the family of God." (Daily Study Bible; Ephesians; Barclay; pg. 93)

Freedom to be sons speaks also of redemption from spiritual bondage. What is the relationship between redemption and adoption? Perhaps Galatians 4:4-7 best shows that relationship. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir." The meaning of redemption is 'to loose.' The powerful blood of Christ is the answer to the powerlessness of men who are in the grip of sin! "It is still true of Christ that by His power He can liberate men from this helpless slavery to the things which attract and disgust them at one and the same time." (Daily Study Bible; Ephesians; Barclay; pg. 94)

"O God, release me from the bondage of sin and make me a captive of your love. Free from sin, I am free to serve you. I bow low before you in order that I might stand tall before everything else. I am redeemed from being a slave of sin in order that I might be adopted as a son of God! Glory!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The shame and humiliation of my sin is replaced by the dignity and status of my position as a son of God!

## FORGIVENESS FROM SINS

Adoption as sons (v.5), redemption from bondage (v.7), and forgiveness from sins (v.7,8a)--all were ways of declaring the wonderful truth that man is free to be sons of God rather than slaves of sin. We have looked at adoption and redemption. Let us now look at forgiveness.

What is the relationship between redemption and forgiveness? Redemption from sin means deliverance from the slavery of sin, but there is also forgiveness of the sins themselves. Deliverance from what I am--a slave! Forgiveness for what I have done--sin!

Wrong moral choice (sin) always leads to wrong moral consequences (bondage). Christ not only releases one from the consequences of wrong moral choice, but Christ forgives one for the wrong moral choice which led to bondage in sin. Not only does Christ release the prisoner of sin, but Christ relieves the prisoner of the guilt of the crime which resulted in imprisonment. The present bondage is broken (redemption), and the past guilt is resolved! Not only are bad habits broken but a troubled conscience is cleansed! Forgiveness means relief, and redemption means release, and both are made possible through Jesus' blood. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us." (Ephesians 1:7,8a NIV).

Why does God redeem us? Why does God forgive us? Is there something about us that makes us worthy or appealing to God? Never! God redeems and forgives because God chooses to redeem and forgive, not because we are worthy! We cannot earn or deserve or purchase God's favor. God's grace--unmerited favor--is initiated totally by God. God loves us, not because we are lovely, but because 'God is love.' The very nature of God is love, not a sentimental love, but a suffering love. We are redeemed and forgiven 'through his (Christ's) blood.' (Ephesians 1:7) Love which bleeds is love which saves!

God could neither redeem man from the bondage of sin's consequences, nor forgive man for the guilt of wrong moral choices, without the atoning blood of Christ! It is not an eternal divine decree which is the instrument of man's salvation. It is instead the shed blood of Jesus Christ which is the instrument of man's salvation. The will and pleasure of God was to save humanity from sin, but this divine intention in eternity could only become realized in time if Christ should choose to consent to the Father's request that He die an atoning death on Mount Calvary! Christ had to die, not in the sense of absolute necessity, but in the sense of redemptive necessity. Only through the blood of Christ could God's holy nature be honored and man's salvation be guaranteed. Even though God the Father requested God the Son to come to earth to die for mankind, in reality, there are not three parties involved in this transaction (God, Jesus, Man), but rather there are only two parties involved in this transaction (Holy God and Sinful Man). For when Jesus died, God died!

"O God, I see now that your justice was maintained and your love was demonstrated at the same time when Jesus died, for, when Jesus' blood was shed, God's life was poured out! God, you took the penalty of sin upon yourself when Jesus died, for 'God was in Christ,' both dying for sin and at the same time reconciling sinners to Himself! Thank you! Thank you!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: 'The blood, the blood' - this is my plea, this is my salvation!

## FREE TO BE UNITED, NOT DIVIDED

Christians are called to unity, for God is a unifying God. Christians are free, not to divide, but to unite men around Christ. Not free to be independent, but free to be interdependent. Not free from social concerns, but free to meet social needs. Not free from authority, but free under authority. One is free when he fulfills the purpose for which he was created. Christians are created to unite all things in Christ.

A brick is not free when it is thrown aside, never to be used in a building. It is 'free' when it finds its place and purpose in the wall of a building. A large 'work horse' is not free when it is never harnessed to work. Rather it is free when it is given opportunity to pull a load, thus fulfilling its purpose for existence.

A Christian is not free when he is given no responsibility. A Christian is truly free when he finds his purpose in creation and in the Church of Jesus Christ. When he is 'carrying his share of the load.' When he is using his spiritual gifts within the Church. When he is functioning as a healthy and cooperative member of the Body of Christ. He is free when he is in love and unity with other members of God's family. God's purpose is a corporate purpose. A Christian therefore is free when he is seeking to unite all things and all persons around the feet of Jesus. When he is involving himself in helping God to realize His ultimate purpose for His world. "For God has allowed us to know the secret of his plan, and it is this: he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in him." (Ephesians 1:9,10 Phillips)

A Christian is free when he is involved in helping to fulfill God's Master Plan for the human race--"to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." (v.10 NIV)

When a Christian involves himself in bringing God and men together and in bringing men together with men in loving understanding, then that believer is helping to fulfill God's purpose of uniting all on earth around the feet of Jesus! Christians are to put their arms around sinners and draw them to the Saviour (II Corinthians 5:2). Christians are to love one another (I John 4:7). There should be no place among Christians for the sectarian spirit--that spirit which results in dividing true Christians because of secondary issues of doctrinal distinctives. Criticism, divisions, carnal jealousy, and competition--these are the results when Christian groups elevate secondary issues rather than unite together because of their common love for Christ! Whenever Christians manifest any spirit other than love, they are hindering the cause of Christ and frustrating the purpose of God which is "to unite all things in him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth." (Ephesians 1:10 RSV)

"O thou unifying God, help me to maintain 'the unity of the faith in the bond of peace.' Broaden the circle of my inclusion of those fellow Christians who agree with me in the essentials of the faith but who disagree with me in the secondary doctrines of the faith. Deliver me from the sectarian spirit that results in destroying fellowship among Christian people. In Jesus' charitable Name. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: While I am contending for the 'essentials of the Faith,' I will not become contentious among fellow Christians who choose to differ from me in the 'secondaries of the Faith'!

## FREE TO BE CONFIDENT, NOT FEARFUL

How can you have confidence that you are included in Christ? You can have confidence that you are a Christian and on your way to heaven, if you have responded in faith to the Good News of salvation (v.13). It is not enough to hear the Good News. You must also believe the Good News. That is, you must put your faith totally in God whose plan for human salvation has been revealed through Christ. Believing is trusting God, taking God at His word, transferring your trust from yourself to God alone, for God alone has a plan for human salvation.

Confidence is based not on denial of sin, not on human ability or human accomplishment. Confidence is based on human confession of personal sin, and acceptance of 'the word of truth,' the 'gospel of your salvation' (v.13). There are those who appear to be very confident, very self-reliant, and self-assured ('towering like a cedar of Lebanon' - Psalms 37:35 Living Bible). These persons seem to manifest no doubts, no fears. Often they are brash and bold and brazen. They seem to have the 'world by the tail.' They enjoy intimidating others with their confident words and actions. It seems that such people make all the right decisions. They boast that they are self-made persons.

But such confidence is an illusion! Such confidence is built on a crumbling foundation! Such confidence is the product of spiritual ignorance--a lack of understanding of God's master plan for history!

What is the basis of confidence? Understanding the "purpose of his (God's) will." (v.11) What is the purpose of God's will? That each person, as a part of the corporate human race, recognize that he is chosen and predestined in Christ to be saved from sin (v.11). That each person, as a part of the corporate human race, realize that he individually is chosen to accept God's salvation. That each person who accepts God's salvation be confident that the "best is yet to be." Why? Because heaven is the inheritance of the believers, guaranteed to believers by the promised indwelling Holy Spirit (v.14).

Ephesians 1:11,12 speak of God's objective intention to save the human race corporately. This divine intention to put the human race corporately into a saveable relationship is made possible through Christ. Ephesians 1:13a speaks of individual human response to God's plan of salvation. Those who respond to God's plan of salvation are those who first hear the word of truth (that is, after hearing the 'word of truth,' these persons believe the message of salvation which is made possible 'in Christ.' Hearing and believing the 'word of truth' results in receiving God's promised Holy Spirit who gives assurance of a future inheritance. Ephesians 1:13b,14 speaks of God's gift of assurance and confidence to the believing heart. The believer's confidence is related to the past, present, and future--in his understanding of God's past saving intention (v.11), in his relationship to God's present saving power (v.13), and in his assurance of God's future heavenly inheritance (v.14).

"O God, I see that my confidence does not originate in the fulfillment of my own self-centered will, but in the fulfillment of your eternal will--the salvation of mankind through Christ. If one is not saved through Christ, he has no basis for confidence and every reason for doubt and fear. I put my trust alone in the saving Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What God intended in eternity and what Christ provided in time, I will receive by personal faith--salvation from my sins and reconciliation to my Saviour!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION'

1. What evidence is there that man is uniquely created in God's own image?
2. Practically speaking, how is man to exercise his God-given dominance over the earth and at the same time practice his God-required stewardship in the earth? Cite practical examples of how this dual responsibility is carried out by sensitive believers.
3. Why did God place a limitation on man's freedom in the Garden of Eden, according to Genesis 2:16,17?
4. Was the exercise of man's will in the Garden of Eden an authentic exercise of freedom, or was it simply an apparent exercise of freedom which was really predetermined by a sovereign God?
5. What is the most distinctive feature of man that makes him a creature uniquely created by God, different from all other creatures of the earth?
6. What made Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden so appealing to our first human parents, and what is there about that first temptation that is common to all subsequent temptations which all humans face?
7. What were some of the immediate consequences of the fall of Adam and Eve, and in what ways are these consequences the consequences which modern-day persons face when they sin?
8. How do you interpret Genesis 3:15, as this verse relates to God's provision for lost mankind's restoration?
9. After noting the general conclusions and applications from a study of Genesis 1-3 (which are listed in the chapter), which points (if any) revealed some new insights to you? What further additional insights and applications, from your own study of these chapters, can you share with others?
10. From a careful study of Ephesians 1 (along with the insights shared in the chapter of this devotional book), how would you answer the following questions? "Are you a creature of freedom or a creature of fate? Are you free to determine your own eternal destiny, or was your eternal destiny fixed by some divine decree before the foundation of the world? Did God choose to save only certain human beings or did God choose to save the entire human race? (Cite as many scriptures as possible to document your answers.)"
11. According to Ephesians 1:5, what has always been God's unchanging plan for 'us'? Does 'us' refer only to certain favored human beings whom God has chosen or selected, or does 'us' refer to the entire human race? Is there any solid scriptural basis for believing that God has chosen only some in the human race to be saved, and that He has condemned the rest to be eternally lost? What scriptures can you cite to show that God wants to save every human being from sin and for heaven?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION (Cont.)

12. Could God's perfect will to save the entire human race have been possible without the atoning work of Christ on the cross? Note Ephesians 1:7.
13. If it is God's perfect will that all persons come to repentance (II Peter 3:9) then why does not God exercise His sovereign power to force all humans to repent of sin? Does God have a 'permissive will' as well as a 'perfect will,' resulting in God allowing sinners to refuse to repent of sins, even though He desires that all sinners repent? Is it a demonstration of God's sovereign power that He refuses to coerce man, and instead allows each person to exercise his free will in positive acceptance of or in negative rejection to Jesus' universal provision for human salvation?
14. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Even though all persons, because of Christ's unlimited atonement, are in a save-able relationship, all persons are not automatically in a saved relationship."
15. What personal conditions must be met by the sinner in order for God's universal saving purpose to be personally realized in the individual sinner's life? Can you show from scripture that God offers the gift of saving faith to all persons, thus making possible the salvation of the entire human race?
16. What is the relationship between God's universal saving purpose, Christ's unlimited atonement, and a person's individual appropriation of salvation?
17. According to Ephesians 1:5-14, list three different ways in which man's positive freedom is exercised and demonstrated.
18. Spiritual sonship (according to Ephesians 1:5-8) is the result of what three spiritual realities?
19. According to Galatians 4:4-7, what is the relationship between redemption and adoption?
20. What is the relationship between redemption and forgiveness?
21. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Christ had to die, not in the sense of absolute necessity, but in the sense of redemptive necessity, for only through the blood of Christ could God's holy nature be honored and man's salvation be guaranteed."
22. What is a 'sectarian' spirit, and how does such a spirit violate the teachings of scripture, especially those in the book of Ephesians (Ephesians 1:10; 2:14-22)?
23. According to Ephesians 1:13, how can you be sure that you are a Christian and on your way to heaven? What does it mean 'to believe,' as used in this verse?

Chapter 5

REGAINING MAN'S LOST GREATNESS

CAN MAN REGAIN HIS LOST GREATNESS?

We must now begin a serious study of Romans 5:12-14. This passage describes the process by which man lost his greatness in the Fall. Is it possible for man to regain his lost greatness?

Man is made for the stars! Man may wallow in the mud, but he can never forget the stars! Man was born for greatness! Man has lost his greatness, but he can never forget the destiny for which he was created! The God-shaped image upon man may be distorted, but it can never be totally destroyed! Man can never really forget that he was made for godlikeness!

Says Carl Jung, the great psychiatrist, "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness." But man cannot stand a vacuum. That vacuum is meant to be filled with God!

A caged eagle wishes to be freed to soar in the heights. Man is made for the spiritual heights and will never be satisfied to remain in the cage of his sins.

It is possible to attain everything that life can physically offer, and yet be deeply dissatisfied and disillusioned. "The quest for spiritual renewal and personal fulfillment is rooted in the depths of human nature, and the motivation to be what a man ought to be spiritually springs from interior depths. Man feels unhappy when he looks at his soul, dwarfed by a secular spirit and blighted by sin. He feels restless in his estrangement from God. He then reaches toward God. 'Thou hast made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it reposes in thee.'" (Personal Renewal Through Christian Conversion; by Mavis; pg. 12)

Man lost his greatness in the Fall of Adam, resulting in the problem of inherited moral depravity and a propensity to overtly sin against God's laws. Man can regain his greatness by confessing his sins and by committing his life to Christ. Sin's power is great, but God's grace is greater!

Sin came into the world through Adam's disobedience (Romans 5:12). Romans 5:12 describes what in theology is called 'Original Sin.' Notes Bishop Bastian, concerning original sin, "It is that evil tendency with which every individual is born, a tendency which disposes him to do a wrong and thus to become not only by nature but by personal choice a sinner." Why is it that when you tell a child not to do a certain thing, he tends immediately to do it anyway?

"'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.' (Psalms 42:1,2) Satisfy my parched soul with the Water of Life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As the fish is at home in the sea and the bird is at home in the air, my soul is at home in God!

"I'M STANDING UP ON THE INSIDE!"

Romans 5:12 says, "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." This verse, perhaps more clearly than any other verse, declares what is called in theology 'The Doctrine of Original Sin.'

Bishop Donald Bastian says that original sin "is explained by the universal law of natural generation that like begets like. Adam, by the personal exercise of his own free will, fell into sin, thus becoming a sinner. The son born to him was like him not only in physical structure but in his moral image as well. From Cain to the present all his descendants have inherited from him a nature depraved and prone to sin like his own (Genesis 6:5,12; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21-22)."

The fact of original sin and the universality of sin is recognized in most branches of theology. Even unbelievers "have to admit and to confess this, there there is something which is spoiling and ruining life. They have to admit further, that mankind at large seems to prefer to do that which is wrong rather than that which is right; that if you tell a child not to do a thing, he will want to do it immediately and will, as often as not, proceed to do it." (Lloyd-Jones; Romans 5; pg. 190)

Perhaps you have heard of the mother who told Johnny to sit down in a chair, as a means of discipline and punishment. Some minutes later the mother wanted to check out Johnny's obedience, and from another room she called out, "Johnny, are you sitting in that chair!" Johnny replied, "Yes, I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside!"

One does not have to train a child to be selfish--another indication of the fact of 'original sin.'

Romans 5:12 teaches us that "we all sinned, in some sense, when Adam sinned. We were not there in a real way, sinning when he sinned, as Augustine taught; but we sinned because our representative did and suffered loss even as an entire school might if its representative loses at a track meet. John Wesley says, 'As by one man--as being the representative of mankind, Sin entered into the world . . . Even so death passed upon all men . . . in that . . . all sinned in Adam.'" (The Word and Doctrine; compiled by Kenneth Geiger; pg. 76)

Does man sin because he is a sinner, or is man a sinner because he sins? Man is born with a proneness to sin! Is there any hope?

"O God, there is a 'bent' toward sinning in my life. There is a spiritual gravitational pull downward. I feel the moral drag in my life! But thank you, O God, that I also feel the upward magnetic pull of your mighty love and grace. Break the power of 'cancelled sin' in my life and set me free!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I inherited from Adam a proneness to sin; I received from Christ a proneness to righteousness!

## ORIGINAL SIN OR ORIGINAL GUILT?

Notes Bishop Bastian, "Methodist theology clearly teaches a doctrine of original sin, but it does not hold to a doctrine of original guilt. The human race is not held to be guilty of Adam's sin, even though it is by his sin involved in moral ruin (Genesis 2:17; 3:17)."

"It should be frankly acknowledged that the sin nature is not sin in the fully ethical sense, for the volitional and accountable elements are missing. 'The sin remaining in the regenerate believer . . . is not sin strictly speaking, which is any "transgression of the law" incurring guilt; but depravity--an inherited, inborn, sinward inclination--a depraved bias.'" (The Word and Doctrine; compiled by Kenneth Geiger; pg. 112)

No person is personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity from Adam. However, while one is not personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity, one is responsible for not availing himself of cleansing from moral depravity, made available through Christ's atonement.

Further, one cannot put the blame for his personal sins onto the fact that he inherited moral depravity. One cannot say, when he is engaging in personal acts of transgression, "I couldn't help it, for my inherited moral depravity caused me to sin!" There are others who, when sinning, say, "Something made me do it," or "The devil made me do it," or "After all, we're only human, you know." All such statements reflect personal irresponsibility and deny the exercise of human will, made possible by God's grace which places man in both a saveable and in an accountable state of grace. "Whereas the sin nature constitutes a strong impulse toward sin, it is not an irresistible cause-and-effect situation." (The Word and The Doctrine; pg. 115)

Related to this whole question of original sin and inherited depravity is the question of guilt and condemnation, especially as these apply to infants. Says famous commentator Martyn Lloyd-Jones on page 210 of his book Assurance, Romans 5, "What condemns us, and makes us subject to death, is the fact that we have all sinned in Adam, and that we are all held guilty of sin. . . . Death is always the punishment for the guilt of sin, actual sin; and therefore its universality, even in children, can only be explained by the fact that we all sinned in Adam, and became sinners when Adam sinned." But isn't such an interpretation as this teaching 'original guilt'? Are children actually sinners, actually guilty? We must look at this question in our next devotional.

"O God, thou art a just and fair God. I see that I am not personally responsible for Adam's deliberate disobedience of your direct command, but, because he was the representative of the human race, his sin has affected my moral condition. I am responsible to avail myself of your provision for cleansing from my inherited moral depravity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is no stain of moral depravity that is so deep but what Jesus' cleansing blood goes deeper yet!

## ARE INFANTS DOOMED IF THEY DIE?

What is my response to Martyn Lloyd-Jones' contention that even children are involved in the guilt of Adam's original sin? (I quoted his statement in the last devotional.)

Is he saying that infants are actually sinners, that they have actually sinned and these are actually guilty, when there is no possibility of moral conscious choice on the part of the infant? What is actual sin? "Actual sin is accountable wrongness before God." (The Word and The Doctrine; pg. 94) Actual sin is dependent upon the existence of at least four factors: personhood, freedom, knowledge, volition. To say that a newborn babe is guilty of actual sin is to deny these four factors. How can guilt and condemnation be incurred when there is not even the ability to choose wrong and to reject right on the part of the small infant? Surely the doctrine of original guilt is to be questioned (and rejected) based upon an understanding of the justice of God. Are we to conclude that infants are guilty of sin in the same way as responsible adults are guilty of sin? Never!

It is true that infants are involved in the universal moral ruin of mankind (and infants even experience, at times, sin's penalty which is physical death), but this fact surely cannot be taken as evidence that infants are guilty of actual sin (based on a wrong exercise of conscious volitional capacity which infants are incapable of exercising).

Is not the physical death of a baby simply another reminder of the physically deteriorating effects of sin on Adam's body which he passed on biologically to all mankind? Physical death of an infant surely cannot be interpreted as evidence of that baby's actual sin and personal guilt.

"Wesleyanism has consistently rejected all forms of realism which affirm the personal participation of infants in Adam's sin. We have never attached personal guilt in the sense of culpability to original sin. . . . While infants are not condemnable for anything they have done, they are justly condemnable for their corrupt state as members of a corrupt race. Their misfortune, however, is more than compensated by the atonement of Christ by which their liability to punishment in the sense of condemnation is cancelled. Although, therefore, infants share in Adam's guilt, in a specialized sense of the term, yet through prevenient grace 'not one child' (to quote Wesley) 'finally loses thereby, unless by his own choice.'" (The Word and The Doctrine; pg. 112-113)

"Thou Lamb of God, thank you for your cleansing blood which atones for both the pollution of inherited sin and for the guilt of volitional sin. There is a double cure for my double problem!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: 'There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains!'

APPLICATION OF THE ATONEMENT IN CHILDHOOD

Says one about the atonement of Christ, "The atonement has come to all men and upon all men. Its coextensiveness with the effects of Adam's sin is seen in that all creatures, such as infants and insane persons, incapable of refusing it, are saved without their consent, just as they were involved in the sin of Adam without their consent. The reason why others are not saved is because when the atonement comes to them and upon them, instead of consenting to be included in it, they reject it. If they are born under the curse, so likewise they are born under the atonement which is intended to remove that curse; they remain under its shelter till they are old enough to repudiate it; they shut out its influences as a man closes his window-blind to shut out the beams of the sun; they ward them off by direct opposition, as a man builds dykes around his field to keep out the streams which would otherwise flow in and fertilize the soil." (quoted in 'Elect In The Son'; by Robert Shank; pg. 104-105)

Unless or until a small child actively resists the grace of God when he is capable of personal moral choice, that child continues to enjoy the saving benefits of Christ's atonement. Is this to say that some children do not need to experience personal repentance or exercise personal saving faith in Christ? Hardly, for what child, old enough to exercise general volitional powers, has not wrongly exercised his volition morally? Even a small child, say four or five years old, knows something about personal guilt because of wrong moral choice. But it is true to say that some persons exercised positive volition in choosing Christ at such a young age, that they cannot, as adults, remember when they were not Christians!

My wife has a cousin who is a daughter of missionary parents and who has been herself a long-time missionary in Africa. She never remembers when she was not a Christian.

There are children whose first exercise of meaningful volition was in their acceptance of Christ as Saviour, perhaps as early as the age of three!

The streams of God's mercy early flowed in and fertilized their soul! These young children who enjoyed the saving benefits of Christ's atonement when they were incapable of refusing it, gladly received the saving benefits of the atonement when they were first barely able to exercise personal saving faith in Jesus Christ! Said Jesus, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14 NIV)

"Thank you, O God, for the revelation of your positive saving purpose for the human race! Thank you for the unlimited atonement of Christ, potentially sufficient for all persons, generally operative for all infants, and individually efficient for those who exercise personal saving faith in Jesus Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will encourage the very young in my life to exercise their positive volition in choosing Christ!

EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE!

We can summarize the teachings, both explicit and implicit, of Romans 5:12. "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."

Sin came into the world through Adam's personal disobedience. Adam's original sin caused all mankind to inherit moral depravity. All are involved in mankind's moral ruin as a result of Adam's sin. However, while all are involved in the effects of original sin, none are originally guilty when born into the world. Original sin (or better stated, inherited depravity as a result of Adam's original sin) concerns itself with liability to penalty, not personal blameworthiness. None are personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity, but all are responsible for yielding to the pressure and influence of moral depravity. Outward sin can be resisted and inward sin can be purged. Every man inherits moral depravity, and most, if not all, yield to that downward moral tendency which disposes one to do wrong. When one yields to that tendency he becomes, not only by nature but by personal choice, a sinner.

Every man has given counsel to the presence of original sin (moral depravity) in his life, and has chosen willfully to disobey God, thus incurring personal guilt. E. Stanley Jones says that innate depravity "is the self surrendered to nothing except itself--the self become God." (Song of Ascents; pg. 52)

All men are thus personally responsible for willfully committing personal transgressions, for willfully allowing self to assert itself as god of one's life. Sin is seen as 'self' ruling life, rather than God ruling life. Man is responsible for yielding to the tendency towards self-rule.

