

SALVATION

INTRODUCTION TO SALVATION

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the... shadow of death, Light has dawned” (Matt 4:16)

“Freely you have received...”

Yes, dear friend, as the Evangelist assures us, a light has dawned on this sin-darkened world. It is the *“light of the Gospel”* (2 Cor 4:4) -the glorious Gospel of Salvation through Christ Jesus, Who is the *“true Light which gives light to every man”* (John 1:9).

This Salvation is **God’s free gift** -to you, to me, and to anyone anywhere in the world who will accept it. It is given so that **all** who sit in the darkness of sin - and the *“shadow of death”*, the penalty for sin – may have instead *“the light of life”* (John 8:12) and *“eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 6:23).

“...freely give!” (Matt 10:8)

In order to be saved, they must believe on Christ for salvation. But first people must understand their need for salvation; that they are lost in their sins, doomed to an eternity in hell if Christ is not their personal Savior. They must be told that God offers them salvation in Christ, and they must be shown what salvation will do for them. Finally, they must be encouraged -and trained -to tell others about salvation.

You, dear church leader, have received this priceless gift of salvation. It is our fervent prayer that this issue of ACTS Magazine will remind you of what salvation has done for you, and then inspire you -and equip you – to do for others what someone once did for you when you were still *“sitting in darkness”*: Our prayer is that you will share the Good News of salvation with those who have not yet heard it, and thereby play a vital role in shining *“the light of the Gospel”* into all the world.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION – PLANNED BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN

Do you know how precious you are to God?

You are so precious that your heavenly Father planned your salvation **even before He created the heavens and the earth!**

God chose you “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4).

He wrote your name in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Rev 17:8).

The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was “*slain*” (in other words, God planned His sacrificial death for the payment of your sins] “*from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 13:8).

Even before He said, “*Let there be light*” (Gen 1:3), God planned for the day when the light of the Gospel would dawn in your heart.

RESERVED FOR YOU...

You are so precious to God that He has revealed to you, in the pages of the Bible, what He has not fully revealed to the prophets of the Old Testament or even the angels. God partially revealed His plan of salvation **through** the prophets and angels **to** mankind. And the prophets and angels have longed to know what you **already** know if you have diligently studied what the Bible says about God's plan of salvation:

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ Who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

“To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet 1:10-12; see also Ephesians

3:8-10). And you should desire even more to look into what the Scriptures reveal about the plan of salvation God has reserved for you....

...AND FOR ALL WHO WOULD BELIEVE!!

But how will they believe if they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher to tell them that they too are so precious to God that He has planned their salvation? (See Romans 10:14.)

This is where you fit into God's plan of salvation: you are that preacher! Multitudes have not yet heard the Good News of Salvation in Christ Jesus. It is up to you to tell them, and to equip and inspire them to tell others (see 2 Timothy 2:2).

It's true, dear Christian friend-you are so precious to God that "before time began", He called you "with a holy calling" (2 Tim 1:9): to reveal His plan of salvation to those who have not yet heard it, to shine the light of the Gospel on a sin-darkened world.

OUR NEED FOR SALVATION

- **GOD ALLOWS FREE WILL**
- **SATAN CHOSE TO REBEL**
- **ADAM CHOSE TO SIN**
- **WE INHERIT ADAM'S SIN**
- **THE PENALTY FOR SIN IS DEATH!**

GOD ALLOWS FREE WILL

LOVE MUST BE CHOSEN

It was the Father's desire that man would love, honor and obey Him in all things. It was God's desire that man would seek His will and purpose for his life. The Father wanted man to trust and share in His great love, wisdom, and power. He longed for him to receive and **return** His love – even as the Father and the Son loved one another (John 17:23). God created man for just this purpose – to share in and enjoy the love, grace, wisdom, beauty and glory.

Love, however, by its very nature, must be freely given. It cannot be forced. You can't make or force anyone to love another.

The same is true of giving honor, respect and worship. Worship is related to "worth-ship". We love, honor and respect what we feel is of great value or "worth."

This means that love requires a free choice. Worship also requires a free choice. We choose to love and worship that which we feel is of great value and worth.

CHOICE INVOLVES RISK

God is sovereign. He has complete freedom to choose and carry out His desires. He ever chooses that which is right, good and holy. He chose to create man in His own image in order that man might know and experience His love and then express it back to Him.

This meant giving man **a freedom of will**. With the power to love went the right to choose. Because of his free will, man could choose to love, worship and honor God.

When God gave man this freedom of choice at Creation, however, it was with great risk. It meant that man could choose good or evil -right or wrong. He could choose either way! And he would choose based on what he thinks is good, true and worthwhile.

Our lives are centered around our values. We love, honor and respect whatever we feel is most "worthwhile" for our lives. It is not a question of "whether" we are going to worship, but "what" we are going to worship. And everybody, to some degree, in one expression or another, worships!