All men are responsible for yielding to the downward pull of sin. (1) Adam disobeyed a direct command. ("And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" Genesis 2:16,17 NIV) (2) Those who lived between the time of Adam and Moses (before the Mosaic Law was given) disobeyed the dictates of conscience and were responsible for sin. (Romans 5:13,14) (3) Those who lived after Moses disobeyed the commandments of the Mosaic Law, incurring guilt and condemnation (Romans 5:20). Everyone is responsible.

"O God, I accept my personal moral responsibility. I acknowledge that I have often yielded to the inward pressure towards self-rule. Help me now to yield to the upward presence of Christ's Rule!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Self-rule (dictatorship) leads to total chaos and moral ruin; God-rule (theocracy) leads to total peace and moral prosperity!

PUTTING 'SELF' AT THE CENTER OF ONE'S UNIVERSE

Every person is morally responsible before God. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

Adam disobeyed a direct command. God created Adam with a free will, and with the ability to love. Love is the property of free will. "For the thing that makes us uniquely human is that, unlike the other creatures, we are able to say both 'yes' and 'no' to God. The stars in the sky follow their prescribed orbits, the animals of the field obey their instincts, but man has this unique and frightening ability--he can refuse to be obedient to his creator. For God does not want slaves, but sons." (God's Unfolding Purpose; pg. 36; by Suzanne de Dietrich)

Love must be tested. God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:17).

Adam disobeyed a direct command and overstepped his God-imposed limitations. Adam took things into his own hands, and set himself up as a little god. Adam's sin was the sin of playing the part of God.

Adam's sin is the central sin of all humanity--the sin of making one's self into a god, placing self and selfish desire at the center of one's universe.

"The person who plays the part of God makes himself into the center of his universe, whether that universe be large or small; he seeks his own glory rather than the glory of the God, he wants to 'run his own life' instead of recognizing it as a gift from the hands of God. In briefest terms, he wants to be his own master rather than God's servant; he wants to dominate rather than to serve." (Ibid; pg. 38)

Notes Donald Joy, "Since our first parents' crime was treason--for the purpose of putting themselves up as their own masters--the infection shows up in us in much the same way. Its symptoms are violent independence, selfishness, self-assertiveness, pride--anything which puts oneself on the throne." (The Holy Spirit and You; pg. 84-84)

Notes Donald Demaray, "What do we mean when we say the nature of sin is pride? We mean that man commits no wrong which is not traceable to a pride; to put it another way, every sin man commits is the product of a desire to protect the ego or self. Murder, adultery, stealing, falsifying, and any and every sin that man has ever committed or ever will commit is the result of pride. It was so with Adam and Eve. It has been so with every man since that time." (Basic Beliefs; pg. 51)

"O God, I have often been guilty of the central sin of mankind--making myself into a 'god.' But what an inadequate 'god' I am! I am not made to rule; I am made to serve! Help me to dethrone 'self' and enthrone the Saviour as the Lord of my life!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I give the ashes of my pride to Christ, and He gives to me 'beauty for ashes'! (Isaiah 61:3)

LUSTS OF THE HEART BATTLE THE REASON OF THE MIND!

We have said that Adam disobeyed a direct command. Secondly, we can say that those who lived between the time of Adam and Moses (before the Mosaic Law was given) disobeyed the dictates of conscience and were responsible for sin. Romans 5:13,14 says, "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."

There was no written law to disobey before the time of Moses, and therefore sin as a transgression against law was impossible. However, even without law, there was the operation of moral depravity, issuing forth in rebellion against God's revelation through nature and through conscience. Mankind before the time of Moses was corrupt and subject to death.

The wickedness of mankind during the time of Noah was great indeed. Says Genesis 6:5, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

God's revelation of Himself through nature and through inner conscience was rejected. "But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, evil men who push away the truth from them. For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known of his existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse (when they stand before God at Judgement Day). Yes they knew about him all right, but they wouldn't admit it or worship him or even thank him for all his daily care." (Romans 1:18-21 Living Bible)

God justly condemned those who sinned against the light of truth, revealed through nature and through conscience. "All who have sinned without knowledge of the law will die without reference to the law; and all who have sinned knowing the law shall be judged according to the law." (Romans 2:12 Phillips)

It is still true that when there is a battle between the higher reason of the mind and the lower lusts of the heart, that oftentimes the lusts of the heart win the battle. "The heart of man is desperately wicked."

"The inner voice of conscience combines with the outer voice of nature to guide me to the face of God! I have too often silenced the voice of conscience and ignored the voice of nature. I am guilty of listening to the clamour of my sinful lower nature! Forgive me for closing my ears to the voice of conscience. I will henceforth listen to the 'still, small voice' and obey!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will respond to the enlightened reason of the mind and kill the dark passions of the heart!

## THE LAW DRIVES MANKIND INTO THE ARMS OF GOD'S MERCY

Thirdly, those who lived after Moses disobeyed the commandments of the Mosaic Law, incurring guilt and condemnation. Romans 5:20 says, "The Ten Commandments were given so that all could see the extent of their failure to obey God's laws." (Living Bible)

From the time of Cain until Moses, God revealed Himself to man through the wonders of nature and through the dictates of conscience. The law of God was written on man's heart and mind (Romans 2). However, man became expert in rationalizing sin, and man trained and conditioned his conscience to guide him as he wanted to be guided. "After awhile they began to think up silly ideas of what God was like and what he wanted them to do. The result was that their foolish minds became dark and confused . . . Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. . . . So it was that when they gave God up and would not even acknowledge him, God gave them up to doing everything their evil minds could think of." (Romans 1:21,22,25,28 Living Bible)

In the midst of moral chaos and mental disillusionment, God introduced the Mosaic Law--including the Ten Commandments. Why did God give the law? The law was given to define sin. The law amplified sin and showed the exceeding seriousness of sin. The law reveals the real nature of man's weakness. The law even prods the old nature of the unregenerate man to cause him to sin all the more. "Law intruded into this process to multiply law-breaking." (Romans 5:20 New English Bible) The law caused man to rebel and to do the very things which the law forbade him to do. The law condemns man and shows man his helplessness. The presence of the law gave man a chance to try to get to God by his own human good, thus finally driving man to despair and helplessness into the arms of God's mercy and grace. The law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. "Law came in, to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also must reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus our Lord." (Romans 5:20,21 RSV)

As a result of mankind giving council to the presence of innate corruption in his life, mankind has rebelled against God. As a result of man's sinful nature and sinful choices, mankind faces the penalty of sin which is death.

"O God, deliver me from my tendency to justify my behavior and to rationalize my sin! Thank you for your holy law which clearly defines and strongly magnifies my sins. Your holy law drives me into your strong arms of mercy! I am helpless in myself but hopeful in You!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The law is the great magnifying lens of sin; the Lord is the great purging flame of sin. I choose the Flame!

BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF 'DEATH'

Romans 5:12 tells us that death reigns over mankind. "When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout the entire world, so everything began to grow old and die, for all sinned." (Living Bible)

All have been born in sin. All have willfully sinned. The penalty of sin is death. Therefore, all men face sin's penalty which is death.

'Death' according to the Bible, is threefold. There is physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death.

The universal consequence of sin's entry into the world is physical death. When Adam fell, all of mankind fell--fell from health to weakness, fell from life to death. Saints and sinners alike must experience the corruption of physical death. Man is born to die. Sin brought death into the world. Never blame God for funerals!

Another consequence of sin's entry into the world is spiritual death. Many are alive physically, but dead spiritually. Says Ephesians 2:1,2: "You were spiritually dead through your sins and failures, all the time that you followed this world's ideas of living, and obeyed the evil ruler of the spiritual realm--who is indeed fully operative today in those who disobey God." (Phillips)

The final and terrible consequence of sin's entry into the world is eternal death. Eternal death is sin's final punishment, experienced by those who persistently and ultimately resist the offer of God's mercy and forgiveness. "And death and hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death--the Lake of Fire. And if anyone's name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire." (Revelation 20:14,15 Living Bible) It is not God's will that any perish. God's perfect will is that all be saved. But God's permissive will allows a man to spurn the mercy of God, and be eternally lost. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Hell was not prepared for man, but was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels (demons). God never intended for a human being to suffer in hell, but the man who serves Satan must suffer Satan's fate. The servant must dwell with his master. God wishes to save all men from that terrible place of destruction and torment. God never sends anyone to hell; a sinner sends himself there by willful refusal of the offer of mercy.

Have you responded to God's offer of mercy and forgiveness? Are you willing to surrender control of your life to Christ?

"O God, it is not your will that I perish. You prepared hell for the devil and his demons, not for me! I am made by you and for you. I am made for heaven! But only the holy ones will go to heaven! Make my life holy! I am a candidate for your grace--the grace that transforms sinners into saints!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whosoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' I DO! I DO!

## A TOTAL LOSS AND A TOTAL GAIN!

In seeking to understand the meaning of God's creation of man and the tragedy of man's fall into sin, many questions come to mind. "Did God know that mankind would fall into sin, and if He did know, can it not be said that God predestined mankind's fall into sin?" To answer that question fairly, one must make a clear distinction between God's foreknowledge and God's predestination. God knew that mankind (in Adam) would choose wrongly, but God cannot be blamed for mankind's fall.

Romans 5 teaches us that mankind universally lost greatness through sin's great power (Romans 5:12-14). But Romans 5 also teaches that every person has the potential of regaining greatness through grace's greater power (Romans 5:15-21). Let us continue to look at Romans 5, in an attempt better to understand the meaning of the fall of man and the wonderful provision of God in restoring man.

Someone is heard to say: "If Adam had not sinned, we would not have all of these problems in the world." When Adam sinned, all mankind sinned. You and I were in Adam when he sinned. When he sinned, death came as a consequence to Adam. Because we were in Adam, we too (as an entire human race) received death as a consequence!

Perhaps you find yourself saying: "That's no fair! I cannot help it that Adam sinned! I should not be held responsible for Adam's sin!" But let me respond by asking a couple of questions: "Is it fair that you should get the beneficial results from Christ's righteousness? Is it fair that you should be treated so mercifully and kindly simply because God looks favorably upon Christ's righteousness?" You were not personally to blame because of Adam's transgression, even though you have to bear, along with Adam, sin's consequences, since you were in Adam from the beginning. That appears grossly unfair! However, is it just and fair that you should so abundantly enjoy the benefits of Christ's righteousness, which is life and peace, simply because you are in Christ, although your personal commission of sins should result in death for you? Although you involuntarily inherited original sin because you, by physical birth, are a descendant of Adam, you may voluntarily receive life and peace and justification through spiritual birth, by faith in Christ's righteousness. Being 'in' Adam means receiving Adam's lot--condemnation and death! Being 'in' Christ means receiving Christ's lot--righteousness and peace and eternal life and glory!

You personally had no choice in being a descendant of Adam and in automatically (at physical birth) becoming a member of a fallen race which is universally infected with sin and subject to death. You lost your greatness, due to your own indulgence in personal sins, but you may regain your greatness, due to Christ's atonement and due to your personal repentance and faith in Christ's atonement. You lost all 'in' Adam; you may regain all 'in' Christ!

"O God, what I lost by being a member of Adam's race, I thank you that I can more than gain by becoming a participant in Christ's atonement. Thank you for Christ's blood which cleanses from all sin--even inbred sin!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not allow my inherited state of sin to keep me from receiving my spiritual heritage in Christ!

THE FIRST 'ADAM' AND THE SECOND 'ADAM'

You had no choice as to your physical descent from the first 'Adam,' but you do have a choice as to your spiritual connection to the second 'Adam.' Some things were decided and determined for you before you were born, but in some things you make decisions--decisions so important that an eternal destiny is determined by your decisions!

It is true that you personally had no choice in being a descendant of Adam, but it is also true that you had no choice in being an object of God's special love and mercy! You had no choice in being a member of a human race for whom a universal atonement has been provided by Christ!

In some important things you do have a choice! You chose to succumb to personal transgression, admittedly made more appealing because of the pull of original sin within your heart. But just as you chose to sin, you may choose to yield to the pull of God's grace working within your heart and mind to bring you to a place of true repentance. You can choose to stay 'in' Adam or you can choose to get 'in' Christ. You can choose to remain in death or you can choose to receive new life in Christ!

It must be acknowledged, of course, that there is a difference between what you lost in Adam and what you regain in Christ. In Adam, the results of his sinful actions are automatic. Those who were born to Adam, automatically inherit the taint of his sin (original sin). The results of Adam's transgression to his descendants, are actual and universal, and come through biological heredity.

In Christ, the results of His righteous actions are not automatic. Human beings do not, without the exercise of their will, receive the righteousness of Christ as their own righteousness, whereas, human beings, without the exercise of their will and choice, automatically receive the taints of Adam's sin. In Christ, the benefits of His righteous actions to the human race are potentially universal. However, these benefits must be received individually, not by involuntary biological birth, but by voluntary spiritual rebirth. We did not personally choose to be 'in' Adam. We must personally choose to be 'in' Christ. It is by nature that we are related to the first 'Adam.' It is by grace that we are related to the second 'Adam,' the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mankind is universally and automatically lost through sin's great power. However, the sins of all mankind are universally atoned for through Christ, making possible the individual salvation of every person. Sin's power is great, but grace's power is greater!

"Help me, eternal God, to make right choices in life, that I may enjoy a right destiny in eternity!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am not free to choose my inherited sinful heredity from Adam, but I am free to choose my spiritual inheritance from Christ! I will exercise my positive volition!

GOD REDEEMED THE 'TERRIBLE' INTO THE 'TREMENDOUS'!

The fall of Adam (and the consequences of that fall upon all of humanity--sin, pain, etc.) provides the 'raw material' from which man and God, working together, produce holiness and happiness.

Let us examine this statement together during the next couple of days. Before doing so, however, let it be stated that we must never turn sin and rebellion into a virtue. Adam fell from God's originally-created state of grace. God did not will that fall, but in spite of that fall (and perhaps even through that fall) God has brought about great good to humanity. God did not will sin, but God has used sin (as represented in the fall) to provide good for humanity. God is the great redeemer, even producing good out of evil.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. The fall was terrible since it represents human rebellion in opposition to divine love. However, the cross is far greater than the fall is terrible, since the cross of Christ represents divine restoration of the chiefest of sinners. Man's lost greatness through sin's power is great, but man's restored greatness through grace's power is greater!

The evil resulting from the fall is not worthy to be compared with the good resulting from the free gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus. "God saw that to permit the fall of the first man was for best for mankind in general; that abundantly more good than evil would accrue to the posterity of Adam by his fall; that if 'sin abounded' thereby, over all the earth, yet grace 'would much more abound,' yea, and that to every individual of the human race, unless it was his own choice." (Wesley's Sermon, 'God's Love to Fallen Man'; pg. 43)

What good has accrued to the posterity of Adam, as a result of the fall? Without the fall there would have been no cross, and without the cross there would have been no opportunity for God to visibly demonstrate His eternal love in its greatest intensity! The fall caused all men to be constituted as sinners (for "in Adam all die"). It is because all men are in need of salvation that a Saviour was provided. Fallen humanity is capable of experiencing God's love in a way that not even the unfallen angels can experience God's love. The race of beings which have fallen to the lowest depths are capable of experiencing God's love at the highest heights! God redeemed the terrible--the fall--into the tremendous--experience of Calvary love! Without the terrible there could not be the tremendous!

"O God, your wisdom is past finding out! What was for humans the greatest tragedy--the fall into sin--has become for the divine the occasion for the greatest revelation--redeeming love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The rending of sin in the fall has become the rendering of salvation in the cross! Glory!

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE DARK 'FALL' OF MANKIND!

Yesterday we asked the question, "What good has accrued to the posterity of Adam, as a result of the fall?" We said in the last devotional that it was the fall that called forth the necessity of the cross of Christ, and in the cross the eternal heart of divine love is revealed to humanity! So God redeemed the terrible into the tremendous! Without the fall there could be no cross. Without sin 'abounding,' grace could not 'much more abound.'

We can also answer the above-stated question by saying that the whole experience of justification by faith and redemption in the blood of Christ could have had no existence, apart from the fall of man. Only because Adam and the sons of Adam fell from grace, does Adam's race have the need and the capacity to experience forgiving love in the Son of God. The highest heights of God's love (redeeming love; not merely creation love) can only be experienced by a race of beings who have fallen into the lowest depths of sin. The unfallen angels personally know nothing of God's redeeming love. It is only fallen man who can experience redeeming love!

Notes John Wesley, "The fall of Adam produced the death of Christ. . . If God had prevented the fall of man 'the Word' had never been 'made flesh'; nor had we ever 'seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.' Those mysteries never had been displayed, 'which the very angels desire to look into' . . . Unless 'by one man judgement had come upon all men to condemnation,' neither angels nor men could ever have known 'the unsearchable riches of Christ. . . According to the counsel of his own will,' the plan he had laid before the foundation of the world, he created the parent of all mankind in his own image; and he permitted all men to be made sinners, by the disobedience of this one man, that by the obedience of one, all who receive the free gift, may be infinitely holier and happier to all eternity!" (Wesley's Sermon, 'God's Love to Fallen Man'; pg. 48-49)

The immensity of man's sin is great, but the immensity of God's love is greater. When sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

You can be sure that if one stays connected with the Old Adam (with all that he represents by way of disobedience), he will experience both physical and eternal death. You can be 'much more' sure that if one gets connected and stays connected with the Last Adam, Christ, he will experience both abundant life here and eternal life hereafter!

"Only the pained can appreciate pleasure; only the hurting can appreciate healing; only the sinning can experience a Saviour; only the fallen can know redemption. Even though you, O God, did not will the fall of mankind, you graciously provided for the recovery of mankind! What a wise God!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As in the case of the historic fall, so in the history of my personal life: In the darkest night of my personal tragedy there is the brighter light of God's provision!

THE 'MUCH MORE' OF THE LAST ADAM - JESUS CHRIST!

If death is certain through Adam, how 'much more' certain is life through Christ! "If God's justice and his righteousness led to punishment, 'much more' will His love and grace and mercy lead to salvation." (Assurance, Exposition of Romans 5; by Martyn Lloyd-Jones; pg. 231)

"If we can say (as we can) that God's essential and eternal justice led to man's punishment and death, oh how infinitely more certain and sure can we be--and especially having seen it all displayed in a living manner in Christ--that His love is really going to do for us that which He has said He would do, namely, give us life." (Ibid; pg. 231)

There were great losses because of Adam's fall. There are greater blessings because of Christ's salvation!

What we all lost in Adam was great! What we all gain in Christ is much greater!

The condemnation which we earned as a result of our fall from grace is not as great as the fellowship we freely receive as a result of our salvation in Christ. Condemnation is something we have earned and deserved (because of our racial and personal involvement in sin). "Salvation is something which has been given to us and which we receive absolutely freely as the gift of God." (Ibid; pg. 233)

The process of death, as a result of Adam's sin, abounds, but the process of life, as a result of Christ's righteousness, much more abounds. The process of life and fruitfulness is greater than the process of death and disintegration!

If sin is a cruel tyrant whose reign is death, how much more is Christ a loving king whose reign is life and love! "Adam's one sin brought the penalty of death to many, while Christ freely takes away many sins and gives glorious life instead. The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to be king over all, but all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and acquittal are kings of life because of this one man, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:16,17 Living Bible) "Adam was made lord of creation but he lost that position. We shall not only have that back, we shall have infinitely more. We shall share a throne with the Son who shares the throne of thrones with His Father. That is the prospect awaiting us!" (Lloyd-Jones; Ibid; pg. 266)

What we lost in the first Adam, we more than gain in the second 'Adam'--Jesus Christ! Are you living in the first or the second Adam?

"O Christ, what I have lost because of my racial connection with Adam and because of my personal involvement in sin, I have now regained because of your universal atonement for sin and because of my personal appropriation of your forgiveness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's grace is lavish! I regain in Christ far more than I ever lost in Adam!

CHRIST'S BLOOD GOES DEEPER THAN THE STAIN OF SIN!

If we lost a righteousness in Adam's fall, we gain a much greater righteousness in Christ's salvation! The righteousness which was the property of creation, lost in the fall, is not as great as the righteousness which is the gift of recreation, gained in conversion. The righteousness which Adam enjoyed as a property of his unique creation, is not to be compared with the righteousness which the sinner receives as a gift of his glorious conversion! The righteousness of Adam may have been great, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater! Where sin abounded, in that it stole from Adam his original righteousness, grace does much more abound in that it imparts to Adam's fallen race the very righteousness of Christ (giving man right standing with God!).

How is that righteousness imparted to sinners? Apart from anything that a sinner can do. All a sinner can do is to accept by faith the free gift of Christ's righteousness. This righteousness is of grace--it all depends on God's love and Christ's obedience! "As we were constituted sinners because of Adam's one sin, and apart from any action on our part, so we are constituted righteous persons entirely apart from anything that we do. It is entirely and only because of Christ's obedience." (Assurance, Exposition of Romans 5; by Martyn Lloyd-Jones; pg. 276)

"The burden of the New Testament is not sin-fixation but a Christ-fixation. Its emphasis is not the incurable persistence of sin, but the illimitable triumph of Calvary! Not sin reigns, but grace reigns! The final words are not 'sin' and 'defeat,' but 'grace' and victory."

'Dark the sin that soiled man's nature,  
 Long the distance that he fell,  
 Far removed from hope and heaven,  
 Near to deep despair and hell.  
 But there was a fountain opened,  
 And the blood of God's own Son  
 Purifies the soul, and reaches  
 Deeper than the stain had gone.'

(Insights into Holiness; compiled by  
 Kenneth Geiger; pg. 72)

"The principle taught, then, (in Romans 5) is that what grace has done is not merely to counteract exactly what sin has done. . . . In fact there is not comparison; it is superfluity, an abounding, an engulfing, it is an overflowing on the side of grace." (Ibid; Lloyd-Jones; pg. 299)

"O God, I openly confess that all my own righteousness is like 'filthy rags' in your sight (Isaiah 64:6), for my righteousness is tainted by human pride. The taint of pride is deep. Wash me thoroughly with your blood and clothe me beautifully with the garments of Christ's righteousness! I believe! I believe!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "The cleansing stream, I see, I see! I plunge, and oh! it cleanseth me, it cleanseth me!"

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'REGAINING MAN'S LOST GREATNESS'

1. Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Carl Jung's statement: "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness." Why or why not?
2. What is the meaning of 'original sin'? Note Romans 5:12.
3. Share, from your personal observations and experiences, some practical manifestations of 'original sin.'
4. Does man sin because he is a sinner, or is man a sinner because he sins?
5. Is there such a thing as 'original guilt'? Why or why not?
6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "While one is not personally responsible for inheriting moral depravity from Adam, one is responsible for not availing himself of cleansing from moral depravity, made possible through Christ's atonement."
7. What four factors must be existent in order for 'actual sin' to be committed? In light of these four factors, is it reasonable and scriptural to say that infants are guilty, and condemned, and lost?
8. In light of the fact that all infants are born with a sin nature (which is caused by Adam's original sin), on what basis are infants saved if they should die in infancy?
9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Unless or until a small child actively resists the grace of God when he is capable of personal moral choice, that child continues to enjoy the saving benefits of Christ's atonement."
10. What is the essence of all sin, as seen in the actions and attitudes of Adam and as seen in the actions and attitudes of all of Adam's fallen race?
11. Do you agree or disagree with Donald Demaray's statement: "Every sin man commits is the product of a desire to protect the ego or self." If you agree, then share some illustrations demonstrating the truth of this statement.
12. On what basis can it be said that mankind was guilty of sin, even before the giving of the Mosaic Law? (See Romans 5:13,14; Romans 1:18-21; Romans 2:12.)
13. What was the purpose of the Old Testament law, as it related to the salvation of mankind?
14. What is the threefold definition of 'death' according to the Bible?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'REGAINING MAN'S LOST GREATNESS' (Cont.)

15. What did you, as a member of the human race, involuntarily inherit from Adam, and what are you, as an object of God's special love, capable of voluntarily receiving from Christ?
16. What has been provided for every human being, as a result of the death of Christ on the cross?
17. What is meant by the expressions: 'The first Adam and the second Adam'?
18. What good has accrued to the posterity of Adam as a result of the fall?
19. What realities can we be sure of because of our natural relationship to Adam; what realities can we be even more certain about because of our supernatural relationship to Christ?
20. Describe the righteousness which the believer enjoys, both in terms of its source and in terms of the method by which it is received.
21. What is the main thrust of the teaching of the New Testament in regards to sin and to grace?



## Chapter 6

### WHY BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST?

## NO MAN LIKE THIS MAN!

Many who have testified of a personal experience of God have spoken of 'God' in terms of Jesus. Those who seem to 'know' God best are those who speak most often of Jesus. Christians claim that the greatest fact of Reality is this: What Jesus was as a human, God has always been eternally! Doubtless the eternal God is more than the human Jesus, but God is no less than Jesus! Christians claim that Jesus was God in human form! Jesus gives God a face! When one sees Jesus, he sees God! These are startling claims!

Testifies E. Stanley Jones: "In the Congo when those in charge were about to pull up the idol from the idol-pit, the people fell back terror-stricken. They cried: 'If we look on the face of "our father," we will die.'" "But," continues Jones, "as we look on the face of 'Our Father' in the person of Jesus, then we do not die, but live! We see God not terrible but tender, not forbidding but forgiving. We see in Jesus God as He is--really is! . . . God is like Jesus in character. Transfer every characteristic of character from Jesus to God, and you do not lower your estimate of God--you heighten it . . . Jesus is God simplified, God approachable, God understandable, God lovable." (Word Became Flesh; E. Stanley Jones; pg. 24, 37)

"There is a picture of a face of Jesus surrounded by dark clouds. Apart from Jesus there are dark clouds of mystery surrounding God. But in the midst of these clouds I see that one dear Face. We smile at the boy who when asked by his mother what he was doing replied: 'I'm drawing a picture of God.' 'But no one knows what God is like,' said the mother. 'They will when I get finished,' said the boy with finality. All attempts to tell or draw what God is like are childish. Except one--Jesus!" (Ibid; pg. 48)

Why believe in Jesus Christ? Because Jesus is believable! Jesus is believable because His unique claims were backed by His unique life and teachings, and ultimately by His victory over death!

Why believe in Jesus? For at least five reasons. Using a series of rhyming words, it can be said: (1) No man ever sought like this man. (2) No man ever taught like this man. (3) No man ever wrought like this man. (4) No man ever fought like this man. (5) No man ever caught like this man. We must look at Jesus' life in view of these five wonderful facts.

"God, because You are infinite and I am finite, I need a visible, approachable God! I need a forgiving God, not a forbidding God! I need a tender God, not a terrible God! I need a God who has lived with mankind and who understands mankind! If Jesus is God, I need Him! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus' claims are unique! If they are true, He is the greatest personality in History! I will honestly examine His claims!

THE INITIATING LOVE OF GOD!

First, no man ever sought like this Man. Who could ever imagine that God, in human flesh, would actually take the initiative to seek out sinful man! No other religion besides Christianity teaches that God, through Christ, actually stepped down to rescue lost mankind! "I have sought thy nearness, with all my heart I called thee, and going out to meet thee, I found thee coming toward me." (Springs of Devotion; pg. 13) Draw near to God, and He draws nearer to you!

But Jesus' seeking love seeks even those who are running from God! This initiating love of God is movingly portrayed in Francis Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven.'

"I fled Him down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat - and a Voice beat  
More instant than the feet -  
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

And then there comes the time when the fugitive was beaten.

"Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!  
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,  
And smitten to my knee,  
I am defenseless utterly."

And then there comes the end:

"Halts me by that footfall;  
Is my gloom, after all,  
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He Whom thou seekest!  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me!'"

(Quoted by Barclay in Romans;  
Daily Study Bible; pg. 165-166)

Jesus is like the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes into the wilderness to go after the one sheep which is lost, until He finds it (Luke 15:4).

"O, thou 'Hound of Heaven,' you loved me when I was loveless; You sought me when I was lost; You cared for me when I was indifferent; You pursued me when I was running away from Life. Thank you for hounding me with such Love! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Religion is the record of Man's proud attempts to reach God; Christianity is the story of God's loving pursuit of sinful Man!

## THE MASTER TEACHER

Second, no man ever taught like this Man. Jesus was a Master Teacher. Jesus adapted His teaching to His audience. He was direct, simple, and forceful in His teaching. Step by step He introduced truth in the most interesting way. The crowds followed Him to hear Him. He masterfully used illustrations and parables. He allowed men to think for themselves. He stimulated thinking rather than offering pat answers.

He taught openly. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret." (John 18:20)

Jesus taught authoritatively. "The people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matthew 7:28,29) No second-hand pronouncements of tradition, or quotations from ancient Rabbis, but rather firsthand declarations of the bedrock facts of Reality! Jesus came straight from God and He spoke directly about God. Who better knew about God than He who had dwelt eternally with God!

Jesus' teaching was authoritative because of its source. Said Jesus, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father taught me." (John 8:28) "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." (John 7:16)

Jesus taught uniquely. Jesus taught that He Himself had brought the Kingdom of God (the Rule of God) to a present reality! "The Kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:21)

Jesus taught compassionately. At the heart of Jesus' teaching was the flame of holy love. Jesus was moved with compassion as He looked at the multitudes who were wandering as sheep with no shepherd.

No man ever taught like Jesus, for Jesus taught His followers to call God 'Father.' Because of commitment to Jesus as Saviour, Jesus' followers had the right--a daring thing--to address God, using the tender and intimate title of 'Father,' the very word which Jewish children used to address their human fathers!

Jesus taught by example. Jesus' teaching was not speculation or theory or abstract principles. His teaching was practical, experiential, concrete! He practiced what he preached!

"God, dare I call you 'Father'? I see you in the stars and feel your power in the wind. I know you are Mighty Power, but are you Fatherly Love? If Jesus is God, then my question becomes exclamation!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** If Jesus is God, then everything Jesus taught about God is true! Glory!

THE AMAZING MIRACLE WORKER!

Jesus' uniqueness is becoming increasingly apparent. No man ever sought like this man. No man ever taught like this man. Thirdly, no man ever wrought like this man.

The miracles which Jesus performed were not merely acts of compassion, as important as compassion was to Jesus, but primarily they were demonstrations and signs of Jesus' Kingdom power. Both Jesus' Words (parables) and Jesus' Works (miracles) must be seen as complementary ways in which Jesus communicated the present reality of the Kingdom. The miracles were further proof of the Kingdom's inauguration.

Notes A. M. Hunter: "The miracles are tokens of the coming of God's Reign in Jesus. They are the Kingdom of God in action--God's sovereign grace and forgiveness operative in Christ. 'If I by the finger of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.' The miracles are signs, after all, but only signs for those whose spiritual insight enables them to discern the sovereign saving activity of God in Jesus. . . . Jesus regarded not only His 'teaching with authority' but also His 'mighty works' as wrought by the Spirit of God through Him. His 'powers' are manifestations of the Supreme Power. His signs are the creative works of the Spirit operating through Him to save sick and sinful men and women. 'The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.'" (The Work and Words of Jesus; A. M. Hunter; pg. 59)

The miraculous nature of Jesus' works is altogether 'reasonable' if Jesus is God in human form! As one writer so ably said: "If the universe is dominated by a Spirit, miracles are possible; if by a Spirit that is Love, probable; and if that Spirit becomes incarnate, this miracle would make further ones very probable."

The miracles which Jesus wrought were dramatic signs--acted out parables--to demonstrate that Jesus had come to spearhead an attack against the powers of sin, sickness, and Satan. Said Jesus, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils." (Luke 11:21,22 NIV) Jesus' miracles are foretastes of the kind of power that will be exercised by God for the purpose of totally and eventually destroying the kingdom of evil. Jesus is the 'strong man, fully armed, who attacks and overpowers' Satan. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil. The miracles are God's power in action!

"God, the work of Jesus is becoming focused in my understanding. I see that Jesus came to destroy evil and to impart good--to save helpless creatures like me from the harmful works of the Enemy! Thank you for your manifest Power! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If Jesus is God, then He should do the works of God--destroying the works of Satan!

THE DAY DEATH DIED!

If it is true that no man ever sought like this man, that no man ever taught like this man, that no man ever wrought like this man, it is also true that no man ever fought like this man. Jesus fought and won against Satan! Said Calvin, "There is no tribunal so magnificent, no chariot so elevated, as is the gibbet on which Christ has subdued death and the devil, and trodden them under His feet."

The Death of Jesus on the Cross was altogether unique. The greatest of all paradoxes is this: Through the means of death, death was forever destroyed! The day Jesus died was the day death died!

"Through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14,15)

Jesus' parables were parables of the Kingdom. Jesus' miracles were demonstrations and signs of Jesus' Kingdom power. Jesus' death was a redemptive death--the necessary means by which God was given opportunity to demonstrate Jesus' power over death. Jesus' death was a substitutionary death for the guilty sinner. Jesus paid the penalty for sin. Therefore, he who puts his trust in the Christ who paid the penalty for sin, puts his trust in one who proved to be more powerful than death! For Jesus arose from the dead!

The death and resurrection of Jesus are inseparably connected. They are the means by which God irrevocably defeated the powers of darkness! The death of Christ became the death warrant of Satan! Satan overstepped himself when he crucified the Lord of Glory! For Satan crucified one in whom the very power of God was resident! Jesus' power was so great that not even death could silence Him. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (I John 3:8)

'Death cannot keep his prey,  
Jesus, my Saviour!  
He tore the bars away,  
Jesus, my Lord!

'Up from the grave he arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
And he lives forever with his saints to reign;  
Hallelujah! Christ arose!'

"God, your ways are amazing! I would never have dreamed that you would destroy death by dying, and that you would give healing through suffering! Thank you for your death and resurrection! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus died, I may live! Jesus' darkest day makes possible my brightest day--victory over sin, death, and hell!

THE GREATEST CATCHER OF MEN'S HEARTS!

Jesus sought, Jesus taught, Jesus wrought, Jesus fought. Because of the Incarnation and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God was able to establish His Church. No man ever caught like Jesus Christ!

The Rule of God assumes the Realm of God. Subjects in the Realm of God's victorious Kingdom compose the true Church of God. God is forever reconciled to Mankind through the Cross and Resurrection, and God is progressively realizing His purpose of reconciliation in each sinner's life.

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

Does Man's rejection of God's call affect the validity of the Kingdom of God? Does Man's rejection destroy the Kingdom? Indeed not! "God's Reign exists, however men respond. It claims the obedience of men truly; but it is there before the claims are made, and it is still there if men reject them." (Introduction to New Testament Theology; A. M. Hunter; pg. 26)

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

Kenneth Scott Latourette, popular historian, notes that Christianity is today more widely distributed geographically and more deeply rooted among more people than it or any other faith has ever been. He observes that during the past four hundred and fifty years and especially in the last century and a half, Christianity has been more influential in the life of the human race than at any previous time. ('A History of Christianity'; Preface XV, XVII)

The Church of Jesus Christ has grown in spite of almost every conceivable obstacle. Jesus is the Universal Christ who attracts peoples of all ages, all cultures, all backgrounds. Jesus' winsome spirit catches men. He is almost irresistible!

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

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Though millions have come to Christ, there is still room for me!

THE ANSWER TO MAN'S DREAMS!

In the last devotional the popular historian, Kenneth Latourette, stated that "Christianity (during the last century and a half) has been more influential in the life of the human race than at any previous time."

There is abundant evidence that Jesus is God! If Jesus were not God, could He have influenced so many so much, throughout all of history?

Through prophetic inspiration, Isaiah wrote, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Who other than Jesus Christ could fit this description? The uniqueness of Jesus is even found in His genealogy, as recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In tracing Jesus' genealogy back to King David, Jesus is presented as the long-looked-for Messiah, the Deliverer of Israel, the 'Anointed One' from Heaven. Jesus is seen as the answer to Man's dreams!

David's kingdom was glorious and powerful. During Israel's days of decline, the Jews longed for a kingdom like unto David's to be restored to Israel. Eventually this hope of kingdom restoration was transferred into a spiritual hope. The Messianic expectation borrowed the language of kingdom glory, a glory like unto the glory of David's kingdom, excepting that the glory of the Messianic kingdom would be much greater. Therefore it was natural that Mary should hear the angel announce Jesus' coming in the language of kingdom glory: "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:31-33)

The kingdoms of earth rise and fall; Christ's kingdom abides the same forever! Christ is the only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords! (I Timothy 6:15) One writer described Jesus' influence in this way: "Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever have sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth."

"God, I am a part of the universal longing of Mankind. I too long for a Great Deliverer, a Wonderful Counsellor, a Prince of Peace, an 'Anointed One' from Heaven! If Jesus is all this, then I want Him to be the Lord of my life! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who is the 'Son of the Highest' will have highest place in my life!

## THE 'PERSONALISM' OF JESUS

The genealogy of Jesus, mentioned in yesterday's devotional, significantly reveals something about the nature of God! Can a long list of hard-to-pronounce names be significant or interesting? Dr. Paul Tournier, famous Christian counsellor, believes so! He says, "When I was young I used to think that they (the long genealogies) could well have been dropped from the Biblical Canon. But I have since realized that these series of proper names bear witness to the fact that, in the Biblical perspective, man is neither a thing nor an abstraction, neither a species nor an idea, that he is not a fraction of the mass, as the Marxists see him, but that he is a person." (quoted by William Barclay in Daily Study Bible; Hebrews; page 61)

The genealogy of Jesus helps us to realize the importance of the individual from the Biblical perspective. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was always concerned with individuals. It is true that He was moved with compassion on the multitudes, but His compassion went beyond the multitudes to the lonely individuals. He saw each person as unique and worthy of His personal attention. Even in the midst of the crowds, He took time for the individuals. Surrounded by a crowd, Jesus healed the woman who had been sick for twelve years with an incurable disease. As the crowds thronged Him, Jesus spotted the curious Zacchaeus, and he became the object of Jesus' special attention and love within the privacy of Zacchaeus' home. The healing of the blind man near Jericho vividly shows Christ's personal compassion. "And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging; and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him, that he should be brought unto him." (Luke 18:35-40)

There is no problem too small but what Jesus is interested in it! Jesus' heart is touched with your personal grief. He cares when your nights are long and when your days are fraught with care. He cares for each person and desires to fold each to His loving bosom. It is important to know that Jesus cares for individuals, and the genealogy of Jesus helps us to realize the 'personalism' of Jesus.

"God, I thank you that I am not 'lost in the crowd,' but that I am an object of your special love! You are so powerful that you can rule the vast universe, and yet so personal that you care for me personally! Thank you for Jesus who has shown me your 'personalism'! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If God, through Christ, is so personable, I will never be satisfied until I know God personally!

SYMBOLIC MEANING OF JESUS' GENEALOGY

Each of the three sections in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17) symbolically represents one of the three stages in the history of mankind, and, indeed, in the history of every individual.

The first section of the genealogy which is from Abraham to David is the section which describes Israel's greatness. It represents the first stage in Man's history--the stage of man's greatness. Man, created in God's image, was made only for greatness and fellowship. Innocence, uprightness, strength, and obedience characterized Man's beginning. Man's body was strong, his mind superb, and his spirit was unblemished.

The second section of the genealogy is from Solomon to the Exile and portrays Israel's decline and decay. It represents the second stage of man's history--the Fall into sin. Even though man was born for greatness, man lost his greatness through self-will and rebellion against God's law. Alienated from God, Man started on a course of action that produced civilizations and cultures saturated with crime, lust, hate, greed, and war. As G. K. Chesterton once said of man: "Whatever else is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be." Man was made for communion, but is plagued by feelings of separation and rejection. Man was made to only enjoy peace, but hears constantly the clamour of disharmony. Man was made for love, but is too often a creature of hate. Man was made to be integrated, but is a bundle of frayed nerves. Man's innocence became blemished by guilt, and his capacity for nobility became shrivelled by self-centeredness.

The third section of the genealogy is from after the Exile to the Coming of Christ. Christ is the one by whom Israel could have regained her true greatness. This section represents the third stage of man's history--Redemption and Reconciliation. Notes William Barclay, "Man can regain his greatness." (Daily Study Bible; Matthew Vol. 1; pg. 4) Christ came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to rescue the perishing, to restore the downtrodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul. He came not to condemn, but instead to save (John 1:17). He came to "save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered life, to make a strong character out of a shallow life, to make a confident and radiant life out of a guilt-ridden life. Through Christ, mankind can come once again to know true greatness. Notes Barclay, "In his genealogy Matthew shows us the royalty of kingship gained; the tragedy of freedom lost; the glory of liberty restored. And that, in the mercy of God, is the story of mankind, and of each individual man." (Ibid; pg. 4)

"God, the history of mankind is the history of my personal life. I was born for greatness, but I have lost my greatness through my sin and rebellion. Allow me to regain my greatness through personal repentance and faith. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Rescuer of the Human Race came to rescue me! I, who am lost, will allow myself to be found!

ONE IN CHRIST JESUS!

The appearance of four names in Jesus' genealogy reveals something very significant, and foreshadows what was accomplished through Christ's ministry. What are the four names? Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. Ruth, the Moabitees. Tamar, an adulteress. Bathsheba, the woman whom David seduced and took deceitfully from Uriah. The appearance of these names in Jesus' genealogy symbolically declares that Jesus came to earth to destroy the man-made barriers!

First, there are no longer barriers between male and female. The appearance of women in Jesus' genealogy shows that God considers women important--so important that women are named in the ancestry of the Son of God! Jesus came to destroy all contemptible attitudes towards women. We see the tenderness of Jesus as He wept with Mary and Martha over the death of Lazarus. Jesus won the heart of the despised Samaritan woman. In restoring life to the son of the widow of Nain, we see the great love of Jesus for this woman.

Second, there are no longer barriers between saint and sinner. Great joy is experienced in heaven when only one sinner repents (Luke 15:7). Christ takes the despised woman of Samaria and makes her an honored messenger of love. Christ takes a demon-possessed outcast and makes him a respectable citizen. Christ takes a high-browed Pharisee and makes him a humble and faithful follower. Christ takes a doubting Thomas and makes him a flaming evangelist. Christ takes a thieving Onesimus and makes him a faithful servant. Christ takes an adulterous outcast and makes her a pure and respectable lady. Christ takes the dying thief and makes him a son of paradise. He takes the guilt-ridden publican and makes him a free and justified believer. Christ restores a wandering prodigal to the status of full sonship. Christ breaks the shackles of sin and sets the prisoner free! Christ seeks and finds the lost sheep. He restores the downtrodden! "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:17)

Third, there are no longer barriers between Jew and Gentile. Christ came to break down all racial barriers. All in Christ's genealogy were not Jews! Ruth was a Moabitees. Wrote Paul, about Christ's mission: "For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us." (Ephesians 2:14) We are one in Christ Jesus!

"God, I thank you that you love all indiscriminately--Jew and Gentile, male and female, saint and sinner. Teach me, like Jesus, to destroy the barriers that divide persons from one another. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus is the Universal Christ! I will seek to follow Christ, and be universal in my concern for all humanity!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON "WHY BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST?"

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "What Jesus was as a human, God has always been eternally!" (Why or why not?)
2. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God is like Jesus in character. Transfer every characteristic from Jesus to God, and you do not lower your estimate of God--you heighten it." (Why or why not?)
3. Give at least five reasons (as listed in the chapter) for believing that Jesus is God.
4. What makes Jesus' unique claims regarding his own deity believable?
5. In terms of 'initiating action,' what does the Christian Faith claim, that no other Faith claims?
6. What elements in Jesus' teaching made His teaching so unique?
7. What was the primary and the secondary significance of Jesus' miracles?
8. What great paradox in the Christian Faith is revealed in Hebrews 2:14,15?
9. What is meant by the expression: "Jesus' death was a substitutionary death"?
10. Why are the death and resurrection of Jesus inseparably connected, as these events relate to man's personal salvation?
11. What is meant by the phrase, "No man has ever Caught like Jesus Christ"?
12. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Most non-Christians who appear to be rejecting Jesus Christ are not really rejecting Christ; instead, they are rejecting caricatures of Jesus Christ." (Give reasons why you agree or disagree with this statement.)
13. Cite evidence from Scripture and from history that shows that Jesus was the long-looked-for Jewish Messiah.
14. What does the genealogy of Jesus teach us regarding the person of Jesus and the nature of His ministry?
15. What is the symbolic meaning of each of the three sections in the genealogy of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 1:1-17?
16. Discuss three barriers that Jesus came to destroy, as foreshadowed by the significant appearance of four names in Jesus' genealogy, as recorded in Matthew 1:1-17.

## Chapter 7

### THE IDENTIFICATION OF A PERSONAL GOD

THE GOD WITH A BEAUTIFUL FACE!

One little frightened girl in a dark room cried out to her mother to quickly come to her. The mother went to the dark room and reassured the daughter that God would take care of her. The little girl replied: "But God has no face!"

A small boy was gazing at a picture of his father who was away for several months. Exclaimed the boy: "I wish daddy would step out of that picture and be here in person with me just now!"

That is what God did! Christianity declares that God stepped out of His vast universe and became a real man with a real face. Jesus gave God a face! Jesus is the God with a beautiful face! Because Jesus is God, God is approachable, available, lovable!

One woman who was struggling to make a surrender to God was making little progress. The very thought of God terrified her! Finally a friend said, "If you were asked to make a surrender to Jesus, would that be difficult?" "Oh, no!" replied the woman. "Jesus is so beautiful. I could easily surrender!" She was told to surrender herself to Jesus. When you surrender to Jesus, you surrender to God! The beautiful face of Jesus is the very face of God! What Jesus was, God has always been!

John writes, "In the beginning was the Word." Jesus is called the 'Word' for, just as one's words express one's hidden thoughts, so Jesus communicates the hidden thoughts and plans of the Almighty God!

The writer of the book of Hebrews clearly states that Jesus, the Son, is the heir, agent, and preserver of the created universe! "But in the last of these days He has spoken to us in (the person of a) Son Whom He appointed Heir and lawful Owner of all things, also by and through Whom He created the worlds and the reaches of space and the ages of time--(that is) He made, produced, built, operated and arranged them in order. He is the sole expression of the glory of God--the Light-being, the outraying of the divine--and He is the perfect imprint and very image of (God's) nature, upholding and maintaining and guiding and propelling the universe by His mighty word of power." (Hebrews 1:2-3) (Amplified version) The beautiful creation is the product of the beautiful Son. A little girl who had lived all her life in a large city, was taken for a day in the country. When she saw the beautiful bluebells in the woods, she asked, "Do you think God would mind if I plucked some of His flowers?" (Daily Study Bible; Barclay; John Vol. 1; pg. 201)

"God, how can I longer be terrified by you when I behold your face in the face of Jesus Christ! Such beauty, such love, such acceptance! Surrendering to Jesus, I surrender to you! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My struggle shall turn to surrender, my terror to confidence, when I look upon the beautiful face of Jesus!

FULLY MAN - FULLY GOD

John declares that Jesus is not only the Eternal Word, but that Jesus is also the Incarnate Word. John proclaimed that "the true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1:9,14)

'Coming' denotes continuous action. Gradually the constant eternal light of God's truth was being revealed in many ways and at various times.

'True light' means that all other lights are only partial rays or reflections, imperfect, incomplete, transitory.

'Lights every man' means that no person is without some degree of light. The light of truth which came in various ways at various times in history (Hebrews 1:1-4) was culminated in Jesus Christ!

God created all things good, but man marred the perfect design of God. Through his willful disobedience, man plunged himself into the abyss of sin, corruption, and misery. Man became alienated from his creator. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5)

God looked down and viewed man's rebellion, moral depravity, confusion, and ignorance, and realized that He could only save mankind if He became a man! "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman." (Galatians 4:4)

Jesus was fully God! Paul declared, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9) Jesus' disciples who knew Him most intimately, declared Jesus as sinless. Peter wrote that Jesus "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." (I Peter 2:22) John declared that "in him is no sin." (I John 3:5) Jesus stood the test of the critical Jewish eye, and was declared as uniquely sinless!

Jesus was fully Man! Paul wrote that Jesus "took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man." (Philippians 2:7) The writer of the Hebrews vividly described the fact of Jesus' humanity. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same; . . . For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham . . . that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." (See Hebrews 2:14-18.)

"Because Jesus was fully human, He identifies completely with the human race. Because Jesus was truly God, He provides a perfect sacrifice for the human race. Thank you, God, for giving the world the Perfect God-Man. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The lesser lights will lead me to the greatest Light. I will follow on until I find the 'Light of the World.'