Now God created man to worship Him. With man's worship of God would come his love, faith and obedience. Not a slavish, crawling-in-the-dirt kind of servitude, **but an obedience filled with joy and confidence**, trusting in God's love and desire for our best.

It is true that we serve, obey, and become like that which we worship. What we worship will determine our character and our conduct -our attitudes and

our actions. *This* is true in both a negative (Ps 115:4-8; Isa 44:9-20) and a positive way (2 Cor 3:18).

No wonder Jesus said, *“seek ye first the Kingdom of God”*; for when we do, everything else falls into its rightful place (see Matthew 6:33).

God allowed man to make his choice for worshipful obedience by placing two special trees in the Garden of Eden. One was called the *“tree of life”* (Gen 3:22). The other tree has been called the *“tree of death.”* God called it the *“tree of the knowledge of good and evil”* (Gen 2:17). Man was warned not to eat of that tree. He was not to set standards of good and evil -right and wrong – for his life apart from God’s wisdom: *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov 14:12).

SATAN CHOSE TO REBEL

CAST OUT OF HEAVEN

Satan in the form of a graceful serpent then appeared on the scene. He is wise in the ways of evil and there is evil purpose in his heart. Where did he come from? Why was he there? What will he seek or do? Let us again turn to the Scriptures for our answers.

The Bible sometimes uses earthly settings and people to teach us about heavenly and spiritual things. The prophet Ezekiel tells us about a certain king of Tyre who was very wicked. In Ezekiel 28:11-19, the judgment of God is being addressed to the King of Tyre. However, there are many Bible scholars that see in this passage (and in Isaiah 14:12-15) a description of the fall of Satan. This was a view held by several of the Church Fathers of the 4th century A.D. A careful reading of this passage in Ezekiel reveals several extreme descriptions that would be difficult to attribute to the earthly King of Tyre (see especially Ezekiel 28:13-15).

“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created.”

“You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery

stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.”

“By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones.”

“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings that they might gaze at you.”

“You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth” (Ezek 28:12-18).

The same kind of picture is painted by the prophet Isaiah. With powerful words he reveals the evil character of the wicked king of Babylon. Again, these verses have a double application as the prophet shows us the evil picture of Satan.

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [Satan’s pre-fall name which meant ‘Light Bearer’] son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isa 14:12-15).

Five times Satan crosses “God’s will” with “his will”. Five times Satan declares his self –will in opposition to God’s will (vs.13-14). Clearly we can see Satan’s pride and rebellion against God. Satan desired (and still desires) to replace God’s sovereign rule with his own. He also wants to function independently from the Most High God. Satan invites, tempts, intimidates and snares men into these two sins of **self - exaltation and selfish independence**. It would seem that Satan before his fall – and all the other angelic beings – were originally created with the ability to love, honor, worship and serve God. As we have said, to create beings with freedom of choice brings a great risk. There is the danger of rebellion.

The results of those wrong choices can be tragic. To reject God’s love, truth and goodness is to reap the results of hatred, error and evil. To reject one is

to choose the other. Just as when you flip a coin - one side or the other will turn up. Sadly, Satan made the wrong choice!

Yes, the Scriptures in Ezekiel and Isaiah seem to show that Satan had been created by God for a high and noble purpose. He was perfect in his beauty and wisdom. He had been given great power and authority.

The *cherubim* (plural for *cherub*) in the Book of Revelation are related to heavenly worship. It is possible that Satan at one time not only ruled the hosts of heaven as *"the anointed cherub who covers"* (Ezek 28:14) - which indicates a high office with authority and responsibility -but also led them in their worship of God. This seems to be indicated by Ezekiel 28:13 where there is reference to musical instrumentation included in Lucifer's (Satan's) created being. Many see this as supporting the idea that one of Lucifer's duties was to lead the heavenly host in worship of the Most High. His duty and responsibility was to guard the holy will and word of God and to honor the Lord in all ways. It seems he was an "overseer" of the heavenly host.

SATAN'S PRIDE

Because of his beauty and position, pride entered Satan's heart (Ezek 28:15,17). Paul, when listing the qualifications for being an overseer, warns them about pride, and uses Satan as an example:

"...not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil" (1 Tim 3:2-6).

Heaven is holy and perfect. Therefore Satan's sin could have arisen only from within his own heart. Pride and the desire for power became his downfall. He found more pleasure in his own beauty than in the glory of God. He became lifted up in his own eyes, and sought the honor and power which belong only to God.

Satan wanted the worship of Heaven and the authority of God's throne. And he was willing to rebel against the Most High God to get it. Sadly, a large number of the angelic host joined Satan in his rebellion (see 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

One wonders why Satan and his host thought they could succeed in their rebellion against God. The Scripture even says that he was *"full of wisdom"* (Ezek 28:12).