JESUS IS NOT A PUT-UP JOB

Notes J. B. Phillips, "Now once you honestly reach this conclusion that Christ was God--God revealed as fully as is possible, in a human being--you certainly don't know all the answers, but you have a remarkable amount of light to live by. For one thing, it revolutionizes your conception of the character of God. You don't see him any longer as a remote and terrifying being insulated from human life. You see him as God who so loved Man that he became Man. It was not a put-up job. He did it properly, without supernatural advantages, and he lived and died in the sweat and pain of human life. This is not one of those pagan legends about one of the gods disguised as a human being: this is the real thing. And once you see what God really was and did and suffered, you begin to see what kind of a person he is, and you have a powerful clue to his long and patient purpose." (Good News; J. B. Phillips; pg. 72, 73)

The story is told of a naturalist who viewed a procession of ants carrying pebbles to build an ant hill. To the naturalist, the ants seemed to be moving to and fro in confusion, with little organization. With keen interest the observer watched and wished that he could communicate to the ants a more organized method to carry their heavy pebbles. Wishing that he could alleviate them of the confusion, the naturalist suddenly realized that he could communicate to the ants only if he himself would become an ant.

The naturalist who viewed the ants wished only to become an ant in order to help them. Christ only became a man in order to release man from his bondage of sin. But Christ "came to his own home, and his own people received him not." (John 1:11)

Why does man reject the Son of God? John well knew the reason when he wrote, "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." (John 3:19-20)

God's light must be experienced as self-surrender before it can be experienced as self-fulfillment. Wrong concepts and attitudes must be surrendered if we are to experience the Light of God as self-fulfillment. Jesus calls us, as He called the Jews of His day, to surrender (a) false Messianic conceptions, (b) legalistic systems of self-salvation, (c) nationalistic pride.

"Jesus, I am beginning to realize that you are 'the real thing.' You are not a god simply disguised as a human being, but you are truly human and yet truly God! You revolutionize my concept of God, for you are God fully revealed in human form. What a mystery, and yet, what a revelation! Amen."

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Self-surrender will lead me to self-fulfillment; walking in the light of truth will lead me to the Light of the world!

GOD'S LIGHT CAN SOOTHE OR SEAR!

The Jews of Jesus' day needed to surrender certain things if they were to experience God's Light as self-fulfillment. And so must we.

First, false Messianic conceptions need to be surrendered. The Jews' physicalistic concept of the Messiah caused them to believe that God would always save them and always destroy their enemies. People still try to use God for selfish reasons. Some expect God to protect them and make them happy and prosperous, regardless of their lack of repentance, confession, restitution, discipleship, or involvement in human suffering. We must realize, even though the Jews failed to realize, that God's first concern is our holiness, and only secondarily our happiness and material prosperity.

Second, legalistic systems of self-salvation must be surrendered. The Jews believed that moral justification could be found through outward observance of written law. They failed to understand the law's purpose (to define sin; to magnify sin; to humble man and to drive him to Christ). Law was not given to save man but to show man that salvation can be found only in Christ. Their wrong conception of law led to hypocrisy and shallowness in spiritual understanding. Attempts at self-salvation led to religious pride. Religious evasion became an accomplished art. External respectability was used to cover up internal heart corruption. Modern man also often prides himself in law-keeping or in religious observances, rituals, moralism, ethics, and philosophy. Some seek to balance their moral account with God by good deeds. But, breaking one of the commandments makes one as guilty as the man who has broken many of the commandments (James 2:10). The Light of God can only be known as self-fulfillment through surrender of pride and moral self-sufficiency.

Third, nationalistic pride must be surrendered. The Jews believed that God was unconditionally 'married' to Israel--to protect her, to prosper her. Israel believed all other people to be inferior, objects of God's judgment. Thus, Israel believed her salvation to be automatically guaranteed by virtue of racial descent from Abraham. Some modern Americans assume, sometimes subconsciously, that God favors America and that God is unconditionally obligated to advance America's interests, regardless of personal repentance and faith. Only when we realize that God's covenants are conditional, and then humble ourselves in repentance, can we know the Light of God as self-fulfillment. God's light can soothe or sear, save or condemn, depending upon man's response to it.

"God, give me courage to surrender my wrong concepts to you in order that I may receive your Truth. I confess that often I have tried to earn salvation through mere human effort or moral performance. I reject the false and accept the True! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God's Light will heal me, not hurt me; save me, not condemn me; soothe me, not sear me!

"HE HATH VISITED AND REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE"

The Bible says, "He (God) hath visited and redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68) Says E. Stanley Jones: "The only way to redeem His people was to visit them. He couldn't sit on a cloud and utter commands or pick us up and take us to heaven with celestial tongs, not soiling His fingers with the messy business of human living. No, He dwelt among us--amid our poverty, amid our temptations, amid our problems and choices, amid our oppositions and disappointments. He lived among us and showed us how to live by living." (Word Became Flesh; pg. 34)

God, in the person of Jesus, knew what it was to pass through childhood, adolescence, and manhood--with all of the temptations unique to each stage. Jesus, like us, felt the pull of materialism, the pull to popularity at any cost, the pull to accomplish the right ends with the wrong means. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus understood what poverty was all about. After Jesus had entered into His public ministry, on one occasion He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

Jesus understood the challenge of involvement with people, for he worked with all sorts of people--religious and profane, literate and illiterate, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, Jew and Gentile, urban and rural. He understood the complexities of human relationships and the subtleties of human nature.

Jesus understood what it was to be misunderstood, rejected, and despised, and he also knew what it was to be hailed, praised, and followed. Jesus knew abounding times and abasing times, prosperity and poverty, apparent success and apparent failure, companionship and loneliness, joy and sorrow, acceptance and rejection. Through all the changes and chances, due to the ebb and flow of life, Jesus learned to be master of circumstances. As we would say today, Jesus learned to cope with life, to cope with the challenges and the responsibilities of life. Jesus' life demonstrates God's total identification and involvement with man's daily changing experiences.

Jesus even identified with man's sins. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (I Peter 2:24)

"Jesus, you hit rock bottom in your identification with mankind when you went to the Cross for my sins! No one but God could demonstrate such love!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** In His total identification with mankind, Jesus gave Himself totally for my redemption. Nothing less than the total giving of my Self to God is worthy of God's infinite love for me.

## A MAN OF SORROWS

Most scholars believe that the description of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 is a description of Jesus Christ.

The sorrows and sufferings of life are many and varied, but Jesus' life shows us that God is involved in all of them. Wrote Kagawa, the great Japanese missionary: "God dwells among the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. He stands with the juvenile delinquents. He is there with the beggars. He is among the sick. He stands with the unemployed. Therefore let him who would meet God visit the prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to Church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads his Bible let him help the beggar." There is never a sorrow that He doth not share, nor a woe that He does not feel. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Picture Jesus as He makes His way into the desert to contemplate, following the beheading of His cousin John. Follow Him to the graveside of His dear friend Lazarus, and listen to His deep moans and sobbing in the midst of Lazarus' broken-hearted sisters, Mary and Martha. Go with Jesus to the Mount that overlooks Jerusalem; and witness Jesus' tear-soaked cheeks as he cries out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto the desolate." (Matthew 23:37,38)

"The poor mother of Nain, crying as if her heart would break as she stumbled after the pathetic little procession going out to bury her only son--Christ could not bear it! The leper, the innocent, once gay young life struck down by that slow, dreadful living death--Christ could not bear it. 'I will, be thou clean.' The great mass of attractive, lovable men and women caught in the toils of sins that spoilt their lives, and temptations they could not break, and wild regrets that were a misery--Christ could not bear it. And so He died to free them. And so we can say today, in those most moving words of our hymn, 'Jesus, Thou art all compassion.'

'Jesus, Thou art all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;  
Visit us with Thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.'

But the greatest thing of all is this, that when you see this compassionate Christ, you are seeing God." (The Gates of New Life; Stewart; pg. 197)

"Do you care, God, when my days are weary and my nights are dreary, when my heart nearly breaks with sorrow? O yes, I know you care, for I see Jesus moving among suffering humanity, applying His touch of healing. Let Jesus touch me! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus was acquainted with grief, I will not detach myself from grieving persons.

OUT OF THE IVORY PALACES

"Many years ago, when the Duke of Windsor was the Prince of Wales, he one day left Buckingham Palace, journeyed west into the coal mining country, put on a miner's cap, and went down into the dingy tunnels to see for himself the conditions in which men toiled in a difficult and dangerous branch of British industry. As a member of the royal family he was as much a prince in the coal mine as he was when he lived in the palace in London. But, while his essential equality with royalty was unchanged, there was no longer an equality of experience. He had consented to enter into experiences that never came to him amid the elegances and immunities of the palace." (Proclaiming the New Testament; Paul Rees; pg. 44)

Jesus was still the royal Son of God while he dwelt on earth, but Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to accept the pooriness of humanity. As II Corinthians 8:9 points out, the costliness of the Incarnation is seen in three facts: (1) how rich Jesus was, (2) how poor He became, and (3) how wealthy he made us.

Jesus came out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe--all because of His great love for a fallen race of people! He who was invested with the full powers of divinity, He who was co-equal with the Father and the Spirit--this powerful, eternal Christ became a lowly human!

Says Bishop Sheen: "In the filthiest place in the world, purity was born. He who later was to be slaughtered by men, acting as beasts, was born among beasts. He who would call himself the living bread, descended from heaven, was laid in a manger, literally a place to eat. . . . There was no room in the inn, but there was room in the stable. . . . The stable was the last place that the world would have looked for Him. Divinity is always where one least expects to find it. No worldly mind would have suspected that He who makes the sun warm the earth, would one day have need of an ox and an ass to warm him with their breath. That he, who, in the language of the Scriptures, could stop the turning about of our tourists, would have his birth place dictated by an imperial census. That he who clothed the fields with grass, would himself be naked. That he, from whose hands came planets and worlds, would one day have tiny arms that would not be long enough to touch the heads of the cattle. That the feet that trod the everlasting hills, would be too weak to walk. That the Eternal Word would be dumb. That omnipotence would be wrapped in swaddling clothes. That salvation would lie in a manger. That the bird which built the nest, would be hatched therein. No one would have ever suspected that God coming to this earth would be so helpless. And that is precisely why so many miss him."

"Jesus, your very name means 'Love' to me! Love can go down. You went down into the very pits of sin to rescue sinners! You left the glories of heaven to experience the miseries of earth! All because You loved a sinner like me!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus humbled Himself to serve all; I will surrender myself to serve Him!

## HE IS NEARER THAN YOU THINK!

The Incarnation teaches us that God, far from being detached and disinterested in man, is instead the God who has taken the initiative in seeking and saving mankind! There is a story of a woman who was trying to find God. "She had a certain dream which she dreamed more than once, namely, that she was standing in front of a thick, plate glass window. As she looked at it, she seemed to see God on the other side. She hammered on the window, trying to attract His attention, but without success. She grew more and more desperate, and began to call to Him and found herself shrieking at the top of her voice. And then a quiet, calm voice at her side said: 'Why are you making so much noise? There is nothing between us.' Perhaps that illustrates our difficulty, does it not? We have been thinking all along that God was somewhere far away, unapproachable . . . some place that was difficult of access . . . and we have been groping around for a long time, and all the while He is standing beside us." (Mr. Jones, Meet the Master; Peter Marshall; pg. 131)

It is a great thing to know that God loves the human race--corporately yes, but more amazingly, individually. Paul Rees tells of a community canvass being made. At a certain door the questioner asked the woman who answered his knock what children she had. She began, 'Well, there's Willie, and Horace.' But the canvasser interrupted, 'Never mind names, I just want numbers.' Then she grew impatient and a bit indignant. 'They haven't got numbers,' she protested. 'Every one of them's got a name.' Concludes Paul Rees: "They had personalities that spoke with all the eloquence of their individual characteristics. . . . So God looks upon His human creatures." (Stand Up in Praise to God; Paul Rees; pg. 23-24)

Jesus was made rich but He became poor in order that, through His poverty, we might be made rich! The way God accomplished this purpose is most mysterious and wonderful! "It is fifteen hundred years ago that this apparently invincible Empire (of Rome) utterly collapsed, and all that is left of it is ruins. Yet the little baby, born in such pitiful humility and cut down as a young man in his prime, commands the allegiance of millions of people all over the world. Although they have never seen him, he has become friend and companion to innumerable people. This undeniable fact is, by any measurement, the most astonishing phenomenon in human history. It is a solid rock of evidence which no agnostic can ever explain away." (Good News; J. B. Phillips; pg. 162-163)

"God, forgive me for groping around so long, trying to find You when You have already found me! You are nearer to me than I ever dreamed! Your initiating love is not only for the world as a whole, but for me as a person! Amazing!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will listen attentively to the quiet, calm voice at my side. It sounds like the voice of Love!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE IDENTIFICATION OF A PERSONAL GOD'

1. What is meant by the statement: "Jesus gave God a Face!"
2. Why is Jesus called 'the Word'? (John 1:1,14)
3. Who does the writer of Hebrews (in Hebrews 1:2,3) declare that Jesus is?
4. What significant truths regarding God's plan of salvation can you describe, as noted in John 1:9?
5. What declaration from the lips of Jesus' disciples offers strong evidence for the deity of Jesus?
6. What evidence from Scripture can you cite for the true humanity of Jesus Christ? (Note Philipians 2:7; Hebrews 2:14-18.)
7. Why must Jesus be fully Man and yet fully God in order for Him to be the Savior of mankind?
8. How does acceptance of the conclusion that Jesus was God revolutionize your conception of the character of God?
9. What was the purpose for which God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ?
10. According to John 3:19-20, why do people reject the Son of God?
11. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God's light must be experienced as self-surrender before it can be experienced and enjoyed as self-fulfillment."
12. What false Messianic conceptions regarding the mission of Jesus, did the Jews of Jesus' day hold? What are some of the false conceptions people have today regarding the mission of Jesus?
13. What is meant by the statement: "Legalistic systems of self-salvation must be surrendered." What behavioral manifestations will likely be evident in the life of the person who seeks to live by law rather than by grace?
14. Were God's covenants with Israel conditional or unconditional? Is God obligated to favor America, regardless of the degree of America's obedience to God's revealed moral laws and will? What is meant by the expression: "God's light can soothe or sear!"
15. Name several ways in which Jesus, as the Incarnate Son of God, identified with the human race when He was on the earth.
16. Describe what is meant by Bishop Sheen's statement: "Divinity is always where one least expects to find it."
17. What is there about Jesus that makes Him and the movement that bears His name--Christianity--one of the most astonishing phenomena of human history?

## Chapter 8

### THE SACRIFICE OF A LOVING GOD

HE HIT ROCK BOTTOM ON A CROSS!

When God identified with mankind, in the person of Jesus, He identified at the lowest level. Not only did Jesus identify with sinners in life, but Jesus identified with sinners in his very death. "He took man's sin as His own and died as a malefactor on a cross. The visitation meant identification, and the identification meant not identification with man at the top, becoming the best of men, but becoming the worst of men--a sinner, dying between sinners. 'He became sin for us.' That identification was gradual, beginning at inner renunciation of being equal with God, coming in a virgin's womb, and going deeper at every step until He hit rock bottom on a cross: 'My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'" (Word Became Flesh; E. Stanley Jones; pg. 153)

Just as mankind (in the person of Adam) freely chose to disobey the Father, so the second Adam, Jesus Christ, freely chose to obey the Father.

He freely chose to come to earth to give His life a ransom for sinners, and to destroy the devil's works (I John 3:8). Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus often said, "My hour has not yet come." What did He mean? He meant that God's appointed time for Him to die a redemptive death had not yet come. Just before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "Father, the time has come, Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." (John 17:1)

Said Jesus, "No man takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord." Jesus willingly gave his life for the sins of the world.

As Jesus stood before Pilate, Pilate said to Jesus: "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or to crucify you?" Then Jesus said, "You would have no power at all over me unless it were given to you from above." (John 19:10-11 Living Bible)

Jesus' death was not an accident of history or a mere incident of human cruelty. Rather, Jesus' death was the result of God's grace and of Jesus' free choice.

He could have called ten thousand angels to rescue Him from the cross, but instead He died alone for you and me!

The death of Christ was an absolute necessity, if mankind was to be saved from sin and from hell! Christ's death on the Cross (a) appeased God's wrath, (b) satisfied God's justice, (c) demonstrated God's love.

"O God, was ever such love manifested as on Mount Calvary! You sacrificed all in order to save all! I will glory in 'the old rugged cross'!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus willingly laid down His own life for me, I will gladly lay down my self-will for Jesus!

HE WAS BORN TO DIE!

A painter once 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 in 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 destiny on a cross!

Of course, we know that this painting is only the creation of an artist's mind. There is nothing in the Gospels which indicates that Mary knew ahead of time that Jesus would die on a cross. 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 was born to die--to die a death that would enable millions to live! At the heart of Jesus' ministry was a cross! Notes William Sangster, "Those devils and weaklings who met at Calvary would have said, 'We did it.' He cries from His Cross: 'I did it! It is finished!' If they were right, the Cross would be a gibbet, a symbol of shame, something to hide and speak of only by compulsion and with bated breath. In point of fact, we placard it to all the world. No steeple so high that it will not bear it; no point of earth but is honoured to be the stump of His Cross: it lies in a cache on the summit of Everest. It is His message, not theirs, which it bears at the last. That free and evil men sought and secured His death cannot alter the fact that He knew what they were doing--and let them do it. You cannot martyr God. . . . Hold in mind . . . who it was who hung and suffered there, and you will not think of it as martyrdom.

"If He was man, it was murder; if He was God, it was an offering.

"If He was man, it was martyrdom; if He was God, it was sacrifice.

"If He was man, they took His life from Him; if He was God, He laid down his life freely.

"If He was man, we must stand up and take our hats off; if He was God, we must fall down and give Him our hearts." (Daily Readings; pg. 253)

"In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime."

"God, the symbol of shame has been transformed by your Son into the symbol of glory; earth's darkest day has become earth's brightest day; life's greatest tragedy has become life's greatest triumph! I will henceforth glory in the Cross! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus died that I might live; I will live that others might not die--spiritually!

THE CROSS APPEASED GOD'S WRATH

On the Cross, Jesus said, "It is finished." What did He mean? Only eternity will fully reveal the meaning of that phrase. Jesus did not mean by this phrase "the work of human cruelty is done." Jesus was saying, "The work of reconciliation and salvation has been accomplished for mankind." The death of Jesus accomplished certain important things.

First, the Cross appeased God's wrath. In speaking often of God's love, we sometimes forget the fact of God's wrath. Both the Old and New Testaments picture God as a God of love, but the Bible also speaks of God's wrath against sin and evil. Both John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of 'the wrath to come' (Matthew 3:7). John wrote in his Gospel: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36) James declares that the one who makes himself a friend of the evil world also makes himself 'the enemy of God' (James 4:4). Those who live by the passions of their flesh are 'children of wrath,' says Paul (Ephesians 2:3). The wrath of God will come upon the 'sons of disobedience.' (Ephesians 5:5-6)

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. However, unlike the wrath of the pagan gods, there is no irrational passion in God. God's wrath is controlled, directed, and tempered by God's love. Wrath and love are compatible in God's nature. He hates sin but He loves the child of sin. "There is a divine wrath, but if we may put it this way, it is always exercised with a certain tenderness. Even when He is angry with man's sin God loves man and is concerned for his well-being in the fullest sense. There is a divine love, but it is not a careless sentimentality indifferent to the moral integrity of the loved ones. Rather it is a love which is a purifying fire, blazing against everything that hinders the loved ones from being the very best that they can be." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; Leon Mooris; pg. 176)

Jesus became sin for us. He bore our sins in His own body on the cross. On the cross Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus represented all the sins of all the world when He was on the cross. God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Because Jesus became sin, God could not look upon Jesus, for God cannot look upon sin. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." (Habakkuk 1:13) Jesus took God's wrath against sin upon Himself, by becoming the perfect sacrifice for sin. Thus, Jesus' death saved mankind from God's just wrath.

"Jesus, thank you for honoring God's holiness and, at the same time, being my shield against God's just wrath. Thank you for bearing my sins in your body on the Cross. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The more God the Father loves His children, the more He hates the sins of His children.

### THE CROSS SATISFIED GOD'S JUSTICE

Imagine the following: Court Room Scene, You standing before Judge.

- You are guilty of a great crime. You cannot pay for it except by death, for this crime holds the death penalty.
- A friend of yours offers to take your just penalty for you--to die in your place.

Therefore:

1. Justice has been met, insofar as the law is concerned.
2. Double punishment for one crime would be unjust (so if your friend dies, you don't need to die for your crime).
3. If the truly guilty one is willing to accept the substitutionary offering of the friend, then the punishment for the crime has been met and the guilty one is free and declared henceforth clear and innocent (as far as the just requirements of the law are concerned).

Of course, in real life, such a thing would not likely take place. But this simple analogy speaks to the issue of God's justice.

So serious is sin that, in the process of punishing sin, the sinner would also be destroyed. The wage of sin is death for the sinner. The Cross is not only the answer to appeasing God's wrath toward sin, but also the answer to saving the sinner from suffering the just penalty for sin which is death.

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, and reliable place to live. All basis for morality (right and wrong) would then be destroyed.

God wanted to save mankind, but a universe run by justice and by a just God must appropriately punish sin. The wage of sin is death; therefore, the sinning one must die. If God were to remain just in His character, He could not allow sin to go unpunished. The Cross is the answer to this moral dilemma. If God should die on a cross, then sin would be justly punished through that substitutionary death, and yet the sinner himself could be saved. The Cross allowed God--the great Judge of the universe--to remain just in his punishment of sin and yet merciful and loving in his treatment of the sinner himself. God, because of the Cross, can be both just and the justifier of the ungodly. Jesus took the penalty for man's sins so that man could be forgiven justly.

"Jesus, thank you for dying on the Cross, thus allowing God to maintain justice in His character, and, at the same time, allowing God to exercise kindness in His treatment towards sinners like me. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am free from the penalty of sin, not free to continue sinning, but free to serve the Saviour!

THE CROSS DEMONSTRATED GOD'S LOVE

We have noted that the cross appeased God's wrath and satisfied God's justice. Concerning the latter, it is important to realize that one 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 clear himself from his crime). Wrote the famous Charles Spurgeon: "Christ has made a complete atonement; and there is none other plan by which sinners can be made at one with God, except by Jesus' precious blood. I may make sacrifices; I may mortify my body; I may be baptized; I may receive sacraments; I may pray until my knees grow hard with kneeling; I may read devout words until I know them by heart; I may celebrate masses; I may worship in one language or in fifty languages; but I can never be at one with God, except by blood; and that blood, 'the precious blood of Christ.'" (The Passion and Death of Christ; pg. 36)

Thirdly, the cross demonstrated God's love. The cross on Calvary is the unveiling of the cross which has eternally been on the heart of God! The cross is the greatest of all revelations concerning God. For the revealed cross in history is the result of the hidden cross on the heart of God! The cross shows that at the heart of the universe is self-giving, sacrificial love. God is love and the cross on Mount Calvary gives concrete expression to that truth. Because God is suffering love, the cross is an absolute necessity. Only as man could see Jesus on the cross of Calvary could man see the Christ of the ages who has always borne a cross in His heart!

Jesus reveals the nature of God. Everything Jesus was, God has always been. When Jesus was suffering on the cross, God was suffering on the cross!

Jesus' suffering on the cross for sin shows that God suffers for sin. God hurts in our hurts, He bleeds when we bleed, He shares our guilt. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." (Isaiah 53:4)

Jesus' love for humanity was supremely expressed when He suffered for man's sin. "But God commendeth His love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

John 3:16 condenses the deep and marvelous truths of redemption (as someone pointed out):

- "God" . . . . . greatest lover
- "So loved" . . . . . greatest degree
- "The world" . . . . . greatest number
- "That He gave" . . . . . greatest act
- "His only begotten Son" . . . . . greatest gift
- "That whosoever" . . . . . greatest invitation
- "Believeth" . . . . . greatest simplicity
- "In Him" . . . . . greatest person
- "Should not perish" . . . . . greatest deliverance
- "But" . . . . . greatest difference
- "Have" . . . . . greatest certainty
- "Everlasting life" . . . . . greatest possession

"'Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly.' Looking at the Cross, I am looking at the very heart of God! Jesus, the Cross is thy magnet to draw me to God!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The 'precious blood of Christ' is God's most precious gift to mankind--and to me!

THE GOLDEN TEXT OF SCRIPTURE

There are many great love stories, but the greatest love story of all--the most dramatic, and the most unbelievable--is the love story which is summarized in 25 words, John 3:16! It is the golden text of Scripture! It is the Gospel 'in a nutshell.'