As we have seen, however, there is a “blindness” and self- deception in pride. When we center everything in ourselves, it is hard to “see” beyond ourselves. Deception is believing something is right when it is wrong - that it is good when it is evil.

With pride comes deception. Satan was truly deceived. He was far too smart to try something that was plainly doomed to failure. But he really thought he would win!

The person who can most easily deceive others is one who is deceived himself. He will be very sure he is right and seem to be very sincere. Certainty and sincerity are not sure signs that one is right, however. It is possible to be sincerely but truly wrong!

SATAN’S SELF-DECEPTION

There may have been a number of reasons why Satan and his host believed they could win. No one had ever disobeyed God before. His power and authority had never been tested. The results of rebellion had never been seen. Death was unknown. Moreover, this was the first time the powers of good and evil came in conflict with one another. The battle of the ages was about to begin!

Unlike God, Satan was not “omniscient” – all-knowing. As a created being, all he had to go on was God’s word. He didn’t know how powerful or important he might truly be.

With pride comes deception. And with deception comes doubt of anyone else’s authority. Satan began to doubt God’s word, and as a result decided to disobey God’s word.

The links in the chain of evil can now be clearly seen: PRIDE – SELF-DECEPTION – REBELLION – DISOBEDIENCE. The last link was the link of DEATH!

Satan also may have thought that he had found a weakness in God’s divine plan. An overview of Scripture seems to show that God chose to achieve His purpose in creation through creatures of free will. The angels, and later man, were made with a freedom of choice.

As said before, this involved a great risk. There was the danger of wrong choices and the evil results that would follow. God foresaw that possibility, but rested in His knowledge that in the end:

1. **GOOD would overcome EVIL**
2. **LOVE would overcome HATE**
3. **LIGHT would overcome DARKNESS**
4. **TRUTH would overcome ERROR**
5. **RIGHT would overcome WRONG**

SATAN'S JEALOUSY

Moreover, these noble qualities of God's character would be expressed through those who chose to love, honor and obey Him. In Heaven it would be achieved through those angels who chose to remain loyal to their Creator.

On earth it was to be through a royal family of beloved sons and daughters. The "First-born" of that family would be the Lord Jesus Himself.

It is possible that Satan was jealous of the love, honor and worship that was given to God by the heavenly host. Satan's rebellion was an attempt to take God's place and receive the worship that belonged to Him. You will recall how the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world – in an attempt to get Jesus to worship him in the wilderness (see Luke 4:5-8). This incident shows us that the devil desired the worship belonging to God alone.

In opposing God, Satan drew the battle lines for the age-long conflict between good and evil.

As we know from scriptures already given, Satan was not able to gain a victory in Heaven. He and his host of fallen angels were cast out. What they lost in Heaven, however, they would later try to gain on earth in the Garden of Eden.

ADAM CHOSE TO SIN

SATAN ENTERS THE WORLD

As we have already seen, there is a great desire within the heart of our heavenly Father. It is for a family through which the character, authority and power of His Son can be revealed. For that reason, you recall, God made the

first man and woman and told them to be stewards, caretakers of the earth and fill it with a family of loving children who would be loyal to Him.

It is to this earth and that family, therefore, that Satan now comes. The battle that began in heaven now reaches into God's new creation. Satan seeks to rob the first earthly family of their heritage; by tempting them to commit the same sin that caused his downfall from the heavenly heights -pride and rebellion!

He comes to them in the form of a wise and beautiful serpent. He cannot overpower them, for they have been given authority over all of the creatures of the earth. He has only one way in which he can reach them with his evil purpose – deception! Now we can see why Jesus called Satan the ‘father of lies’ (see John 8:44).

The Apostle Paul refers to this deception in his second letter to the Corinthian church. Listen to his words of warning: “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity. that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3).

Yes, Satan used lies and confusion as his way of deceiving and confusing their clear understanding of God's simple commands. You recall that God had told them not to eat of that one tree. Let us again listen to His words of warning: “Of every tree in the Garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:16,17).

SATAN DECEIVES EVE

Satan now begins to form his chain of evil: pride -deception – doubt – disobedience – death. Let us study each link in the chain as it is found in the record itself: “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’

“And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’

“Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ (Gen 3:1-5).

Satan told them that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not something to be feared, but truly to be desired. He told them that instead of dying as God had said, they would really begin to live. In fact, according to Satan, they would become like God, and be able to decide what was good and evil – right and wrong – **for themselves**. They wouldn’t need God to direct their lives. They could know for themselves, rule themselves, and become their very best – **all by themselves**. Then the kingdom, power and glory would be theirs –alone! Satan lied to them, saying that if God really loved them, He would have told them that Himself.