But the greatest love story of history is not appreciated as it should be, because of our familiarity with it. Dr. Roland Bainton, famous historian and former professor at Yale Divinity school, notes: "When I was in the divinity school, a student from the English Department used to come over and chat with me on Saturday nights. He had been brought up in such a secular atmosphere, that he had never heard the story of the Crucifixion. I read it to him for the first time in his life. He wept. I was ashamed that I did not weep. Because I suffered from the secularism of familiarity."

Although we can never plumb the depths of its meaning, let us again look at the heart of the Gospel as revealed in the most familiar verse in the Bible, John 3:16. Let us move into a simple exposition of this verse during the next few days.

"FOR GOD"--Divine Initiative. This Divine Initiative is what shows clearly the great contrast between Christianity and the other world religions. For instance, Hinduism has Scriptures showing men's austerities in storming heaven's gates to disturb God's calm aloftness through human persistence. But Christianity declares the startling fact that God always takes the first step--the initiating step. It is not God's reluctance, but man's reluctance, that must be overcome. It is not man searching for God, but God searching for man! It is not man climbing up the ladder to find God, but God climbing down the ladder to find man! In India, there is a picture of an armless God. But the God of Christianity is not armless. Jesus is God's arm reaching out to lost humanity!

"GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD"--Divine Redemption. Make no mistake about it. God hates sin, the actions and attitudes that degrade men, but God loves men. It is man that God came to love, to redeem. Jesus came not to destroy but to save, not to condemn but to forgive, not to subtract but to add. "I am come that they (mankind) might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," said Jesus. Saint Augustine said, "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

"God, I thank you that I don't have to storm heaven's gates to get your attention. You loved me when I was loveless! You sought me when I was indifferent! Let me never 'get over' such love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will allow Calvary Love to break my heart anew!

THE GREATEST LOVE STORY

We are looking at the golden text of Scripture, John 3:16. This verse describes the greatest love story known to mankind!

"THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON"--Divine Substitution. Jesus is God. Therefore, when Jesus died, God died! Jesus took man's penalty. God is righteous and just. God must be consistent in His actions if He is to be consistent and reliable in His character. "The soul that sinneth it shall die"--that is the righteous law of God. For God to remain consistent in His character requires God to exact the penalty for sin which is death. Sin must be penalized.

But God is not only just; He is by nature Love. God's just character requires the death penalty for sin; God's loving character desires the saving of mankind. How can mankind be both saved for heaven and justly punished for sin? How can the apparent contradiction and requirements of God's justice and God's love be reconciled? There is only one answer and that answer was hidden in God for generations, 'until these last days.' The "mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" has been revealed. How can God remain just and at the same time justify the ungodly and redeem a race of men? Only by Divine Substitution! God must take the penalty of sin upon Himself, justly punishing sin in his own body and fulfilling the law's demand for the death penalty. Such sacrifice--and such love!

"During the Civil War a company of irregulars known as 'bushwhackers' were arrested by the Union soldiers. Because they were guerrilla fighters and not in uniform, they were sentenced to be shot. A courageous young boy in the Union army touched his commanding officer on the arm and pleaded, 'Won't you allow me to take the place of one of the men you have just condemned? I know him well; he has a large family who needs him badly. My parents are dead and I have few friends. No one will miss me. Please let me take his punishment!' The officer hesitated but finally gave his consent. Pulling the husband and father to one side, the young man filled his position in the death line. On the stone that marks his grave in a little southern town are these words: 'Sacred to the memory of Willy Lear. He took my place.'" (Daily Bread; Jan. 1971; Jan. 28)

"God, you took my place on the Cross! I should have been there, suffering justly for my own sins, but instead, you were there shedding your own blood. Your perfect sacrifice means that I can be perfectly forgiven! A thousand 'Thank You's'!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Cross is the perfect solution to maintaining God's justice and at the same time revealing God's saving love!

"WHOSOEVER" INCLUDES ALL!

Jesus died for all. Therefore, all can be saved, if they will!

"WHOSOEVER"--Universal Offer. "Whosoever" includes all the little children of the world. Children are tragically neglected and abused too often, but Jesus is the lover of children. Jesus said that one must express childlike simplicity and faith if he enters the kingdom of heaven! In contrast to the ancient world which mistreated children and used them as mere human tools, Jesus introduced a new standard into the world when "He took them (children) up into His lap and loved them."

Jesus loves the exploited people of the world. The exploited in Jesus' day were the slaves. The vast majority of the ancient world was composed of slaves. Many of Christianity's converts were slaves!

Jesus favors the unfavored. The unfavored in Jesus' day were women! Jesus is the greatest champion of women! He liberates women without destroying either their personhood or their womanhood--a far cry from the results of the modern women's liberation movement! Women in the ancient world were treated simply as objects to use and to possess. Jesus treated women as persons. Note the number of women in the New Testament who were loyal followers of the Lord. Jesus came to break down the artificial walls of division. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

"Whosoever" includes the rich and poor alike. James, the blood brother of Jesus, wrote: "Let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his elevation (as a Christian, called to the true riches and to be an heir of God); and the rich (person ought to glory) in being humbled (by being shown his human frailty), because like the flower of the grass he will pass away." (James 1:9,10) (Amplified Version)

"Whosoever" includes both the moral and the immoral. "Celsus, an early opponent of Christianity, objected to this attitude, saying that other faiths invited in the respectable, the moral, the upright, but this faith scandalously invites in the riffraff, the immoral, the drunken, the dishonest, and welcomes them! It does! But the riffraff become respectable, the immoral become the moral, and the drunken become the sober, and the dishonest become the honest, and live and die for it!" (How To Be a Transformed Person; E. Stanley Jones; pg. 124)

"God, I see that 'Whosoever' includes the young and the old, male and female, free and slave, black and white, rich and poor, moral and immoral, learned and illiterate. You are not willing that any should perish!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus died for all, all can be saved--and that includes me!

A NEW QUALITY OF LIFE

We continue to mine the wealth of John 3:16, perhaps the greatest verse in the Bible!

"BELIEVETH IN"--Individual Appropriation. Belief is the key to appropriation of God's salvation. What is belief? To believe, according to the Amplified Bible, is to "trust in, rely upon, adhere to." It is releasing one's weight upon God! It is commitment of one's heart and mind and life to the all-sufficient power of Christ. It is transferring one's trust from self to Christ!

"Believeth" is in the present tense in the Greek New Testament (John 3:16). The present tense is the continuous tense. This means that it is the person who persistently, habitually, and continuously believes in the Son who will not perish but who will have eternal life. Eternal life is not a deposit which God gives a person who momentarily believes, but eternal life is a relationship of love, maintained with God through obedience and faith. God's faithfulness and power to save and to keep are never in question. It is a question of the continuance of the believer's commitment, trust, and belief. Can faithfulness of God avail for unfaithful men? Indeed not!

"SHOULD NOT PERISH"--Individual Protection. Those who appropriate the grace of God through a continuing commitment to Christ are those who are continually renewed inwardly and outwardly, and thus saved from disintegration and degeneration. Those who don't believe are those who are gradually perishing--in attitudes, in relationships, and in physical constitution. To persist in unbelief is ultimately to perish eternally!

"BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE"--Individual Assurance. Eternal life is not a mere duration of existence, but it is a new quality of life! When I asked a 27 year old alcoholic, a son of a medical doctor, if he wished to have eternal life, he answered, "If I have to live forever like the h-- of the life I have lived the last 27 years, then I don't want eternal life!" But he failed to realize that eternal life is a present and new relationship with Christ! It is not confined to time, and it is not limited by physical death. Physical death becomes merely a 'bridge' releasing one into the nearer presence of God, where one can express his new life without the confining limitations of time! Christ is the object of your faith, and new life is the result of your faith!

"God, help me to believe in you, not momentarily, but continuously, in order that I may continue to enjoy a new relationship of love and life! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am saved by believing, and I remain saved by believing--believing in the Son!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE SACRIFICE OF A LOVING GOD'

1. How was Jesus' ultimate and deepest identification with mankind manifested?
2. Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, when He often said, 'My hour has not yet come,' what did He mean?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Jesus' death was not an accident of history or a mere incident of human cruelty. Rather, Jesus' death was the result of God's grace and of Jesus' own free choice. If Jesus had not chosen to come to earth to die, He still would have been holy and sinless. He was under no obligation (except the obligation of 'Love') to come to earth to give His life as a sacrifice for sinners."
4. Describe what is meant by the statement: "Jesus was born to die."
5. Was the death of Christ an absolute necessity, if mankind was to be saved from sin and from hell? Why or why not?
6. Describe what you think Jesus meant when He said (while He was dying on the cross), "It is finished."
7. In what ways did the Cross (death) of Jesus both appease the wrath of God and, at the same time, demonstrate the love of God?
8. How is the wrath of God unlike the wrath of the pagan gods?
9. What are the two contrasting attitudes which God has toward sin and toward sinners?
10. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The more God the Father loves His children, the more He hates the sins of His children."
11. Why did Jesus, while He was dying on the cross, cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
12. The Cross (Death) of Christ is the answer to a great 'moral dilemma' which God faced. What was that 'moral dilemma,' and how did the Cross (Death) of Christ resolve it?
13. Describe what is meant by the statement: "The cross on Calvary is the unveiling of the cross which has eternally been on the heart of God!"
14. What did Dr. Roland Bainton mean when he said that he suffered from 'the secularism of familiarity'?
15. In terms of 'Initiative,' how is Christianity so different from other world religions?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE SACRIFICE OF A LOVING GOD'

16. Do you agree or disagree with Saint Augustine's statement: "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." What evidence is there that God loves you so personally and intensely?
17. How can God remain just in His character and, at the same time, justify the ungodly and redeem a race of men?
18. What evidence is there from a study of the New Testament (and especially from a study of the Gospels) that Jesus' love is universal rather than exclusive, that Jesus wants to save all persons instead of only a select few?
19. If belief is the key to appropriation of God's salvation, what is the Biblical meaning of 'belief'?
20. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Eternal life is not a deposit which God gives a person who momentarily believes, but eternal life is a relationship of love, maintained with God through obedience and personal faith."
21. Can the faithfulness of God avail for unfaithful persons who drift away from God? Are believers ultimately saved without meeting any moral conditions other than the conditions of initial repentance and faith in Jesus Christ? What is the final condition that believers must meet if they are ultimately to enjoy eternal life in heaven? (Does the use of the Greek 'present tense' for 'believe' in John 3:16 help answer the above questions?)
22. Is 'eternal life' only a future life to be enjoyed in heaven, or is 'eternal life' a present life to be experienced by sincere believers here on earth? Give a scriptural basis for your answer.
23. What is the basis of your personal assurance of salvation?

## Chapter 9

### THE REDEMPTION OF LOST MANKIND

CHRIST SHED HIS BLOOD

Christ substituted and sacrificed His life on the cross for us that we might be spared divine wrath and that we might have eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

The scriptures make it clear that God's wrath is visited upon sinners or else the Son of God dies for them. Either we die or He dies. The person who accepts Christ's provision for man's plight need not endure the penalty of sin which is eternal death, but instead enjoy the gift of God which is eternal life!

Christ shed His blood on the cross that mankind might live. "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22 NASB) Merv Rosell relates an interesting story. "The little daughter of a friend of mine, five-year-old Mary, underwent an operation and lost so much blood that it was necessary to resort to blood transfusion. Samples of the blood of all the adults of the family were taken, but none was found to match Mary's. Then a test was made of her older brother's blood. It was found to match. Jimmy is a husky boy, thirteen years old and deeply fond of little Mary. 'Will you give your sister some of your blood?' the doctor asked Jim. Jimmy set his teeth. 'Yes, sir, if she needs it!' The need was very desperate so the boy was at once prepared for the transfusion. In the midst of the drawing of the blood, the doctor observed Jimmy growing paler and paler. There was no apparent reason for this. 'Are you ill, Jim?' asked the doctor. 'No, sir, but I'm wondering just when I'll die.' 'Die?' gasped the doctor. 'Do you think people give their lives when they give a little blood?' 'Yes, sir,' replied Jimmy. 'And you were giving your life for Mary's?' 'Yes, sir,' replied the boy simply." (Shoe-Leather Faith by Merv Rosell; No. 448)

The scriptures are very clear that Christ's death was substitutionary in nature. Christ died that we might live!

Said the great preacher, Robert G. Lee: "When God made man, God breathed into him--and he became a living soul. But when God made salvation available for men, God bled for man." Wrote the apostle Peter, "The price was in fact the lifeblood of Christ, the unblemished and unstained Lamb of sacrifice." (I Peter 1:19 Phillips) Jesus is the 'Lamb of God' who takes away the sins of the world!

"Life is in the blood! When Jesus' blood was shed, God's life was poured out for me! No shedding of blood, no saving sacrifice! 'The blood, the blood'--this is my plea, this is my salvation! Thank you! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Love which bleeds is love which saves!

SIN MAKES A SLAVE OF MAN

Jesus came to earth to ransom a lost race of sinners! Wrote Peter, "For you must realize all the time that you have been 'ransomed' from the futile way of living passed on to you by your fathers' traditions, not with some money payment of transient value, but by the costly shedding of blood. The price was in fact the lifeblood of Christ, the unblemished and unstained lamb of sacrifice." (I Peter 1:18,19 Phillips)

Mark declares Jesus' mission in these words: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Redemption is the work of Christ. Basic to the idea of 'redemption' is 'deliverance with a cost involved.' A ransom price was given to liberate a slave. Assumed in the definition of redemption is the fact of the bondage of mankind. Sin makes a slave of man.

Man is a slave to sin by reason of his sinful nature. Wrote Paul, "But there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin and death that are still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin." (Romans 7:23 Living Bible)

Man is a slave to sin by reason of his own choice. "Don't you realize that you can choose your own master: You can choose sin (with death) or else obedience (with goodness). The one to whom you offer yourself, he will take you and be your master and you will be his slave." (Phillips, Romans 6:16)

Sin affects the mind, the emotions, the conscience, and the will of man. Sin makes man a slave to passion, pride, self-centeredness, anger, hate, anxiety, and fear. One minister tells of an alcoholic with whom he prayed for salvation. The alcoholic was so bound by his habit that he left the room where the minister had been praying with him. Through alcohol, he sought to drown his thoughts of God. He was trying to run from God and from reality. Finally, on his deathbed the alcoholic cried out to God for forgiveness. His soul was saved in that moment of repentance, but his life, which had been wasted on alcohol, was lost.

In the name of freedom, there are those who deny God's moral law and become a law unto themselves. (II Peter 2:19) But Jesus said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34) Inherent in the idea of redemption is the assumption that man is in bondage to sin and to self. Is there any ruler so tyrannical as self?

"Thou liberator of my soul, deliver me from the bondage to sin and to self. Save my soul from eternal loss, and save my life for earthly gain! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If the Son shall make me free, I shall be really free! (John 8:36)

SUBSTITUTIONARY PRICE OF REDEMPTION

We have been making note of the fact that God ransomed sinners with the precious lifeblood of Christ, who is the sinless, spotless Lamb of God! The scriptures often speak of the suffering and sacrifice of the Saviour. "For it became Him (Jesus), for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Hebrews 2:10)

"Under the system of Jewish laws the high priest brought the blood of the slain animals into the sanctuary as a sacrifice for sin, and then the bodies of the animals were burned outside the city. That is why Jesus suffered and died outside the city, where His blood washed our sins away." (Hebrews 13:11,12)

"We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9)

The writer of Hebrews wrote: "Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy He knew would be His afterwards; and now He sits in the place of honor by the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2) The substitutionary death of Jesus became the ransom price for mankind!

"A minister was boarding at a farmhouse, and his host was not a Christian. Early one morning, the farmer beckoned to the minister to follow him out to the chicken house. There, on one of the nests, sat a hen with a brood of chickens peeping out from under her wings. 'Touch her, Parson,' said the farmer. As the minister put his hand on the hen, he found that she was rigid in death! 'Look at that wound in her head,' the farmer continued. 'A weasel has sucked all the blood from her body, and she never once moved for fear the little beast would get her chickens!' 'Oh, Jonas,' said the minister, 'that was just like Christ! He endured all the suffering of crucifixion, though He might have come down and saved His own life. But He didn't, because our redemption depended upon His death. If He had been spared death, we would be lost!' The farmer saw it instantly. Tears of penitence began to course down his cheeks, as with a grateful heart he thanked God for His unspeakable gift!" (Shoe-Leather Faith; Merv Rosell; no. 333)

Greater love than this cannot be found, that God would shed His sinless blood for sinful man!

"I receive the breath of life from God's creative power; I avoid the sentence of death through Christ's cleansing blood! I am doubly Yours--through Creation and through Redemption! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I shall combine tears of penitence with tears of joy when I look at the Crucified Saviour!

## THE LAW IS SILENCED!

What was the motivation for Christ's costly ransom for man? Nothing less than love, the love which gave and suffered, and the love which conquered and achieved!

Christ's death redeemed man from sin. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24) To the Ephesians, Paul wrote: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7) Wrote Paul to Timothy, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Timothy 2:5,6)

Christ's death redeemed man from the law's curse. Man cannot keep the law's demands, but Jesus was able to keep those demands. Thus, Jesus alone is the perfect fulfiller of the law with all its stringent demands--another evidence that Jesus was divine!

Christ not only perfectly fulfilled the law's demands, but Christ paid the full penalty for the law's infraction. Jesus' death was substitutionary in nature. Not only did He come to redeem man from sin, but He came also to redeem or deliver man from the law's curse. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, 'Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:13 NASB) "But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were subject to the law, so that we might be adopted as sons." (Galatians 4:4,5 Barclay)

As Spurgeon says: "As many as Christ died for, are for ever free from the curse of the law; for when the law cometh to curse a man who believeth in Christ, he saith, 'What have I to do with thee, O law? Thou sayest, 'I will curse thee,' but I reply, 'Thou hast cursed Christ instead of me. Canst thou curse twice for one offense?'" Behold how the law is silenced! God's law having received all it can demand, is not so unrighteous as to demand anything more. All that God can demand of a believing sinner, Christ has already paid, and there is no voice in earth or heaven that can henceforth accuse a soul that believes in Jesus. You were in debt, but a friend paid your debt; no writ can be served on you. It matters nothing that you did not pay it, it is paid, and you have the receipt. That is sufficient in any court of equity. So with all the penalty that was due to us, Christ has borne it." (The Passion and Death of Christ; Charles Spurgeon; pg. 64)

"Christ, you have paid the penalty of sin, and thus fulfilled the law's demands. God, you have demanded all, and your Son has paid all. Now I can receive all! Glory! Amen."

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because Christ spoke 'loudly' on the Cross, the law has been silenced! Now I have a right to sing confidently of forgiveness, and the law cannot speak back! Amazing!

## GLORIOUS FREEDOM!

Common to the idea of redemption is freedom--the result of paying the ransom price. When a ransom was given for a slave, the slave was freed. The Bible defines man as a slave to sin, and it describes Christ's death as a death to ransom man, to free him from the bondage of sin.

Many passages from Paul speak of man's freedom from sin's bondage. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2) Paul wrote to Timothy that Christ "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (II Timothy 1:10) Paul said that "our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Romans 6:6) The Christian is serving a new Master.

It is the glorious message of the Bible that man can be freed from his sinful bondage! Christ gives liberty to man. If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed! This liberty, however, is not a selfish liberty, but it is a liberty to serve Christ, instead of self! The paradox of the Christian's redemption is that he is redeemed to become a slave! A slave, not of passion, but of love; a slave, not of self-will, but of Christ; a slave, not of sin, but of righteousness! "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." (Romans 6:22)

Liberty is not to be abused. Christian liberty is liberty to serve Christ, and the motivation for this service is love. Christ loved man so much that He bought man with the price of His own blood! "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's." (I Corinthians 6:20)

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

Christ gives love for hate, a cool head for a hot temper, understanding for resentment, confidence for fear, relaxation for anxiety, peace for guilt, integration for divided loyalties, direction for confusion. Christ came to give the more 'abundant life.' The greatest freedom of all is the freedom from the tyranny of self. Self in the center of life, makes one's life off-center! Freedom from sin is freedom to serve the Saviour. Bowing low before Christ, you stand tall before everything else! Glorious freedom!

"God, I realize that it is an inescapable fact of life that everyone is the servant of some master--either a servant of sin or a servant of righteousness! Satan gives bondage; Christ gives freedom. I choose Christ as my Master! Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am free to choose my Master, but I am not free to accept or to reject the consequences of my choice!

"I FEEL LIKE MY HEART IS VERY BLACK"

During the last several days, we have been looking at the glory of the cross of Christ. After the showing of a vivid film on the death and resurrection of Jesus, a young grade school child travelled to his home in a car with a children's worker. Before he arrived at his home, the child said to the worker, "I feel like my heart is very black!" That young child was visibly moved as he remembered seeing Jesus portrayed in agony on the cross. The cross had touched his life and convicted him of sin. There in the car, as he was travelling to his house, that children's worker led that precious child to a saving knowledge of Christ. It was the cross and God's love demonstrated on that cross that melted that child's heart.

Listen to the following testimony of a man who saw himself in the light of the cross: "I was deeply convinced of the great goodness of God towards me all of my life, particularly in that he had given his Son to die for me. I also had a far clearer view of my sins; particularly my base ingratitude toward him. These discoveries quite broke my heart, and caused showers of tears to trickle down my cheeks. I was likewise filled with an utter abhorrence of my evil ways, and was much ashamed that ever I had walked in them. And my heart was thus turned from all evil, so that it was powerfully inclined to do all that is good. It is not easy to express what strong desires I had for God and his service; and what resolutions I had to seek and to serve him in the future: in consequence of which, I broke off all my evil practices and forsook all my wicked and foolish companions, without delay, and gave myself up to God and his service with my whole heart." (Quoted in Personal Renewal Through Conversion; C. Curry Mavis; pg. 34)

It is in the cross of Christ that we glory, for the cross of Christ demonstrates the love of the eternal God. Love is costly! Love is bloody! Love is a cross! It is God's love alone that devised the plan of salvation. God was under no obligation whatever to save mankind. God would not have been unjust to have condemned mankind to damnation and eternal loss. It is God's inherent nature to love. There was nothing in mankind to incite or create love in God. Man's salvation is entirely dependent upon God's love which is uncaused and unconditional. This love is a matter totally of God's will and nature, not of man's worthiness.

"Holy God, I realize I am unholy, in need of your holiness. The cross shows the blackness of my nature, but more than this, the brightness of your love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will allow the Cross to do its convicting and convincing work in my life!

EMPTY-HANDED, I STAND BEFORE THE CROSS!

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

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

God's love and God's wrath are compatible. Indeed, God's wrath is a manifestation of God's love. We understand the love of God better, against the backdrop of sin which has God's wrath focused upon it!

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

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

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

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

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

HE TOOK OUR FLOGGING!

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE LOVELY DIED FOR THE LOVELESS!

God's love is beyond measure and degree! "Even if we were good, we really wouldn't expect anyone to die for us, though, of course, that might be barely possible." (Romans 5:7 Living Bible) Death for good men is unexpected, but death for bad men is unimaginable. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Christ not only died for us, but He suffered untold physical pain and indescribable spiritual affliction--all because He loved us! Think of the scourging Jesus endured before crucifixion. Barclay notes that when a man was scourged he was tied to a whipping post in such a way that his back was fully exposed. The lash was a long leather thong, studded at intervals with pellets of lead and sharpened pieces of bone. It literally tore a man's back into strips. Few remained conscious throughout the ordeal; some died; and many went raving mad. Jesus stood that. (Daily Study Bible; John; Vol. 2; pg. 285; William Barclay)

In Romans 5:6-8, there are three terms that are used to describe bad men for whom Christ died: 'without strength,' 'ungodly,' and 'sinners.'

"Without strength" means "totally incapable." We are totally incapable of independently understanding spiritual truth, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them." (I Corinthians 2:14) We are totally incapable of independently pleasing God, for our righteousness is as 'filthy rags' in God's sight. (Isaiah 64:6)

"Ungodly" means "godless deeds" and "godless attitudes." We were made by God and for God, but we have rebelled against the laws and the love of God. We are made to be godlike, but instead we have become godless.

"Sinners" mean "those who practice sin." To sin is to 'miss the mark' or the goal and intention of God for human life. God's intentions for us have been thwarted because of our self-centered wills. What man plans, without God, is against the plan of God for man. The goal of life is to glorify and to serve God. Man seeks instead to glorify himself and to serve his own selfish purposes. Thus, man is a sinner, for man is 'missing the mark' of God's goals for human living.