It is easy to see how Satan first sowed the seeds of pride and selfish desire. Then he deceived them into doubting God. He got them to doubt God’s word, God’s love, and His power and authority. Their doubt led to disobedience -and their disobedience led to death!

WHAT ADAM LOST

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6).

Sadly, the lie worked. In opening herself to deception by believing the lies of Satan, the woman disobeyed and came under the judgment that God had promised. Although Adam was not deceived, he still chose to sin – and by that choice, he submitted to Satan’s rule. God had originally created man to be a steward of the earth, and to rule over it and care for it. By his disobedience to God in submitting to Satan’s lies, this is changed. Now man’s rule has been forfeited to the Serpent (Revelation 12:9 verifies that it was Satan using the serpent’s form in the Garden). The stewardship of our world, originally delegated to man, now falls to Satan.

Satan was quick to take the scepter – the royal rod for ruling-into his own hand. The authority, which had been given to man, was now taken over by Satan. Man found himself under the authority of the kingdom of darkness and death.

It seemed as if a timeless tragedy had set in. Many things were lost by man as a result of his **sin** and **disobedience**:

1. **He lost his relationship as a beloved son.**
2. **He lost his divine covering and God-given authority.**
3. **He lost the beauty of God's image in his life.**
4. **He lost his destiny in God's divine purpose.**
5. **He lost his very life.**

WE INHERIT ADAM'S SIN

WHY DO WE SIN?

The first problem that our salvation must solve, then, is the question of sin. It is our sin that separates us from God's holy will and purpose for our lives. We must understand why we are sinners and why we sin if we are to understand the greatness of our salvation.

This then raises two important questions:

1. **Are we sinners because we sin?**
2. **Or, do we sin because we are sinners?**

Theologians and Scripture scholars have been debating these questions for centuries. Yet a question this important should be clearly answered in the Bible.

SIN ENTERED THE WORLD BY ONE MAN

The key to understanding the relationship between sin and the sinner can be found in Romans Chapter 5. Paul is talking about the origin of sin and how it affects each one of us. Listen to his words in Romans 5:12: "*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*" The word "world" is the same as found in John 3:16: "*For God so loved the **world**...*" It is from the Greek word kosmos, and refers to the human race. Paul is saying that as the head of the human race, Adam **infected** all mankind by his own sin. The result of this terrible infection by sin was both spiritual and physical death.

Paul explains this truth in this way. In the time between Adam and Moses no one was judged guilty for their sins, for the Law had not yet been given.

However, they still died. Their death, therefore, could not be due directly to their sins, since there was no law to pass that judgment.

So, Paul reasons, their death must have been due to Adam's sin. We were "in Adam" when he disobeyed God. Therefore, we suffer the penalty of that's in because we are members of the Adamic (descendants of Adam) race (Ps 51:5).

Here is the story in Paul's own words: "*Until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imparted when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam.... By one man's offense death reigned through the one... **By one man's disobedience many were made sinners**" (Rom 5:13,14,17-19).*

IN ADAM, ALL SIN; IN ADAM, ALL DIE

The truth is plain: we were all born sinners because of Adam's sin. Apart from any act of sin on our part, we are heirs to Adam's sin - and his sin - nature.

Even if we had never once sinned, we would still be sinners. By the offense of one, judgment came upon all. "*By [one] man came death... for ... in Adam all die*" (1 Cor 15:21,22).

In Adam we all sinned; in Adam we all died. This concept or idea of being "in Adam" is an important truth to understand. As we shall see, the same thought carries over to our relationship of being "in Christ," and will be one of the truths by which we will come to understand our great salvation much better.

"IN ADAM – IN CHRIST": AN EXAMPLE FROM NATURE

This idea of being "in another" can also be seen in an example from nature. In trying to produce better rice, agricultural scientists expose rice seeds to high energy rays. Such radiation is able to change the genetic make-up of the seed. By this high-energy radiation, the nature of the rice seed is changed.

The way it grows and survives is altered. Most changes made by radiation of genes (heredity material) are harmful, but sometimes the changes turn out for the better. What changes come from the radiation can be known only by planting the seed and seeing what the harvest it produces is like.

One seed will produce a stalk with many seeds. Each of those seeds will carry the genetic changes -whether they are for better or worse. This will hold true for all the generations of rice that will follow.

As the seeds are planted, and planted again, there can come forth in a few years a great harvest of rice. Each plant will have the same character and quality as was “fixed” in that first radiated seed.

If the genetic changes were for the better, where did the great harvest of higher-quality rice come from?

That first seed! Many bushels of better rice were all “in the one seed”.

The same is true if the genetic change was for the worse. In that one bad seed are many bushels of poor-quality rice. The results of radiation will be passed on to all the following generations.

No further radiation is needed to carry on the harmful results produced in the first seed. The nature of the rice has been changed for all future generations’

IN THE LOINS OF ADAM

Now we can better understand what Paul meant when he said that “in Adam” we were all made sinners. When Adam sinned, we were in the loins (body) of Adam. The seed of humanity from which you and I came was potentially in Adam from the very beginning. What then happened to you and me when Adam sinned? We became sinners! *“Through one man’s offense judgment came to all”* (Rom 5:18).

David was very aware of this truth. He clearly stated the idea in one of his Psalms: *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”* (Ps 51:5). David is confessing that **he was born a sinner**. He was made a sinner -as every other human being is made a sinner **in Adam**. He knew he needed a clean heart and a new spirit not only because of his sins, but because of his inborn sin nature.

Yes, we have been born as sinners because we were in Adam. We sin because we have a sin-nature. It shows itself very early in life. Those of us who are parents have seen this in our own children. We didn’t have to teach them to sin; they just came by it naturally from their parents. They quickly learned how to get their own will and way. Whenever their wills were crossed,

their little sin-natures got louder and stronger. That streak of sin seemed to grow faster than they did!

Why was this so? Because we all take after our forefather Adam.

“When he sinned, many were made sinners.” We were all in Adam from the very beginning.

NATURAL BORN-SINNERS

Yes, we were all born sinners. But it is also true that you are a sinner because you sin. We have proven this by our many and repeated acts of sin. Paul tells us most plainly that there is *“none righteous, no, not one... All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:10,23).

Therefore, if someone asks us, “Do we sin because we are sinners?” we would have to say “Yes”. If they also ask us “Are we sinners because we sin?” we would have to say “Yes” again. Both are true. **It is not either/or**. We were born sinners, and everyone has proven that fact by their many sins.

Therefore, we have been judged as sinners on both counts – by our sinful ancestor (Adam) and by our sinful actions. They are two sides to the same coin.

Yes, we are all “natural-born sinners”. However, many religious people still do not see their need of salvation. They do not consider themselves to be sinners.

They live good, honest lives. They attend a church or go to a pagan temple regularly, and support it with their finances. They pay their bills, and don’t drink or curse. They try to keep the Ten Commandments, and believe they will make it to heaven -by their own works of righteousness.

This is a tragic error to make, for they are wrong! We are all sinners -twice over – by birth and by deed. It is a fact of history – and of life. There’s nothing in ourselves that we can do about it. No amount of good deeds will change our sin-nature, or cancel the penalty for our sins.

The Scripture says that at the very best *“all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”* (Isa 64:6). We cannot hope to cover our sin by our “good works”. Paul declares in Galatians 2:16 that *“by the works of the Law no flesh shall be*

justified". Even if we were perfect in our obedience of all of God's laws, it would not be enough to save us!

In the bright light of God's holiness, we can only be seen as the sinners we are. Our hope can never be in our goodness -only in God's grace. We must know we are "sick unto death" because of Adam's sin, and our own, before we can receive God's cure!

THE PENALTY FOR SIN IS DEATH!

NO EXCEPTIONS

We have seen that the condition of sin is "universal". By this we mean that **everybody everywhere** is a sinner. Moreover, the penalty for sin is also universal. Everyone is doomed to die because of their sin. "*All have sinned ... [and] the wages [penalty] of sin is death*" (Rom 3:23; 6:23).

The Bible describes every human being as being under the sentence of death. Apart from God's grace, no one is accepted. From the very beginning, the penalty for sin has been the same. God firmly and clearly warned Adam and Eve that to disobey meant death.

"Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17).

The prophet Ezekiel further affirms the death penalty for sin in these simple but very strong words: "*The soul who sins shall die*" (Ezek 18:4, 20). Nothing could be more certain. The wages, or outcome, of sin is death. By nature and by deed we are sinners. We have chosen to go our way rather than God's way. "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way*" (Isa 53:6). What is the result of getting our own will and going our own way? "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*" (Prov 14:12).

A DARK DESTINY

The way of man is a dead-end street! It couldn't really be otherwise. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6).

The Father's will and way to life centers in His Son. Any other way leads to death. When we choose to disobey God and go our own way, it will lead in only one direction – downward to destruction.

Sin can be defined as opposing God's will and way with our own. By its very nature, disobedience can lead only to death. This is the reason that all sinners are doomed to die. We have all willfully chosen the wrong road. It began "in Adam" when he chose to disobey God. Not only were we victims of that choice, but we have nurtured that choice by our own acts of disobedience. Apart from God and His grace, we are in this world without hope. Death is our destiny!

OUR ONLY ESCAPE

There is only one way we can escape this destiny: Someone who is sinless must pay the penalty of sin for us. God has already done this -by sending His only begotten Son Jesus *to take all the guilt of our sins on Himself and die in our place upon the cross.*

A BRIGHT HOPE

Every sinner is without God and without hope in this world. It is indeed a dark night of despair. But against this black background shines the bright light of God's love. As the Bible tells us: "*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*" (Rom 5:20).