"O Christ, You saved me when I was incapable of saving myself! The Good One died for the bad one; the Godly died for the godless; the Lovely died for the loveless; the Helpful died for the helpless! I can never repay such love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Love divine deserves my life, my soul, my all!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE REDEMPTION OF LOST MANKIND'

1. Why is the shedding of the blood of Jesus on the cross considered to be of such central importance in the teachings of Christianity? (Note Hebrews 9:22.)
2. Define the meaning of 'Redemption,' and discuss the following elements that are essential for a full understanding of this concept: (a) the bondage of man, (b) the ransom price of Christ, (c) the freedom of man from sin.
3. By reason of what is man a 'slave to sin'?
4. Sin affects man in what areas of his life?
5. God claims ownership of every person, by right of what two great realities?
6. What was the motivation for Christ's costly ransom of mankind from sin?
7. What is the basis of the believer's confidence, in the face of the law's holy accusations against all imperfect men?
8. Essential to the idea of redemption is freedom. From what is a believer freed? To whom is a believer bound? What kind of life (in terms of attitudes and behavior) can one expect a spiritually-liberated person to live?
9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Man's salvation is entirely dependent upon God's love which is uncaused and unconditional. This love is a matter totally of God's will and nature, not of man's worthiness."
10. Why is God's love in no way a contradiction of God's wrath, and in what ways does God manifest both of these qualities in His treatment of mankind?
11. Show how each of the greatest contributions of the three main civilizations of Jesus' day (i.e., the Jewish, Greek, and Roman civilizations) failed to save mankind from its sins.
12. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The only way for an unjust sinner to be justly spared sin's penalty is for the righteous Saviour to unsparingly take the sinner's death. The justice of God can only be maintained through the exercise of the love of God--love that must suffer a substitutionary death for the sinner."
13. How are those for whom Christ died described in Romans 5:6-8?



Chapter 10

THE VICTORY OF A CONQUERING GOD (I)

(The Resurrection Devotionally Experienced)

NO TOMB IN CHRISTIANITY!

Searching to find God--that is what we have been doing during the last several weeks. We look upwardly toward the heavens and we see the handiwork of God. We look inwardly at our conscience and we see the moral laws of God at work, convicting, convincing, and revealing the ways of God. We look backwards in history and we see God providentially revealing Himself in historical events and in the greatest historical event which was the coming of God to earth (Incarnation). We look outwardly at the Church and we see God transforming human lives. In every direction we look, we see God!

We have been on our knees, gazing at the heart of God! Looking at the heart of God, we see a cross! The cross has always been on the heart of God, but that cross was revealed to man on Mount Calvary where Jesus died!

If God's love was best demonstrated on the cross, then God's power was best demonstrated by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead! The death and resurrection of Jesus are two parts of one whole. The cross without the resurrection would be great heroism at its best and great tragedy at its worst!

In our search to find God, it is important to look carefully at the Christian belief in the resurrection.

What is the foundation of Christianity? The simple and obvious answer is Christ. "For other foundations can no man lay that that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 3:11) The foundation of Christianity is not an ethical creed or the memory of a religious reformer. Rather, the foundation of Christianity is a living Saviour--a 'Saviour' because Jesus' death was redemptive, and 'living' because Jesus arose from the dead.

One time in India a Christian preacher was preaching and a Mohammedan said to the Christian preacher, "We have a proof in our religion that you haven't got in yours. We can go to Mecca and find the tomb of Mohammed, but when you go to Palestine you can't be sure that you've got the tomb of Jesus."

"Yes," said the Christian preacher, "you're right. We have no tomb in Christianity because we have no corpse." (20 Centuries of Great Preaching; Vol. 9; pg. 322)

"God, I tremble when I think of the terror of the cross, but I thank you that that terror turns to triumph on Easter morning. Dark Friday turns to Good Friday because of that bright Sunday morning!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will glory in the glory of Christianity--a blood-stained cross and an empty tomb!

CHRISTIANITY BEGINS WHERE RELIGION ENDS!

Among the religions of the world, Christianity is unique because Christianity alone rests upon the foundation of the resurrection. In fact, as one great Christian once said, "Christianity begins where religion ends . . . with the resurrection." (Dr. W. A. Criswell)

Christianity is based on a miracle. One day during the French revolution, a man remarked to Talleyrand, who was Bishop of Autun: "The Christian religion--what is it? It would be easy to start a religion like that."

"Oh, yes," replied Talleyrand. "One would only have to get crucified and rise again the third day." (Shoe-Leather Faith; No. 137; Merv Rosell)

It is important to understand that the entire superstructure of Christianity--faith, hope, justice, immortality, transformation--rests upon the foundation of the resurrection. We must in turn look at each one of these concepts which compose the superstructure of Christianity and realize that if the foundation of the resurrection is removed, the entire superstructure will crumble!

Christianity believes that the bodily resurrection of Christ is the foundation of faith. Wrote Paul to the Corinthians: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." (I Corinthians 15:13-18)

If Christ did not rise from the dead, then death had the 'final word,' and death proved to be stronger than life. To put faith in Christ would be to put faith in one who was defeated by death and thus one who had no power over death. If Christ did not overcome death, then He has no power to give man victory over death, regardless of how much faith man puts in Christ. Faith in Christ is only meaningful if Christ conquered death. Belief in the resurrection is the very foundation of faith.

"God, I see now that the value of my faith depends upon the object of my faith. The object of my faith is the resurrected Lord! Through faith in Christ, death becomes my slave! Death serves me because death gives me a grand entry into my heavenly home with Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I shall place my faith in the one person who is totally trustworthy--Jesus, the resurrected Christ!

"HOPE IS A THING WITH FEATHERS!"

Christianity believes that the bodily resurrection of Christ is the foundation of hope.

Emily Dickinson once wrote, "Hope is a thing with feathers." By this she meant that hope is both beautiful and fragile!

Hope is beautiful. It is the dash of flavor in the stuff of everyday life. Without hope a person soon becomes depressed and even physically ill. A man grows hopeless when he thinks that his actions make no difference in the outcome of his little life.

Hope is beautiful because it drives men to great exploits. But hope is also very fragile. Hope must be grounded in nothing less than a living God if hope is to survive in a world of despair. Even Christian believers are not immune to the threats of despair!

When one looks at the outward world, he is tempted to throw away all hope! Modern-day conditions challenge one's hope. The acceleration of pornographic literature in the name of art, the liberalization of abortion laws, the secularization of American higher education, the growing disillusionment with the American political process and judicial system, the inflationary spending habits of Americans which is precipitated by exploitative advertising, and the increasing waves of political terrorism--all of these have combined to attack the very foundations of western civilization!

The 'Golden Calf' of science, before which many Americans have naively worshipped for decades, has failed to give soul security and lasting peace. Men's hearts fail them for fear of what is coming upon the world! World-wide starvation is increasingly becoming a fearful possibility. It is reported that serious devout occultism is stronger than ever before.

From some angles the picture is very dark. Is there any basis for hope? Wrote the Psalmist, "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the maker of heaven and earth." (Psalms 146:5,6a NIV) Wrote Jeremiah, "But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8 NIV)

"God, I so often become shaky when circumstances around me become shaky. My little world within me becomes cloudy when the big world around me is filled with despairing clouds! Help me to rejoice in hope even when circumstances seem hopeless!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** There are no hopeless situations, only people who have grown hopeless about them!

THE RESURRECTION GIVES HISTORY ITS MEANING

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for all hope. Wrote the apostle Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." (I Peter 1:3,4)

By rising from the dead, Christ showed that there is hope beyond the grave--in the future. Christ's resurrection was prerequisite to Christ's eternal reign. Evil will be destroyed and righteousness will triumph. The future belongs to those who believe in and appropriate the power of Christ's resurrection.

If Christ had not risen from the dead, then life and history would have no goal, meaning, or destiny. But the resurrection is proof that nothing--not even death--can destroy history's goal which is the ultimate triumph and reign of righteousness and peace by Christ. The death warrant for evil has been signed by the resurrection.

Remove the resurrection hope and all that is left is present despair and futility and future doom. It is the resurrection that gives history its meaning! Said H. G. Wells, famous historian, shortly before he died: A frightful queerness has come into life. Hitherto events have been held together by a certain logical consistency as the heavenly bodies have been held together by the golden cord of gravitation. Now it is as if that cord has vanished and everything is driven anyhow, anywhere, at a steadily increasing velocity. The writer is convinced that there is no way out or around, or through the impasse. It is the end."

Death, for the Christian, is not the end, but the beginning. The sunset of life introduces the dawn of eternity--eternity with Christ! The winter of death is passed and the resurrection of eternal spring for the sons of men has been ushered in by our all-powerful Lord. The future is bright for the believer of Christ. Said Jesus, "Because I live, you shall live also." Said Bishop Elmer Parsons: "The resurrected Christ will come again to write the final words of history and conclude the plan of God."

Facing the future without God is facing a very dark future. The resurrection of Jesus is the only foundation for a hopeful and bright future.

"Dear God, without the resurrection I am like a lost orphan whistling in the dark trying to ward off my fright. With the resurrection I am like a son stepping into the ever-brightening dawn of my heavenly homeland!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The blazing light of the resurrection dispels my darkness and makes my future bright and hopeful!

## RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

The resurrection is the basis for our hope of having a new body. The Bible teaches that, although the earthly body will decay and return to dust, the spirit of the person never dies. The personality of man will survive eternally. The Bible also teaches that the believer in Christ will receive a new body which is not subject to pain or death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." (John 11:25)

Belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus gives the foundation of hope in the subsequent resurrection of the body of true believers. "The resurrection of Jesus was bodily, and it is not to be confused with the widely-held doctrine of immortality of the soul. It is fashionable today in some scholarly circles to disassociate the resurrection from anything involving the body of Jesus. This is a misuse of terms, for the concept of resurrection implies body. In fact, it is redundant to say 'bodily resurrection.' That is like saying 'widow woman.' When one says 'resurrection,' he has already implied 'body.' The concept of an immortal soul, separate from the body, is a pagan idea, traceable back to pagan religions, centuries before Jesus. This is one falacy refuted in John's Gospel." (Quote from Dr. Frank Stagg; Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky.)

Wrote E. Stanley Jones only a few days before he died at the age of 89: "Sometimes I find myself musing in this way: Dear old body, for the past nine decades we've walked the dusty roads together, we've flown across continents, and you've been uncomplaining even when I've put impossible loads upon you. Thank you for your faithful service, and now you say you'll be faithful till death us do part. When that parting comes, I'll look back at you and salute you and thank you, and I'll say to you, 'When I get my immortal body, I hope there will be a lot of you there incorporated.' Thank you again, for everything." (The Divine Yes; pg. 149)

In his unique way, Jones continues, "I have often said that when the people stand around and say, 'Well, Brother Stanley is gone,' I want to be able to wink at them, and if I have enough strength I would like to laugh and say, 'Jesus is Lord.' Because this will not be death. It will be fuller life. I say this as a half joke, but I believe it will turn out to be reality. Because any person who is in Jesus is deathless, for he is under the principle and power of resurrection." (Ibid; pg. 150)

"God, I have deep-seated urges--the urge for permanence, the urge for transcendence, the urge for personal identity. I believe the resurrected Lord can fulfill these God-created urges!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because of the resurrection of Jesus, I have the capacity to live forever with my Lord, and be personally known and identifiable to all!

## "COME ON UP, EDNA!"

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we have hope of seeing our loved ones who have died in the Lord. Paul wrote to encourage those who were bereaved of loved ones: "Now we don't want you, my brothers to be in any doubt about those who have 'fallen asleep' in death, or to grieve over them like men who have no hope. After all, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again from death, then we can believe that God will just as surely bring with Jesus all who are 'asleep' in him. Here we have a definite message from the Lord. It is that those who are still living when he comes will not in any way precede those who have previously fallen asleep. One word of command, one shout from the archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and the Lord himself will come down from Heaven! Those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and then we who are still living on the earth will be swept up with them into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And after that we shall be with him for ever. So by all means use this message to encourage one another. (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

This scripture gives great comfort during times of great sorrow. One person in my childhood who greatly influenced me to be a Christian was my great aunt (my grandmother's sister). She was a cripple all of her life, but she lived to be an old person. Only hours after she was born, she was stricken with polio and therefore she never knew what it was to walk without leg braces. She never married and was dependent upon other family members, including my grandmother, to care for her. She was one of the kindest Christians I ever knew. She gave me my first Bible in which she wrote, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." (Psalms 62:5) My 'Aunt Mary' was no stranger to pain and disappointment, as she hobbled along in life. But she was always sweet in her spirit and faithful to her Lord. My grandmother, who was caring for her at the time, wept when 'Aunt Mary' died. The sorrow she felt in her loneliness was great, and comfort in her loss was hard to find. One night God gave my grandmother a vision of 'Aunt Mary.' '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.'

"The pain of separation from loved ones is more than I can bear! Will I see and know them again? Yes! Because of the resurrection, I shall be with thee, O Christ, and with them! Glory!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The resurrection is my upward call from God to a new life and to a new body!

THE RESURRECTION HOPE

What about our loved ones who have already died? Where are they right now? Is there any evidence that they are with Christ?

A few years ago, my wife's mother had a most wonderful experience. The following is the account of that experience: "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 alright. 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."

"'If a man keep my saying he shall never see death' (John 8:51); 'Who-soever 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. . . . 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; J. B. Phillips; pg. 212-213)

Wrote Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21 NIV) "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." (II Corinthians 5:1 Living Bible)

"O Christ, because you live, I too shall live forever. Sometimes my earthly body makes me groan and sigh, reminding me that this present body is but a temporary dwelling place for my eternal spirit which shall someday take its flight to You. Earth's pains shall give way to heaven's pleasures, and death shall be swallowed up by everlasting life! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Death for me shall be a joyful departure, not a tragic disaster, for I have a grip on the timeless life of God!

"HOW LONG SHALL THE WICKED TRIUMPH?"

We have noted thus far that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for faith and hope. Christianity also believes that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of justice.

Oftentimes in this present life, wrong goes unpunished and right goes unrewarded. In this life it sometimes seems that the balance is tipped in favor of the wrong. One is tempted to ask with the Psalmist, "How long shall the wicked triumph?" (Psalms 94:3) When Jesus was crucified, it seemed that evil was triumphant and justice was mocked, but God's resurrection of Jesus vindicated God's righteousness and justice. Christians believe that the resurrection is proof that ultimately righteousness will be rewarded and evil will be punished. Christ is the firstfruits of those who will rise from the dead. The righteous, like Christ, will be raised to the resurrection of life and then the righteous of all ages will be vindicated, and impartial justice will be rendered.

In this life it sometimes seems that the balance is tipped in favor of the wrong, but in eternity each man will receive his just due. Lenin wrote: "Every religious idea, every idea of God, even flirting with the idea of God, is unutterable vileness of the most dangerous kind, contagion of the most abominable kind. Millions of sins, filthy deeds, acts of violence and physical contagion are far less dangerous than the subtle, spiritual idea of a God." Lenin's disregard for God and religion has perpetuated brutality and unrestrained evil in the Communist system. It is said that if Joseph Stalin, a leader of the Communist Revolution, had done nothing else all his life but to write the names of his innocent victims, his life would not have been long enough to finish the job! Hitler killed six million Jews, but Communism has killed thirty million Russians and millions of Chinese and others, including many Jews!

The resurrection of Jesus guarantees a future resurrection of all men-- the righteous to a resurrection of life, and the wicked to a resurrection of damnation! "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." (II Thessalonians 1:6-10 NIV)

"Thou great accountant of the universe, I know you will someday 'balance the books.' Unrestrained evil will be punished, and unrewarded good will be rewarded. I commit the cause of justice into the hands of a just God!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because this is a moral universe, I will act justly and righteously!

## RESURRECTION - LAST WORD IN HUMAN AFFAIRS!

The resurrection of Jesus answers some of our most troublesome questions regarding the seeming triumph of evil and injustice. In his book, the last one he wrote during his long life, E. Stanley Jones dealt effectively with the problem of injustice.

"First, how far can force go in a world of this kind? As long as people believe that the last word in human affairs goes to force, force can go a long way. It can do that today and tomorrow, but the third day, no! For goodness arises from the dead and goodness is the last word. The guards were like dead men, and Jesus was alive. Force can go a long way, but it can only go two days. The third day God raised him from the dead. He himself is the answer, and illustrates that answer in his own body.

"Second, how far can lies go? Lies can put the purest and gentlest and most truthful person on the cross today and tomorrow, but the third day, no! The universe is not built for the success of a lie. . . . Life cannot stand upon the insecurity of a lie. A lie has nothing behind it except itself. The universe makes a lie break itself upon the universe. The universe is not broken for it is established on God's truth. So how far can lies go! A long way. They twisted his words and made them into lies. He was crucified on lies. So lies can go the first day and the second day, but the third day, no! How many lies did it take to try to break the truth of the Gospel? They gave some persons money in those days to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. Jesus raised the question on the cross and answered it in the resurrection. How much money do you think it will take to stop the Christian Gospel now?

"Third, how far can evil go in a world of this kind? Does the moral universe bend to evil? The answer is No! Today, tomorrow, but the third day, no! The third day, evil breaks itself upon the facts of life. The word EVIL in English is the word LIVE spelled backward. In other words, the universe is not built to accept evil. Only truth has the moral universe behind it. There is nothing behind evil except evil. Today and tomorrow evil may be strong, but the third day evil breaks itself upon the nature of reality. For the Christian Gospel and reality are one--in fullest accord. The sum total of reality is behind the Christian Gospel. So the Christian code which is now a character becomes a question mark today, tomorrow, but the third day it becomes an exclamation point. Jesus is alive! He is risen!" (The Divine Yes; pg. 105-107)

"God, there is no power on earth or in hell that can thwart your purposes! 'Though wrong seems oft so strong, God is Ruler yet!'

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power available to overcome evil now!

FULFILLED ASPIRATIONS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF TIME

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for all of life. The foundation for faith, hope, and justice. Also, as we will see today, the foundation for fulfilled aspirations.

There is within the breast of every man a longing for immortality. Man is born with a thirst for infinity. Man is overbuilt for this world, and his aspirations call for a fulfillment that is beyond the scope of time.

The very existence of aspirations is a clue that man is not merely a product of nature, but that he is a spiritual creature whose true greatness is found in a supernatural. Says Harold Sloan, "In nature, then, man aspires, but he merely aspires and dies. The universe provides no fulfillment for his outreachings. Two courses only are open to him. He can surrender to disillusionment, despair, and cynicism, or he can turn from the natural to the supernatural, discovering the answer to his need in forces which transcend nature. . . . Shall man, then, whose faculties lift him so high above the beast, deny the actuality of everything those higher faculties need for fulfillment, and shut himself up to the universe of the beasts? . . . Man's aspirations belong to his inner world; and it is this inner world which he knows most immediately, and therefore best." (He Is Risen; pg. 22, 27)

If man's aspirations are so real to him and these aspirations cannot possibly be fulfilled within the short span of a lifetime, then the very presence of the growing aspirations points to a fulfillment beyond the confines of time, a fulfillment that reaches into eternity. But if aspirations are to be fulfilled in eternity, there must be a life hereafter. But there can be no life hereafter if Christ did not rise from the dead. Therefore, Christ's resurrection is necessary as the foundation for the fulfillment of man's deepest aspirations.

Man spends his entire lifetime, striving to grow, working to create, laboring to accumulate wisdom and knowledge. And then man dies! A thousand unfulfilled dreams! Does death end it all? Is there no future opportunity for man's deepest longings to be fulfilled? Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no resurrection for man, and without a resurrection for man, there is no opportunity for life's deepest aspirations to find fulfillment! The satisfaction of man's deepest aspirations in the supernatural, immortal realm is only made possible because of Christ's resurrection.

"Loving Creator, thank you for life's clues to spiritual reality. The lungs are made for air, the stomach for food, the eyes for beauty, the ears for music. Are not the deepest aspirations of my spirit created by God to be fulfilled by God in eternity?"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Christ lives, my aspirations will not die!

AN UGLY WORM CAN BECOME A BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLY!

It is the fundamental belief of Christians that, without the resurrection, one's faith in Christ is an illusion, one's hope is useless, life's injustices are permanent, man's deepest aspirations remain unfulfilled, and man's transformation is impossible. It is this last point that we must look at today.

Christianity believes that the resurrection is the foundation of personal transformation. Christians point to the many New Testament passages which state that the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to transform lives and to change society. Wherever resurrection power has touched individuals or society, things have drastically changed!

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

The Bible says that your past guilt can be removed and that you can be totally forgiven. Under the power of the resurrected Christ, your human nature can change! Everything can become new! An ugly worm can become a beautiful butterfly, and a dried up root can bloom into a sweet-smelling flower. A bad man can become a good man! "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Corinthians 5:17 NIV)

The great writer, Alexander Pope, muttered: "O Lord, make me a better man," and his spiritually enlightened page replied: "It would be easier to make you a new man." Perhaps you, like Pope, have longed for sweet peace. Then no longer simply try to patch up your life, but let the great and powerful Lord--the resurrected Christ--come into your inner life to remake you, to convert you, to transform you within. Remember, reformation is a human attempt at change; transformation is a God-wrought change. The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to transform your life! You don't have to remain the kind of person that you are. Your conscious and subconscious mind alike can be converted. You can start anew!

One girl who accepted Jesus as her Saviour was so changed that someone told her that she appeared to have 'swallowed sunshine.'

"An alcoholic came to a place of prayer and said, 'O Jesus, if you are going to save me, why don't you do it?' Then he opened his eyes and claimed, 'Boys, he has done it.'" (The Divine Yes; E. S. Jones; pg. 92)

"O Thou Christ, who defied the power of death and left the tomb empty, let that same power that accomplished the humanly impossible be exercised in my life to change me into a new person."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I choose, not to become a better person, but a new person, through the transforming power of the resurrected Christ!

THE RESURRECTION VINDICATED GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

During the last several days, we have looked at the foundation of Christianity--the resurrection of Jesus. We have seen that the resurrection is the foundation upon which the entire superstructure of Christianity is built. The resurrection is the foundation for faith, hope, justice, fulfilled aspirations, and transformation of human nature. Because of its central place in Christianity, we must continue to look at the resurrection, seeking to further understand its meaning and significance.

If Jesus would not have been raised from the dead, certain conclusions would have to be drawn: (1) Jesus was a mere man, even though a great man; (2) Death is more powerful than life; (3) God is not just and loving.

"Long ago some one read the story of the death of Jesus to King Clovis, who was a barbarian, not a Christian; and suddenly, as the story went on, his hand reached for his sword, and drew it, and 'Oh,' he cried, 'if only I had been there with my Franks! We'd have charged up the slopes of Calvary, and smashed those Romans, and saved Him!' But if God, watching Calvary, did nothing--left it at that, and knew this was the end of Christ for ever? Then we are back where Huxley was. 'I cannot see,' he said, 'one shadow or tittle of evidence that God is love.'" (The Gates of New Life; Stewart; pg. 163)

For God to have allowed Jesus to remain in the tomb, would have been a sign that Jesus was not God, that Jesus was not righteous, that death was stronger than life, that evil was stronger than righteousness!

During Jesus' lifetime, God declared Jesus as righteous, but such a claim would be invalidated if Jesus would have remained sealed in a tomb. The resurrection of Jesus is an absolute necessity if God's claim to Jesus' righteousness is to be validated. God had to raise His Son to life to show that the sinless Son of God could not be overcome by the sinful sons of the devil! If the evil plots of men are to be revealed for what they are, and if the righteousness of Jesus is to be vindicated, then Jesus must rise from the dead! Evil must be cut down, if not on the first day or on the second day, then always on the third day!

Also, the resurrection proves God's trustworthiness. For generations, God promised to establish His Messianic kingdom. The death and resurrection were the fulfillments of that promise. God is never slack in fulfilling His promises (II Peter 3:9).

"God, you so loved your world that you gave your Son to die for the sake of sinners. God, you so loved your Son that you raised Him from death for the sake of justice! Such love and such justice!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The resurrection is the badge of Christ's authority to establish his long-predicted Messianic kingdom in the hearts and lives of people--people like me!