We can be so grateful that there is a second part to the verse that declares, "*the wages of sin is death....*" The second part goes on to bring a message of hope and love: "*...but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom 6:23).

GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION

- **A FREE GIFT**
- **A GIFT WE MUST ACCEPT IN ORDER TO HAVE IT**
- **A GIFT GOD PAID FOR IN FULL!**

A FREE GIFT

WHAT IS A GIFT?

We are told of this great gift of God's love in a very familiar passage from John's Gospel: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

The legal definition of a gift involves three necessary parts. These elements are as follows:

1. **Someone must offer it**
2. **Someone must accept it**
3. **The one who accepts it does not pay for it**

A gift is something that has been **freely offered** and accepted **without any thought of payment**.

WE CANNOT EARN IT

A gift is something that is freely offered. No payment can be involved or the "gift" becomes a "purchase" – something which has been bought. God's gift of salvation was freely given. He doesn't offer us something we have to buy - He offers us a gift.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom 3:23). But in the very next verse he gives us the Good News that all who accept God's gift of salvation are *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 4:24).

Some don't fully understand that God's gift of salvation was freely given. They will try, therefore, to turn the gift into a purchase by trying to earn their way into God's favor.

In Southeast Asia there is a group of people who have taken their efforts to a tragic extreme. They are called "flagellists". On the Good Friday before Easter, they beat their backs bloody with whips. Some go so far as to have nails driven through their hands on a cross.

Why would people do such awful things in the name of Christianity? It is because they do not understand that their salvation is a gift. Eternal life is a gift from God!

There is nothing we can do to earn or work our way into God's favor. We are saved by grace, not by "works" – or else we could boast in our efforts (Eph 2:8,9).

Our salvation was "paid in full" at Calvary. When Jesus was dying on that cross He said, "*It is finished.*" Our faith, then, is totally in the finished work of Christ upon the cross.

Now these people in Southeast Asia are sincere. But they are ignorant. They do not know or understand the greatness of God's salvation. They are seeking to be saved, but are going about it in their own way. They are indeed very zealous but zeal and sincerity will not save us. We can be sincere and wrong at the same time.

Paul refers to such religious zeal in his letter to the Romans: "*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*

*"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and **seeking to establish their own righteousness**, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*

"For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:2-4).

What can we conclude? Are such people sincere? Yes. Zealous? Yes. Wrong? Yes. Lost? Yes – through ignorance!

There is no way we can obtain right standing with God by our own efforts or works. That is not God's way to eternal life. Salvation is a gift, not a purchase. It cannot be bought by anything we can do. The work of salvation has already been done by Christ upon the cross. Our part is to receive the gift which has been so freely given. There is no other way.

Many people have accepted Christ as their Savior and have eternal life. There are those, however, who feel that somehow they must add something to the finished work of Christ upon the cross. They wouldn't physically beat their bodies, but they often punish themselves in other ways. They work hard to gain God's approval, but never feel fully accepted. They are always striving to reach greater goals, but forever falling short. They then harshly punish themselves with feelings of guilt and condemnation. Sincere? Yes. Zealous? Yes. Wrong? Yes. Lost? Yes. They have not lost their salvation, but they have lost the joy of their salvation – through ignorance!

A GIFT WE MUST ACCEPT IN ORDER TO HAVE IT

CAN ANYONE ACCEPT IT?

God made His offer when He gave His Son. However, His offer is not “legally” a gift until it is accepted. You recall that *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”* (John 1:11).

Because the Jews living in Jesus’ time did not accept Him – they did not receive the benefit and blessing of God’s offer. *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12).

Billy Graham, the great evangelist, once shocked many people by saying, “One of the great mysteries of redemption is this: While many bad men will go to heaven, many good men will go the hell!”

Why will many bad men go to heaven? Because they accepted God’s gift of eternal life. You will recall the one thief on the cross next to Jesus. In his dying moment he said, *“Remember me when you come into Your kingdom!”* Jesus’ response was immediate: *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:39-43).

That simple prayer of the thief was filled with faith. It contained all the elements of saving faith. What are these?

1. He believed Jesus was King (Lord)
2. He believed the King would have a Kingdom
3. He asked to be included in that Kingdom

Jesus responded, *“Today, you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43). Jesus accepted the thief because the thief believed on Him as Savior and King.

Why will many good men go to hell? Because they refused God’s gift and trusted in their own “good works”.

Jesus put the same truth in this way to the Pharisees – who were very religious, but very lost: *“Assuredly, I say to you that **tax collectors and harlots** enter the kingdom of God before you”* (Matt 21:31).

Why would such sinners enter the Kingdom and the Pharisees be left out? The Pharisees were very religious men who went to the Temple, prayed and paid tithes; they had fast days and feast days, and kept the Sabbath.