## THE RESURRECTION DEMONSTRATED GOD'S POWER

"The clash you see at Calvary was not only between Jesus and His enemies: it was between God and the devil--the two great world powers grappling there, locked in wrestler's grip. And if the cross finished things, then down in the underworld that night there must have run a savage cry, 'We win! We win! God is blotted out.' Power? says Paul. If Christ be not raised, don't tell me God is power." (The Gates of New Life; Stewart; pg. 163)

"The triumph of the resurrection was conclusive evidence of the vast spiritual power exerted through Christ against those enemies of man which had never previously been defeated--sin and death. . . . God, by spiritual power, raised his Son from the dead. The physical force which moved the stone from the tomb and reduced the tough Roman soldiers to terror was only a trifle, a mere straw in the wind which in its holy blast destroyed the power of sin and death. Can you hear the ring of holy joy behind these exultant words of Paul: 'And then, having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, he exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in his final glorious triumphant act.'" (Good News; J. B. Phillips; pg. 200-201)

What Satan thought was his greatest triumph became in reality his greatest tragedy! Satan claimed victory when he saw Jesus hang His head in death on the cross. Satan was crushed three days later when he looked into an empty tomb and knew that Jesus was to ascend to the right hand of His Father's kingly throne! The demons' cries of triumph on Calvary's Friday suddenly turned into cries of terror on Easter morning! Christ disarmed the power of Satan!

"Death cannot keep his prey,  
Jesus, my Saviour!  
He tore the bars away,  
Jesus, my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever with his saints to reign;  
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

The greatest weapon of Satan has always been death. When Christ arose from the dead, Jesus captured Satan's chief weapon!

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15:55,56 NIV)

"Mighty God, I see that I do not fight for a victory; I fight from a victory! The victory over Satan has already been won--on Easter morning! Help me to claim that historic victory as my personal victory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I place my faith in Jesus, I am placing my faith in one who has conquered my greatest enemy--Death!

THE RESURRECTION SEALED SATAN'S DOOM!

War took place in heaven! The most beautiful and powerful angel of heaven, who was himself a created being, became drunken with pride and decided to replace God on His throne! The origin of sin is found in this treasonous act when God's chief angel sought to exalt himself above his created position.

Satan was cast out of heaven, only to cause problems on earth. Satan instigated man's fall into sin. Satan became known as the 'prince of this world' for he usurped God's rightful place of authority.

Considering the power of Satan and the sway of evil, can we truthfully say that Jesus is Lord of history? Considering Satan's cruel power, and considering Jesus' humble earthly life, how can one say that Jesus is the conquering king and Satan is the defeated foe?

The resurrection is the basis for such a positive declaration! By His death and resurrection, Jesus has destroyed him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and Jesus frees those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

What an irony! Through Jesus' death, death for mankind is destroyed! What Satan thought was his greatest victory, became instead his greatest defeat!

Why did Jesus' death destroy death? Because Jesus' death was followed by His resurrection! The death and resurrection of Jesus are two parts of one whole. The death of Jesus must always be interpreted in light of the resurrection of Jesus. The greatest tragedy of history--the death of Jesus--turned out to be the greatest triumph of history because of the resurrection!

The resurrection is what makes Jesus the conquering king and Satan the defeated foe! "Christians, though living in a world still under the prince of darkness, give daily testimony that the prince of darkness has already been judged and the lordship of Jesus is already affirmed. We await the coronation." (Belonging; Adventures in Church Membership; Donald Bastian; pg. 45)

The prince of this world, Satan, has been judged. Satan's head has been crushed (Genesis 3:15). His sentence of death has been pronounced. The broken seal on Jesus' tomb becomes Satan's seal of death! God has already appointed his day of execution: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:10) While he awaits his final day of execution, Satan is taking out his bitterness upon mankind. However, Satan's total destruction is certain! Jesus guaranteed final victory for His Church when He arose victoriously from the dead. Said the victorious Christ: "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!" (Matthew 16:18)

"Victorious Christ, the judgment of the enemy guarantees the execution of the enemy! The crushing of the serpent's head guarantees the total destruction of the serpent! Satan shall no longer be 'on the loose.' Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The bitterness of the battle against evil can be endured when I am assured of the victorious outcome of the battle!

"WHY WAS I SO AFRAID OF THIS THING CALLED DEATH?"

Is there any hope for life after death? Without Jesus' resurrection there would be no hope for the future, after physical death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." (John 11:25) Belief in the resurrection of Jesus gives the foundation of hope in the subsequent resurrection of the body of true believers.

To help you anticipate your future resurrection life, think of life's stages. "The unborn child is up under his mother's heart, well taken care of, well fed, and happy. He likes it there. Suppose then, that someone could come to the baby and tell him, 'You're going to be born. You're not going to stay here.' And he would learn that by being born, he would leave this warm secure place. That would not be being born to him, that would be dying for him. Dying is an end. And the baby would say, 'I don't want to be born. I don't want to die. I like it here. I'm warm. I feel love all around me. I'm happy and content. Just leave me alone. I don't want to leave this nice place.'

"But there comes a day when he is born. Or, looking at it from his angle, when he dies out of that place, and is born into our world.

"What happens to him? He feels soft, tender, loving hands gently holding him. He looks up into a wondrous face, that is full of love, and it is shining down at him. Then as he grows, he has the glorious experiences of childhood, and young manhood, and the future is before him. He feels strong and it is good to be alive. He marries and raises children. He becomes middle aged. He is creative and happy, and life is good. The world is good. And the years begin to add up. His hair becomes white, and his form a bit feeble. He knows he has to die, to leave all this and go into another place. But he protests: 'I don't want to die. I like it here. I love to feel the warmth of the sun on my face, the softness of the rain, the sting of snow. I love to see great mountains, shouldering out the sky. I love to watch the ocean washing upon soft shores of sand. I love to be with my family, and my friends. Life is good; I don't want to leave here.'

"But one day he does die, to this world.

"Do you mean to tell me that all of a sudden God changes? Isn't it reasonable to believe that the first thing he will feel is the touch of great loving hands; that he will look up into a face that is infinitely loving? He will look around him, and his breath will be taken away by the beauties that he sees. All tears will be wiped from his eyes. And he will say, 'Why was I so afraid of this thing called death, when as I now see, it is life!'

"And the Christian will live forever!" (quoted by Robert Andrews on the 'Light and Life Hour'; April 22, 1973)

"God, if on earth I see your smiling face in the beautiful sunset, and feel your love in the cool breeze of the early morning, what will your presence be like in heaven!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21 NIV)

"I WAS TALKING WITH HIM THIS MORNING!"

Provision has been made for your forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life! What is the basis for that provision? Jesus' death for your sins and His demonstration of power over sin, death, and hell as shown in the powerful resurrection! "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." (I Corinthians 15:17 NIV) You need forgiveness, but without Jesus' resurrection, there is no forgiveness of sin! "If the cross was the end, Christ's brave pathetic attempt to be a Saviour failed. Because the sins of men that slew Him had the last word." (The Gates of New Life; James Stewart; pg. 165)

But forgiveness is provided because of the empty tomb!

You cannot live abundantly without forgiveness! "There is a dreadful passage in Carlyle where he imagines a man trying to run away from his own shadow; and ever and again he turns round, and it is still there, that black thing, dogging him; on and on, flinging himself wildly away from it--and round again, and it is still there; and he is panting now, and dead-beat: 'God, God, I can't get away from it!' That is sin--if there is no forgiveness." (Ibid; 155)

Because Christ died and arose from the dead, He has power on earth to forgive sins! Hallelujah!

The Christ who arose from the dead is the Christ who seeks to indwell the heart of every man. The incredible power that raised Christ from the dead is the same incredible power that is available to convert, cleanse, comfort, and challenge modern-day man. "I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven." (Ephesians 1:19,20)

The phrase 'in Christ' is used frequently in the New Testament. As birds are 'in' the air constantly, and as fish are 'in' the water because that is their natural habitat, so Christians are to be 'in' Christ constantly--drawing constantly upon His presence and power. The resurrection makes possible the living presence of Christ. "Two young men were discussing the account of the resurrection of Jesus. They agreed that such a thing was impossible. Seeing an old Christian gentleman approaching, one of them accosted him with, 'Tell us, why are you so sure that Jesus rose from the dead?' Said the old gentleman, 'Well, for one thing, I was talking with Him this morning.'" (Shoe-Leather Faith; No. 133; Merv Rosell)

"God, to me the most beautiful word in all human languages is 'forgiveness,' but all talk of forgiveness is an illusion without the resurrection of your Son. Because He vanquished death, my sin is vanquished! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am a great sinner in need of a great Saviour--Jesus!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE VICTORY OF A CONQUERING GOD' (Part I)

1. If the foundation of Christianity is not an ethical creed or the memory of a religious reformer, what is the foundation of Christianity?
2. Describe what is meant by the statement: "The entire superstructure of Christianity rests upon the foundation of the resurrection."
3. Why is the bodily resurrection of Jesus the foundation of faith? (Note I Corinthians 15:13-18.)
4. In a world of despair and disillusionment, what is the Christian's basis for hope? (Note I Peter 1:3,4.)
5. Describe what is meant by the statement: "The future belongs to those who believe in and appropriate the power of Christ's resurrection."
6. Why can it be said that the bodily resurrection of Jesus gives history its meaning?
7. Describe what is meant by the statement: "The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for our hope of having a new body." What scriptural support can you cite as evidence that there will be a future bodily resurrection for believers?
8. Can you share any personal experience (i.e., your vision or the vision of one of your friends) which gives further support for your belief in a future glorious life with Christ?
9. What attitude should a sincere Christian have regarding physical death?
10. Why is the resurrection of Jesus the foundation for all justice?
11. In what ways does the resurrection of Jesus answer some of our most troublesome questions regarding the seeming triumph of evil and injustice?
12. Why is Christ's resurrection necessary as the foundation for the fulfillment of man's deepest aspirations?
13. What is the basis for personal human transformation?
14. What is the difference between a person becoming a new person and a person becoming a better person? (Define the difference between transformation and reformation.)
15. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "For God to have allowed Jesus to remain in the tomb, would have been a sign that Jesus was not God, that Jesus was not righteous, that death was stronger than life, that evil was stronger than righteousness!"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE VICTORY OF A CONQUERING GOD' (Part I) - Cont.

16. Concerning your own personal confrontation with evil and injustice, describe what comfort you can receive from the following statement: "Evil must be cut down, if not on the first day or on the second day, then always on the third day!"
17. Describe what is meant by the following statement: "The resurrection of Jesus is the badge of Christ's authority to establish His long-predicted Messianic kingdom in the hearts and lives of people."
18. Describe what is meant by the following statement: "What Satan thought was his greatest triumph became in reality his greatest tragedy!"
19. Do you, as a believer, fight FOR a victory or do you fight FROM a victory? Explain your answer.
20. Considering Satan's cruel power, and considering Jesus' humble earthly life, how can one say that Jesus is the conquering king and Satan is the defeated foe?
21. Describe what is meant by the statement: "Jesus' death destroyed death!" (Note Hebrews 2:14-15.)
22. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The incredible power that raised Christ from the dead is the same incredible power that is available to convert, cleanse, comfort, and challenge modern-day man." (Have you personally appropriated that power in your life? Are you coming to know Christ personally?)



Chapter 11

THE VICTORY OF A CONQUERING GOD (II)

(The Resurrection Historically and Philosophically Considered)

WHO MOVED THE STONE?

We are looking at the meaning of Christ's resurrection. Great things were accomplished when Christ arose from the dead. The resurrection vindicated God's righteousness, proved God's promises, demonstrated God's power, sealed Satan's doom, provided man's salvation, and guaranteed man's future resurrection life!

Do you possess and enjoy the hope which the resurrection has brought into our despairing world? That hope has been given to our world through the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus. However, that hope only becomes yours personally and experientially as you take the living Christ into your life as Saviour and Lord. You must abandon all hope for salvation, aside from Jesus Christ. You can't save yourself. Only the resurrected Christ can save you. Turn your life over to the One who has conquered your enemy--death. Confess your sins today and let the power that raised Christ from the dead touch and transform your life.

He can deliver you from the bondage of fear and death, and give you new life. He can write your name in the 'Book of Life' (Revelation 20:15). You can live an abundant life on earth and enjoy eternal life with Christ someday in heaven. Turn your life over to Christ. Remember, the object of your faith determines the value of your faith. Put your faith in the resurrected Christ and you will live forever!

There are three ways to look at the resurrection of Jesus--devotionally, historically, and philosophically. Each way is important for a complete understanding of the resurrection. Some there are, honest people, who would like to enjoy the affirmations regarding the resurrection, devotionally, but who question the resurrection's historical authenticity and philosophical feasibility. It is to these honest people, who entertain honest doubts, that we must now speak.

If Christianity is founded on belief in the resurrection of Christ, what evidence is there that the resurrection is a historical fact?

The scriptures say that certain women found the tomb empty on Easter Day. The question that must be answered is, "Who moved the stone and what happened to the body of Jesus?"

Several theories have been given in an attempt to explain the empty tomb--explanations other than the traditional Christian explanation. We must give an honest answer to those who would ask us for a reason for the hope that we have within us. To do this we must briefly examine the theories which have been advanced to explain away the resurrection of Jesus.

"My heart cannot rejoice in what my mind rejects. My faith must be based on facts, not illusions! Thank you, God, that You are open to honest inquiry!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Honest doubt is the shadow side of honest belief. If I ask honest questions, I will find truthful answers!

FOOLISH THEORIES TO EXPLAIN AWAY THE RESURRECTION

To confront doubts regarding the historical reliability of the resurrection, we must examine the theories which have been advanced to explain away the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

To explain away the resurrection, some say that the women went to the wrong sepulchre. It is said by some that the women went to the wrong sepulchre because it was dark and they were greatly grief-stricken. There are two main weaknesses in this theory: (1) It was not completely dark. Luke says that it was 'at early dawn' (Luke 24:1), and Mark says that 'the sun had risen' (Mark 16:2). (2) These women were no fools. Two of the women who went to the sepulchre in the early morning had previously watched the whole process of burying. There were at least five women who visited the tomb, and therefore if one started on the wrong path, she would be corrected by another. It is not likely that all would go to the wrong sepulchre. Mary Magdalene returned later in the full light of the day, and if she would have gone to the wrong place the first time, it is not likely that she would have made the same mistake the second time. When these women came in the early morning, they came with a businesslike concern to anoint the body and they were determined to complete their tasks. If they had gone to the wrong place the first time, they would not have given up until they had found the right tomb.

There is another theory. It is called the Swoon Theory. Some say Jesus did not die on the cross, but that he only fainted. He revived in the tomb, left it, and then showed Himself to His disciples, and convinced them that He was the glorious Lord! It is almost impossible to conceive that people could take this theory seriously. (1) Only after Pilate was thoroughly convinced by the centurion that Jesus was dead, did he give Joseph permission to remove the body. The centurion probably was present when "one of the soldiers pierced his (Jesus') side with a spear, and at once there came out blood." (John 19:34) (2) It is inconceivable to believe that if Jesus fainted, he would be able to survive for thirty-six hours in a stone sepulchre without warmth or food, after He had experienced the pains of trial, mockery, flogging, and crucifixion. How could a weakling whose body was racked by pain, be able to move a large boulder, and that without disturbing the Roman guard? (3) How could a weak and sickly person give the disciples the notion that He was glorious in appearance and victorious over death? Would he not rather have a ghastly, deathly appearance, after going through such an ordeal? What happened to Jesus after the forty days? Could He have died without anyone knowing about it?

"God, I am so grateful that I do not have to commit intellectual suicide to become a Christian! My 'leap of faith' is not a blind leap! Christianity's faith is based on history's facts! Wonderful!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: An unexamined faith is a faith not worth having! My search for truths will lead me to surrender to the truth!

## WAS JESUS' BODY STOLEN?

Another theory says that thieves stole the body of Jesus. There is no evidence for this. How could thieves have escaped the attention of the guards to move the stone? Why would thieves have wanted the body in the first place, and why would they leave the clothes undisturbed?

Some say that Jesus' disciples removed the body of Jesus. It is argued by some that Jesus' disciples took the body while the guards slept. There are certain real difficulties to this theory also. (1) The soldiers were especially chosen to guard the tomb in order that the disciples might not steal the body and then claim that he arose from the dead. It is highly unlikely that all of the guards would have slept when they had a special assignment. How would guileless and defenseless women get past the guard to roll away the heavy stone? (2) The disciples' main emphasis in their preaching was the resurrection, and they were willing even to suffer for preaching it. Psychologically it is almost unthinkable that a group of men would suffer for a cause that they well knew was not genuine. The disciples were so convinced of the reality of the resurrection that they were willing joyfully to lay down their lives in martyrdom!

Others advance the theory that Roman or Jewish authorities took the body. Some argue that to avoid the trickery of the disciples or of others, the authorities took Jesus' body into safe custody. This theory has one main weakness which makes it completely invalid. The preaching of the resurrection by the disciples caused great disturbance, both to the Jews and Romans. As John Stott says, "The Jews feared conversions; the Romans riots." To avoid the disturbance which the preaching of the resurrection brought to both the Jewish authorities and Roman authorities, the body of Jesus could have been produced, if it had been taken by the authorities. The authorities never attempted to produce the body of Christ. If they could have produced it, Christianity would have been destroyed before it even got a good start.

These are the theories presented to explain away the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are harder to believe than the supernatural explanation of the Bible!

The resurrection is positively proven in the two following ways: (1) The Lord was bodily seen alive after the crucifixion; (2) The lives of the disciples were radically changed. The tomb was not only empty, but many actually saw the Lord after the crucifixion and their lives, as a result of seeing the living Christ, were wonderfully changed! "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (I Corinthians 15:3-8)

"God, you honor the honest doubter and condemn the dishonest doubter! My honest doubts are fading in the light of historical truth! Thank you for honest evidence--evidence that demands a moral verdict!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because the body of Christ could not be produced, the body of the Church cannot be destroyed!

## HYSTERICAL VISIONS OR HISTORIC FACTS?

Paul lists those who saw Christ alive after the crucifixion: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." (I Corinthians 15:3-8)

J. B. Phillips, well known New Testament translator, writes concerning the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians: "Then I came to the fifteenth chapter, which I have come to regard in some ways as the the most important chapter in the New Testament. Certainly it is the earliest evidence for the resurrection of Christ. We need to remind ourselves that so far there were no written gospels, and that these words were written some twenty years after the crucifixion of Jesus. There would still be many alive who knew and remembered him, and Paul lists some of those who saw Christ alive after his very public death. I was struck again by the 'over five hundred Christians' who saw Jesus simultaneously, 'of whom,' Paul comments, 'the majority are still alive.' The evidence for the resurrection does not rest on hysterical visions in the half-light of early dawn but on actual 'appearances,' the last of which seems to have happened to Paul. I noticed the flat, matter-of-fact recital of known events. There is no attempt to persuade or prove, and certainly there is no artistic embellishment. Paul is, in effect, saying: these are the historic facts which we know." (Ring of Truth; pg. 32)

Some explanation must be given for the dramatic changes in the disciples' lives and many other Jews in Jerusalem. The same Peter who denied his Lord, is soon found fearlessly preaching in Jerusalem. Hundreds of Jews were converted within Jerusalem, despite the threat of the angry Jewish leaders. The message of the apostles was discussed and critically examined, and proved to be valid and persuasive.

Not only was Peter persuaded of the validity of the resurrection and even risked his life to preach it, but James, the brother of the Lord, became a strong leader among the believers in Jerusalem. James had previously opposed Christ and showed no tendencies to follow the teachings of his older brother. What factor so radically changed his life? What caused him to be willing to suffer martyrdom for the new movement? Nothing less than the fact of the resurrection! What turned Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle? The resurrection!

"God, what power can make the fearful into the fearless, the doubter into the believer, the impotent into the powerful, the whiner into the winner, the spineless into the courageous? The world has been shaped and shocked since Jesus came! Why? Because of resurrection power? I believe so!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Nothing less than resurrection power can change a Saul into a Paul, a bad man into a good man!

IS THE RESURRECTION PHILOSOPHICALLY FEASIBLE?

We noted yesterday that the fact of the resurrection turned sinners into saints and persecutors of the faith into proclaimers of the faith! The disciples were so convinced that the resurrection was a fact, that their cowardice and disbelief were changed to an invincible faith. They could not doubt the validity of the resurrection after they had seen the Lord with their own eyes!

The very existence of the Christian Church for nineteen centuries, through periods of bitter persecution, is further evidence that a supernatural power was released into the world--a power that Christians call 'resurrection power' which enabled the Church 'to stand the test of time.'

Further, "there is the institution of the Christian Sunday--which can also be traced back to much the same place and date. To what does this owe its inception? The Jews were fanatically attached to their Sabbath, and the early Church was almost exclusively Jewish. It must have required some event of the deepest and most startling significance to make them change to the first day of the week. It did: it was nothing less than the resurrection. And the same line of reasoning can be applied to the festival of Easter." (The Evidence for the Resurrection; by J. N. D. Anderson; pg. 14)

There are those, however, who, even after being moved by the resurrection story, and after even being honestly and intellectually persuaded that the historical evidence for the resurrection is sufficient and valid, are nevertheless inwardly compelled to conclude that a dead man rising from the dead is so incredible that it is impossible to believe. Some who might be inclined to admit to the historical validity of the resurrection are not so quickly inclined personally to believe, because of the supposed rational and philosophical impossibility of the resurrection. Such an attitude of skepticism (after all the historical evidence is in) must be declared as prejudiced and unscientific. Nevertheless, the following question is worthy of consideration: "Can the resurrection be shown to be, not only historically valid, but also philosophically feasible?"

There is convincing evidence, other than the resurrection, for believing that Jesus was 'God manifest in the flesh,' although it must be admitted that the resurrection is the conclusive evidence. Jesus' unique claims, Jesus' miraculous works, the testimony of friends and enemies alike as to the sinlessness of Jesus' character, the mystery and majesty of Jesus' teaching--these facts all point to Jesus' deity. Should it seem incompatible and inconsistent for Jesus, who had shown such uniqueness preceding the resurrection, to have shown uniqueness in the events surrounding His death?

"God, the least I can say about Jesus is that He is unique! Unique in the way He came into the world! Unique in His words and works! Unique in His reactions to His enemies who nailed Him to a cross! Unique in his victory over death!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because Jesus is altogether unique, He has a unique claim on my life!

## A PURPOSIVE UNIVERSE

We contended yesterday that if Jesus showed uniqueness in His life, it should not be surprising that He showed uniqueness in His death. Considering the resurrection philosophically, should it seem incredible that Jesus, who was 'God manifest in human flesh' (as shown by all other evidence), should rise from the dead? Would it not be far more incredible if He had not?

Those who consider the report of the resurrection as philosophically infeasible, are those who have chosen a naturalistic view of reality. To adopt the naturalistic position is to adopt a mechanical, closed-ended conception which holds that the universe is like a perpetual-motion machine with fixed laws over which God has no control, and in which anything that appears to contradict the normal laws of nature cannot happen.

The one who has intellectual problems in philosophically accepting the resurrection as a real possibility needs to consider the broader, more inclusive view of reality; namely, the supernaturalistic view of reality, or sometimes called the purposive view of reality.

To adopt the supernaturalistic view of reality is to adopt the purposive view of reality. The purposive view offers a logical explanation for novelties or irregularities in nature. Prayer, providence, and miracles (the greatest of which is the resurrection) are understandable, and science and religion are complementary in understanding reality. It is not a matter of choosing between uniformity in nature's laws and reports of miracles, but both can be accepted without conflict or contradiction.

The principle can be apprehended and illustrated by noting that human experience and nature both show constancy in general, but flexibility in specific. For example, the general trend in a person's moral development can be predicted, but not the specific decisions, since they are made not on the basis of efficient causation, but on the basis of good as apprehended. As another example, consider that although there is uniformity in laws, nature shows flexibility in the changing of seasons and in the variety of days. There is constancy, but not identity.

Because God is the sovereign ruler of the universe and creator of all natural laws, it is altogether reasonable to think that He could introduce a supernatural event in history if it would serve His eternal purposes. This world with its laws is a subsidiary system, subject to God's will and eternal purposes. Natural law says that a dead man cannot rise from the dead. God's eternal purpose demands that one man, Jesus, must rise from the dead if mankind is to be saved! A universe which has redemptive purposes at its heart makes the resurrection of Jesus both a philosophical feasibility and a moral necessity!

"God, I see that you are reliable enough to give mankind predicable laws by which he can routinely live his life, and yet you are loving enough to transcend natural laws, by which, through the resurrection, you save mankind from the unbearable routine of sin!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** Because this is a purposive universe, I will live purposefully!