Why would Pharisees go to hell, and harlots go to heaven? Because the harlots received God's gift, and the Pharisees would not. Instead, they sought to secure their salvation by their own works of righteousness. The Divine Way to eternal life stood right before them, but they chose to take their own path.

Romans 10:3 includes the phrase "*submitted to the righteousness of God*". It refers to accepting God's gift of salvation that comes only through faith in Christ Jesus.

For many of us it is difficult to "submit" to anything. Something within us rebels against any kind of authority -even that of a wise and loving God.

A GIFT GOD PAID FOR – IN FULL!

OUR CREATOR-REDEEMER

There is a beautiful story in the Old Testament that clearly illustrates God's Father-heart of love. In this story, God reveals Himself not only as a Father-Creator, but also as a Father-Redeemer.

Isaiah the prophet saw this two fold revelation of God's character: "*But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine'*" (Isa 43:1).

The God Who creates also redeems to buy and bring man back into God's purpose would cost the father the life of His only Son. His life was given - as a sacrificial lamb - to buy us back - to redeem us.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC: A PROPHETIC PICTURE OF REDEEMING LOVE

"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'

"And He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' "So Abraham rose early in the morning

and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

“Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.

“And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.

“But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ And he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” (Gen 22:1-7)

At this point in our story, we might wonder why God would ask a man to kill his only son. Isaac (which means “laughter”) was a miracle baby when he was born. Both Abraham and Sarah were well beyond the age of having children.

However, God had promised Abraham a son, and He had kept His word. Abraham had waited twenty-five years for that promise to be fulfilled, and was overjoyed when Isaac was born. Now, God tells Abraham to kill his only son.

Would God really do such a thing, and if so, why? There is a divine purpose for this story being in the Bible. The purpose is to reveal an important truth.

The story is a prophetic picture of God’s plan of redemption. God wants us to clearly understand the roles which the Father and the Son must play in obtaining our salvation.

ISAAC-THE SON

We know that Isaac, as an obedient son, is a type (prophetic picture) of the Lord Jesus. The wood for the burnt offering was laid upon Isaac’s back, as they climbed the mountain. Two thousand years later, God’s only Son would carry a wooden cross upon His back as another mountain was climbed – Mount Calvary!

This story of Abraham and Isaac takes place in the hills of Moriah. These are the same hills outside Jerusalem upon which Christ, God's only Son, was sacrificed as our substitute.

We sometimes overlook the fact that Abraham is a type of God the Father. One can only wonder at the pain that must have been in Abraham's heart as he carried in his hand the knife and the fire. God had promised Abraham that through Isaac would come a family as large in number as the stars in the sky. How could such a promise be fulfilled if Isaac should die – *unless there was the hope of a resurrection!* (Heb 11:17-19).

THE STEADY STEPS OF FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

There *is* a very tender touch to our story when we read "*and the two of them went together*". Side by side they walked in silence: a loving father with his son, and a loving son with his father.

Father Abraham moves with the steady steps of faith and obedience, but there is a great ache in his heart. It is softened only by the hope which he has in God's promise. Finally, the quiet is broken by a question from the lips of Isaac: "*Where is the lamb?*"

Hidden in the answer is a beautiful prophetic picture of God's great redeeming love: "*And Abraham said, 'My Son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' So the two of them went together*" (Gen 22:8).

The word "together" appears the second time in the record and is filled with great meaning. It speaks of their love for one another; it also speaks of their faith and obedience to God.

Abraham must have told Isaac of God's will for his death – and God's promise for his life. Both of them are willing to submit to the Word of the Lord. Isaac was a strong young man and easily could have resisted his elderly father.

What a prophetic revelation of God's love this is: a father willing to sacrifice his beloved son - a son willing to submit to that sacrifice. We can only watch in silent amazement.

We know the ending to our story, of course. At the last moment God did provide a sacrifice in the form of a ram which was caught in a nearby bush. Isaac's life was spared, and God renewed His promise *to* Abraham. Through

Isaac would come a people who were destined to bless all the nations of the earth.

GOD PROVIDES A LAMB FOR US

Two thousand years later we see the same story unfold. Only this time there *is* no last-minute rescue of the One Who submits His life for sacrifice. We are speaking of God's Son Who gave Himself as the "Lamb of God."

Abraham and Isaac are a beautiful type of the Father-Son relationship within the Godhead.

The first time an important word or concept appears in Scripture sets a pattern for its further usage. The setting in which that word is found, therefore, carries very special meaning.

With this in mind, it is interesting to discover that the word "love" first occurs in reference to the love of a father for a son. More specifically, it was the love of Abraham for Isaac. *"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love"* (Gen 22:2).