## RESURRECTION - A DIVINE ACTION CONSISTENT WITH DIVINE PURPOSE!

Another example of this principle of constancy without identity is seen in the fact that man's physiological processes are mostly mechanical, but his rational, mental processes are purposive, and therefore, man's mind not only supersedes his body, but guides it. "Professor Webb of Oxford insists that all men do, in practice, distinguish between one set of qualities, such as extension and motion, which we attribute to bodies and another set of qualities, such as those of thinking and feeling, which we attribute to minds. If we are going to be empirical, accepting the world as we find it, we must somehow find room for both sets of qualities." (Philosophy of Religion; Elton Trueblood; pg. 214) Thus, one can see that the purposive explanation for reality not only includes the mechanical, but transcends it. "The purposive conception is dualistic or pluralistic in that it admits the existence of both minds and bodies, though both are part of the same creation. Purpose is the larger conception, since it can include mechanism, and mechanism cannot include purpose. The purposive systems we know best (i.e., human beings) include mechanical levels which operate alongside the levels of consciousness and, though they follow different laws, can be used in the service of purpose." (Ibid; pg. 212)

From these examples it is plausible to see that, just as the human body is the medium of expression for the rational human mind, so the world with its uniform laws can be the medium for the activity of divine mind, who can supersede nature's laws if it serves His purpose. Nature is regular because mind is self-consistent, but novelty is understandable when an intelligent adaptation to meet a changing circumstance is necessary to serve purpose or reason. "Constancy of purpose must often exhibit itself by a change in procedure. . . . The order which comes from purpose has, thus, a unity of aim and variety of method. Exceptions to the general rule would be fully consistent with a purposive order though the reality of the purpose would ensure that exceptions would be rare. Exceptions for a good reason, such as the welfare of the human race, would not be 'breaks' in a purposive order, but would, instead, be demonstrations of such an order." (Ibid; pg. 215 ff)

Man cannot always see God's purpose, but that fact doesn't invalidate divine purpose. "When we begin to look at the world with any genuine humility we realize that it is at least thinkable that there may be invasions into our causal system, for there is nothing illogical about the idea that God is superior to what we call natural law. We are helped along this liberating road when we realize that natural laws do not tell us what must be, but are mere generalizations of what, in a very short period of history, has been generally observed to occur. The Christian understands natural law as merely the way in which God's purposive action in our little corner of the universe normally takes place." (A Place To Stand; Elton Trueblood; pg. 93)

"Why should I think it illogical that the creator of nature's laws should supersede nature's causal system to accomplish the redemptive purpose of the universe? Thank you, God, for your invasion into human history!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The resurrection is not supernatural, but natural, from God's viewpoint--a divine action in time consistent with divine purpose in eternity!

RESURRECTION - PUZZLING OR PURPOSEFUL?

We said yesterday that the resurrection is a divine action in time, consistent with divine purpose in eternity! If the purpose of God demanded that He supersede natural law and thus make an intelligent adaptation in order to cope with man's moral failure by invading human history, the Incarnation is explainable and the resurrection is not only historically valid, but also rationally and philosophically feasible.

A miracle is only a conspicuous exception to a natural law to achieve the eternal purpose of God, and is therefore not supernatural but normal, as seen from God's viewpoint. "By a miracle a Christian does not mean something mysterious and unaccountable, but rather an event in which the redemptive purpose of God is clearly manifest. A miracle is an alteration in the ordinary course of events which, far from being puzzling, is a clear evidence of divine purpose in God's world. If Christ rose from the dead, as the evidence indicates, that is a miracle. It is a miracle because, in this instance, God chose to intervene directly in the course of events and did so for a transcendentally important purpose. If this was necessary to change men's hearts it is not really puzzling, but highly intelligible." (A Place to Stand; Elton Trueblood; pg. 94-95)

As we have already noted, Christianity is a historical religion; that is, it originated in time and in a specific geographical locality. The resurrection has no true devotional or philosophical meaning if the resurrection is not validated as a solid historical fact. We have seen that the evidence is overwhelming in making such a validation.

Thomas Arnold, the famous historian who was appointed to the chair of Modern History at Oxford, gave the following testimony to his own persuasion of the historic trustworthiness of the resurrection narrative: "The evidence for our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as carefully as every judge summing up a most important case. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of any sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

"God, Thou are the 'God who acts.' You have decisively acted out your eternal plan for human redemption on the stage of human history. Thank you!"

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** The resurrection, the greatest of all miracles, is simply the manifestation of God's personal and purposeful concern for mankind!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE VICTORY OF A CONQUERING GOD' (Part II)

1. In summary form, name at least six realities which the resurrection of Jesus accomplished.
2. Describe what is meant by the statement: "The object of your faith determines the value of your faith."
3. What are three ways in which one can look at the resurrection of Jesus?
4. Discuss the two main weaknesses in the theory of those who attempt to explain away the bodily resurrection of Jesus by claiming that the women went to the wrong sepulchre because it was dark and they were greatly grief-stricken?
5. What is the 'Swoon Theory,' and why is this theory such a foolish theory?
6. Why is the theory which says that thieves stole the body of Jesus a theory that is totally unfounded?
7. Why is it illogical and inconceivable to argue that Jesus' disciples removed the body of Jesus from the tomb while the guards slept?
8. What is the main weakness in the theory which argues that Roman or Jewish authorities took the body of Jesus?
9. What two main arguments can be pointed to as positive 'proof' that Jesus arose from the dead?
10. List those who, according to I Corinthians 15:3-8, actually saw the resurrected Lord.
11. Why does J. B. Phillips (the well known New Testament translator) consider the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians to be one of the most important chapters in the New Testament?
12. Name some of the Jews in Jerusalem whose lives were dramatically changed (following the death of Jesus), and note the most likely reason for the spiritual transformation of these persons.
13. What is the power that has enabled the Christian Church to exist for nineteen centuries, amidst many changes and amidst severe challenges and crises?
14. In light of the fanatical attachment which the orthodox Jews had to the Jewish Sabbath, why were the early Jewish converts to Christianity persuaded to exchange Saturday for Sunday as their day of worship?
15. What are significant facts, all of which combine to form strong evidence to validate Jesus' claim to being divine?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE VICTORY OF A CONQUERING GOD' (Part II) - Cont.

16. If Jesus showed uniqueness in His birth and in His life, should it be surprising that He showed uniqueness in His death? Why or why not?
17. Those who consider the report of the resurrection as philosophically infeasible are those who have chosen a naturalistic view of reality. Describe such a view of reality, and show why adopting such a view of reality makes it impossible to believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
18. What is the supernaturalistic (purposive) view of reality, and why does such a view of reality make the bodily resurrection of Jesus both logically possible and philosophically feasible?
19. Illustrate from both human personality development and from physical nature how the contrasting principles of constancy and flexibility work together in a complementary fashion. How does the supernaturalistic view of reality take into consideration both the principles of constancy and flexibility as these principles relate to 'natural law' and 'miracle'?
20. Discuss what is meant by the statement: "A universe which has redemptive purpose at its heart makes the resurrection of Jesus both a philosophical feasibility and moral necessity!"
21. Discuss how the following statement helps make the bodily resurrection of Jesus more philosophically feasible: "Just as the human body is the medium of expression for the rational human mind, so the world with its uniform laws can be the medium for the activity of divine mind, who can supersede nature's laws if it serves His purpose. Nature is regular because mind is self-consistent, but novelty is understandable when an intelligent adaptation to meet a changing circumstance is necessary to serve divine purpose or reason."
22. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The resurrection of Jesus is not supernatural, but natural, from God's viewpoint--a divine action in time consistent with divine purpose in eternity!"
23. Considering the supernaturalistic view of reality, do you agree or disagree with the following definition of a 'miracle': "A miracle is only a conspicuous exception to a natural law, to achieve the eternal purpose of God, and is therefore not supernatural but normal, as seen from God's viewpoint."
24. What is your personal reaction to the following quotation from Thomas Arnold (the famous historian who was appointed to the chair of Modern History at Oxford): "I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."



Chapter 12

THE MAJESTY OF A REIGNING CHRIST

## KING OF THE AGES

We have been looking intently at the person and work of Jesus Christ. We have looked at the costliness of His lowly identification with sinful humanity (Incarnation). We have gazed at the cross and sought to understand the meaning and significance of the cross to our personal lives. We have studied the resurrection from three viewpoints--devotionally, historically, and philosophically. It is now time to turn our attention to the nature and character of Christ's kingship.

The lowly Jesus, dying on a cross, has become the exalted Christ, reigning in power with the Father. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:8-11 NASB)

Wrote Paul, "Glory and honor to God forever and ever. He is the King of the ages, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God, and full of wisdom. Amen." (I Timothy 1:17 Living Bible) As King of the ages, it was Jesus' purpose to save humanity. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (II Timothy 1:9 Living Bible)

"Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be his very own, through what Christ would do for us; he decided then to make us holy in his eyes, without a single fault--we who stand before him covered with his love. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to!" (Ephesians 1:4,5 Living Bible)

From everlasting to everlasting, Jesus has been king, and the central purpose of His kingship has been to redeem many subjects unto Himself, and to love those subjects as a part of His eternal kingdom. "In him we were chosen. Moreover, because of what Christ has done we have become gifts to God that he delights in, for as part of God's sovereign plan we were chosen from the beginning to be his, and all things happen just as he decided long ago." (Ephesians 1:11 Living Bible)

"O God, how amazing is your plan of salvation! Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, and kingly reign--all are for me! How can I reject such love? I will bow my knees and confess with my lips that you are Lord of lords!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: What Christ purposed for me in eternity, I will allow Him to do for me in time--save me!

ARE YOU LOOKING AT LIFE FROM THE RIGHT ANGLE?

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

Jesus is rightly called 'King of Kings.' This title acknowledges His eternal and continuing sovereignty in the midst of earthly kings. As King of kings, Jesus' power is incredibly great, and all other rulers, whether they acknowledge it or not, are totally subordinate to Christ. Writes Paul, "I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven, far, far above any other king or ruler or dictator or leader. Yes, his honor is far more glorious than that of anyone else either in this world or in the world to come. And God has put all things under his feet and made him the supreme head of the church--which is his body, filled with himself, the author and giver of everything everywhere." (Ephesians 1:19-23 Living Bible)

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

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

"This is my Father's world,  
And to my listening ears,  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the Ruler yet.

This is my Father's world;  
The battle is not done;  
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
And earth and heaven be one."

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

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

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

JESUS IS THE LORD OF HISTORY!

As King of kings, Jesus has sovereign control over all the kings of the earth. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." (Proverbs 21:1 NASB)

Concerning Jesus, Isaiah wrote: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:7)

"When the renowned artist, Dannecker, was requested by Napoleon to make a painting of Venus for the Louvre, he declined even though an enormous sum was offered. The emperor's anger was stirred and he demanded an explanation. The painter answered simply: 'I have painted Christ, and I can never lower my brush to paint an inferior subject.'" (Shoe-Leather Faith; Merv Rosell; No. 27)

Jesus is the God of all gods. He alone is worthy to reign. He stands as King of kings. E. Stanley Jones, that great veteran missionary, went around the world introducing the sign of Jesus' Lordship; namely, three fingers pointing upward, which stands for 'Jesus is Lord.'

The Bible says that all men will someday bow the knees to Jesus and confess with the tongue that 'Jesus is Lord.' All men will either voluntarily or involuntarily give to Jesus His rightful place which is His inherently--Sovereign Lord!

Said Napoleon, the great military victor: "If Socrates would enter the room we should rise and do him honor. But if Jesus Christ came into the room we should fall down on our knees and worship Him."

It is Jesus who divides all of history in BC and AD. Jesus stands at the center of time and gives meaning to the whole. Pagan religions make no sense out of history, but believe history endlessly and regularly repeats itself in eternal cycles. To them, history is going nowhere. But Jesus gives meaning to history, for Jesus is the lord of history. History is going somewhere. History has a purpose and a plan and a destiny. History was divided into BC and AD because of Jesus' first coming. History will find its fulfillment and consummation when Jesus comes the second time!

"Stanley Jones said the awful events of earth did not disturb him because he knew 'how it would all come out.' . . . The genuine Christian, in his depths, is not at sixes and sevens, for he knows that history has a goal divinely determined and that, whatever happens, Almighty God is moving redemptively to that great and grand goal." (The Minister's Ministries; pg. 20; Donald Demaray)

"God, help me gladly give to Jesus the same place in my life which He inherently possesses in the universe--Lordship!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus is not one 'great' in a class of 'greats'; Jesus is the incomparable one!

JESUS IS THE KING OF THE STONES!

Jesus is 'King of the Ages' eternally. Jesus is 'Lord of History' in time. Jesus is also 'King of Life'--physical life and human life.

On Palm Sunday, the disciples were praising and worshipping Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. "And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." (Luke 19:39,40)

Jesus is King of the stones! The very stones are subject to Jesus and are made to praise Jesus as King of earth and creation! Because Jesus is king of nature, "the Christian way is written into the very structure of the universe." (The Divine Yes; E. Stanley Jones; pg. 48)

All of nature is created by God and for God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein . . . Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." (Psalms 24:1,10)

As one poet wrote, "Earth's crammed with Heaven; and every common Bush afire with God."

The Universe belongs to God and will be redeemed by God from the effects which sin has had upon it. The universe is at the command of God. It is subject to Christ, the King. The universe is the friend of God, and is constantly singing praises to God. Barclay notes that if a man sins against God there is a sense in which the whole universe becomes his enemy.

Christ is not only king of physical life, but He is also King of human life. Both physical life and human life are made by God and for God.

Christ is king of human life for Christ's way "is written into living tissues--nerves, arteries, organs, cells." (Ibid; E. Stanley Jones; pg. 48) Christ is king, for He has His claim upon every human being in the very constitution of the physical body! Therefore, going against God is going against oneself! To go against God is to go against the very grain of human make-up! "A pastor's brilliant son, a personal man in a great corporation, told his father: 'I'm trying hard to be an atheist, but I'm having a time of it!'" (Conversion; E. Stanley Jones; pg. 20) It is hard to go against God, for when one goes against God he is going against himself. Man is made by God and for God, and to go against God is to go against the very purpose of one's existence!

"O God, you have your stamp of ownership on me--in my mind, in my body, in my spirit! To reject you is to reject myself! To accept you is to find myself! Glory!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To sin against Christ is to sin against myself. To bow to Christ's Lordship is to stand tall before everything else!

JESUS' WAY IS THE WAY TO LIVE!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD"

At His trial, Jesus was asked by Pilate, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18:36 NASB)

To understand the character of Jesus' kingdom, one must understand something about the popular Jewish expectations regarding the coming Messiah, which Jesus encountered when He came into the world. At the time Christ came into the world, the Jews were a subject people under the dominion of the Romans. The popular talk among the Jews was conversation concerning the coming of the Messiah.

The formulation of the Messianic concept was brought about through the wistful longings of the Israelite people during the dark days of their nation's decline, many centuries before the time of Christ. The Jews wistfully longed for a king who would reign like King David. David was Israel's greatest king and it was David who reigned during the Golden Age of Israel's history. David was idolized as the ideal king who gave Israel military, political, material, and spiritual success. Ever after the time of David, the Jews looked back upon his age as the ideal age, and upon David as the ideal king.

At the time of Christ, the Jews expected God to send a Messiah whose power would be in the sword, whose genius would be in military organization, and whose glory would be in the destruction of the Roman army. The Jews expected the Messiah to establish his kingdom on the earth, with Jerusalem as his headquarters. The Messiah would be David incarnate. The borders of Israel would be expanded more than ever before, and all nations would bow in servitude to Israel. The Messiah would usher in an age of unprecedented power and prosperity for Israel.

Jesus shattered the popular Jewish Messianic expectations! Jesus' kingship or Messiahship was characterized not by hate but by love. Jesus' power as the Messiah would not be in terms of military power, but quite the contrary--it would be in terms of the power of love which would find its expression in the experience of suffering and sacrifice. Jesus came to show the true meaning of Messiahship. The Messiah must suffer, not seek revenge. The Messiah must love, not hate. The Messiah must save, not conquer. The Messiah must rule by love in the hearts of men, not rule by hate over the Jews' earthly enemies. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It is eternal!

"God, you are shattering my false conceptions! You come, not with a sword, but with a cross. You rule, not with the coercion of force, but with the compulsion of love. You come, not to destroy your enemies, but to save your enemies! What a King! A King of Love!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who 'takes the sword shall die by the sword.' He who lives by mercy shall receive mercy!

## "THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE"

Jesus taught that the Messiah's kingdom would be established, not on the foundation of military force and arms, but on the foundation of suffering and sacrifice. When Jesus came into Jerusalem, the crowds cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!" Barclay notes that "Hosanna" means "Save Now!" and it was the cry for help which a people in distress addressed to their king or their god. (Daily Study Bible; Matthew; Vol. 2; pg. 264) The crowd on Palm Sunday addressed Jesus as the Son of David which was a Messianic title. The excitement of the Jews was great as they hailed the long-expected king. When they cried out, "Hosanna in the highest!" they must have meant, "Let even the angels in the highest heights of heaven cry unto God, Save Now!"

Modern man would quickly welcome Jesus today if He would only promise to change society and establish an era of peace and prosperity. Many Americans would doubtless follow Jesus today if He would destroy our enemies, eliminate our slums, fill our bank accounts, deal with our energy crisis, do away with our national debt, and destroy all diseases. Men today, who have such a shallow understanding of Christ's mission, are ready to cry "Hosanna!" - "Save Now!" People want to be saved from anything unpleasant or undesirable. However, when Christ offers suffering, sacrifice, a cross, and possible death, the popular cry of the crowd is no longer "Hosanna!" but "Crucify Him!"

Jesus came not to give political freedom to the Jews, but rather to give spiritual freedom to all mankind. Throughout Jesus' public ministry He refused to become an earthly revolutionary leader. The people attempted to make him a king, but Jesus refused. John records the following incident in Jesus' public ministry: "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself." (John 6:15)

Jesus well knew that it is possible for a man to be free physically and politically and yet to be a slave to self, to passion, to pride, and to falsehood. Jesus could point to the Romans who, while enjoying prosperity and political freedom and power, were yet slaves to idolatry, hate, and suspicion. Jesus came to give spiritual freedom. Jesus said, "every man who loves truth recognizes my voice." (John 18:37) True freedom comes through the truth. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

"O Thou King of Love, rule over my heart! Release my spirit from the prison of sin. Give me real freedom--freedom from my guilts, fears, hates, and prejudice!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If the Son makes me free, I shall be free indeed! (John 8:36)

NONE CAN REMAIN NEUTRAL TO CHRIST!

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

Barclay notes various ways in which Pilate sought to avoid any personal decision regarding Christ.

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

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

Pilate tried the way of compromise. Pilate did not want to crucify Jesus, and thought that the mob would surely be moved to pity if they saw Jesus scourged. But Pilate's attempt at compromise--seeking to satisfy the Jews by scourging Jesus instead of crucifying him--did not work. When Pilate brought Jesus before the Jews again, the Jews cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him." (John 19:6) Compromise won't work. Pilate had outrightly to decide either to crucify Jesus or to release Jesus. The decision was that explicit. As in the case of Pilate, each person today must also outrightly decide whether to accept Christ or to reject Christ.

Jesus is king. His kingship demands a moral verdict from every man. Jesus divides all men into one of two categories--those who accept Christ and those who reject Christ. Jesus said that any one who was not for Him was against Him! Every man is either a child of the light or a child of the darkness. Every man must either respond to the truth or harden his heart to the truth. Every man must either choose Barabbas, who represents hate and violence, or Jesus, who represents love and peace. "Choose ye this day whom you will serve!"

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

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

## SAVIOUR TODAY - JUDGE TOMORROW

It is possible that the last action of Pilate in regards to Jesus is the most dramatic act and the act that is filled with the most irony. Pilate "brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement . . . it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'" (John 19:13,14 NASB) This passage possibly "means that Pilate with one last mocking gesture brought Jesus out, clad in the terrible finery of the old purple robe and with His forehead girt with the crown of thorns and the drops of blood the thorns had wakened, and set Him in the judgment seat, and with a wave of his hand said: 'Am I to crucify your king?'" . . . It may be said that Pilate jestingly caricatured Jesus as judge. If that is so, if Pilate really set Jesus in the judgment seat to make a fool of Jesus, what dramatic irony is there. That which was a mockery was the truth. And one day those who had mocked Jesus as judge would meet Him as judge--and would remember." (Daily Study Bible; John; Vol. 2; pg. 287; Barclay)

"When he was a young man, Judge Warren Candler practiced law. One of his clients was charged with murder, and the young lawyer made the utmost effort to clear his client of the charge. There were some extenuating circumstances and the lawyer made the most of them in his plea before the jury. Moreover, there were present in the court the aged father and mother of the man charged with murder; and the young lawyer worked on the sympathies and emotions of the jury by frequent references to the God-fearing parents. In due course, the jury retired for deliberation. When they had reached a verdict, they returned to the jury box. Their verdict read: 'We find the defendant not guilty.' The young lawyer, himself a Christian, had a serious talk with his cleared client. He warned him to steer clear of evil ways and to trust God's power to keep him straight. Years passed. Again the man was brought into court. Again the charge was murder. The lawyer who had defended him at his first trial was now the judge on the bench. At the conclusion of the trial, the jury rendered its verdict as 'Guilty.' Ordering the condemned man to stand for sentencing, Judge Candler said, 'At your first trial, I was your lawyer, today I am your judge. The verdict of the jury makes it mandatory for me to sentence you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead.' Today Christ is our lawyer, our Saviour, willing to forgive and to cleanse and forget. However, there is coming a fearful day when He will be our judge." (World Aflame; pg. 244-245; Billy Graham)

God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." (Acts 17:31)

"The question in time is: 'What shall I do with Jesus?' The question in eternity will be: 'What will God do with me?' Jesus, I do not ask for justice, but I plead for mercy. I do not want what I deserve--judgment--but I want what you offer--forgiveness!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Who I follow in this life will determine where I go hereafter!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE MAJESTY OF A REIGNING CHRIST'

1. What does Philippians 2:8-11 teach us regarding the relationship between Christ's humiliation and exaltation?
2. As King of the Ages, what has always been Christ's central purpose of His kingship? (Note II Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 1:4,5)
3. How is the glory of Christ described in Ephesians 1:19-23, and how is that power described which made possible Christ's exalant glory?
4. What are two different angles from which a person can look at life, and what are the different conclusions one will draw, depending upon the angle from which he views life?
5. What is the difference between a Christian philosophy of history and a pagan philosophy of history?
6. Why did Stanley Jones say the awful events of history did not disturb him?
7. Describe what is meant by the phrase: "Jesus is King of the stones!"
8. Discuss what is meant by the statement: "If a man sins against God there is a sense in which the whole universe becomes his enemy."
9. What evidence can you point to that demonstrates the fact that Christ is the King of the physical body and human life?
10. Do you agree with the following statement? "If you won't live for God, you can't live with yourself!" (Why or why not?)
11. What evidence is there (from personal experience or from personal observation) that the following scriptural statement is true: "The way of the transgressor is hard."
12. Share your personal insights into E. Stanley Jones' statement: "The idea that the Christian way is hard is all wrong. His (Jesus') yoke is easy and his burden is light, for his yoke is your yearning and his burden is your blessing."
13. From your personal observation and experience, can you share evidence to validate the truth of the following statement, made by a surgeon: "The right thing morally is always the healthy thing physically."
14. What kind of 'Messiah' did the Jews of Jesus' time expect God to send to earth, and upon what primary ancient model did these Jews build their Messianic concepts?
15. Describe the main features of Jesus' Messianic concepts, both as He taught them and as He personified them (in contrast to the popular Jewish Messianic concepts).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 'THE MAJESTY OF A REIGNING CHRIST' (Cont.)

16. What was the meaning of the popular cry of the people on the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on 'Palm Sunday,' and how are the popular expectations of people in our modern day similar to the popular expectations of the people of Jesus' day who cried 'Hosanna'?
17. What is the freedom which Christ (as King) promises to all who follow Him? What are some of the misconceptions which people have today regarding the benefits of accepting Jesus? Will following Christ always result in physical, financial, or political freedom?
18. What is the essence of Christ's power, as King?
19. Note several ways in which Pilate sought to avoid any personal decision regarding Christ. How do Pilate's reactions remind you of modern-day man's various indecisive reactions towards Jesus?
20. Is there any grounds for moral neutrality in the light of Jesus' moral demands? Why or why not? What implications does the 'Lordship of Christ' have for you personally?
21. If the role of Christ on earth during Time is 'Saviour,' what will be the role of Christ at the End of Time?
22. Cite scriptural justification for the following strong statement: "He who spurns God's mercy on earth will surely reap God's fiery judgment in eternity!"
23. Is it both logical and scriptural to say that every person determines his own eternal destiny? Discuss the validity of the following statement: "Who I follow in this life will determine where I go hereafter."

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