The word "love" in the New Testament first occurs in the Synoptic Gospels in this notable phrase: *"You are My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased!"* (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). If Abraham loved his only son, how much more is God's love for His one and only Son!

John's Gospel is the Gospel of God's love. What is the first reference to God's great love in this special book? When we see what it is, we are moved to much wonder and humble amazement:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Yes, the Father has ever loved His Son -from all eternity past He has loved Him (John 17:24). Indeed, how much they loved One Another. But we are included in that love too. Jesus tells us that the Father loves us as He loves His Own Son (John 17:23).

It is almost beyond our understanding, but the Father and the Son planned in love for our redemption before the world was even created. They "walked

together” in that love for you and me. More than that, they “worked it out together” on the cross.

THE AWFUL PRICE

Many of us have had the false idea that the Father was strangely apart from His Own Son during that horrible hour in which He was “forsaken.” It is true; a Holy God cannot look upon sin. And Christ took our sin upon Himself on the cross. *“For He made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor 5:21).

But that does not mean that the Father felt any less pain than the Son did in His agony upon the cross. When the clean, pure, sinless Son of God took our sin upon Himself, something terrible happened. For the first time in all eternity, His fellowship with the Father was broken!

Sin separates. Spiritual death is separation from God. As the “Son of Man” (a prophetic title Jesus used - Matt 8:20; 17:12, 22, etc.), Jesus paid in full the penalty for our sin -alone upon a cross.

But the Father felt the pain of that penalty in full measure as well. When fellowship is broken, both parties share in the awful hurt. They walked that painful road together – to the end. Just as Abraham’s heart was grieved by the possible sacrifice of his son Isaac, so God’s heart was grieved by the actual sacrifice of His only Son for our sin.

Paul is reaching into the meaning of this awful yet wonderful truth in these words to the Corinthian church: *“God [the Father] was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them”* (2 Cor 5:19). This is a part of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Jesus said, *“I am in the Father and the Father in Me”* (John 14:10,11).

When Jesus was born of the virgin, we are told in Matthew 1:23 that *“They shall call His name ‘Immanuel’, which is translated, ‘God with us’.”* John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus, declared: *“Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29).

We recall that Abraham told Isaac, *“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering”* (Gen 22:8). These prophetic words present a beautiful picture of God’s personal love for us. God will provide a sacrificial

Lamb for our sin. He made Himself responsible to provide the necessary means through which we can be saved.

THE FREE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

A holy and righteous God declared, *‘The soul who sins shall die’* (Ezek 18:4). And with that, the Judge of the entire earth doomed the whole human race to death. It was the only thing that justice could do.

However, the mighty Creator of the universe and the Judge of all mankind is also a Father-Redeemer. He looks with love and mercy upon a sinful world and makes a most wonderful -yet terrible decision: “I will die in their place. I will pay the penalty that justice demands that they might live. I love them that much!”

And that is what God did. He was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself. In His Son He gathered up the whole human race and died on a cross. Now this passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans becomes alive with much meaning: *“Therefore, as through one man’s [Adam’s] offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so **through one Man’s [Christ’s] righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.***

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover, the Law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:18-21). In this passage, Paul sums up God’s plan of redemption and salvation. We have two **representative heads**: Adam, representing the whole human race; and Christ, representing all those people who would believe in Him for salvation (see also 1 Corinthians 15:22). This means that we are represented in Adam by natural birth, but we are, in Christ by faith.

When Adam deliberately disobeyed a specific verbal command of God (see Genesis 2:17; 3:6,17), he sinned. Through Adam, sin entered the world with the accompanying judgment of death. Thus sin and death spread to all mankind because all sinned (Rom 5:12). Mankind would hopelessly die, in this life and for all eternity, unless someone came to his rescue!

God did this in Christ, by having the sinless “Lamb of God” pay for humanity’s sins by sacrificing Himself on the cross (Rom 5:6-11).

In Adam, by our natural human birth, we are condemned to die as sinners. But because of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, we can be justified and live, if we are in Him by faith (Rom 5:18,19). In other words, we need to be “born; again” in to a new “family” by experiencing a spiritual birth from above (John 3:1-6).

NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

Now this does not mean that all men are saved without personally coming to Christ for His gift of salvation. We recall that a gift is not a gift until it has been accepted.

We are told in Romans 5:17 that we must personally “receive” God’s gracious gift of life in Christ Jesus. If it isn’t received, it doesn’t do us any good. The offer has already been made, but it must be accepted. Only those who receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior will enjoy everlasting life.

“Behold, NOW is the acceptable time; behold, NOW is the day of Salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).

God calls you today to do only one thing: **Receive His Son as your Savior.** Nothing else really matters.

Charles Wesley wrote the beautiful hymn, “Nothing in my hand I bring, only to Thy cross cling.” And he said it all.

Andrew Murray put it this way: “Every human being should put all of their sins in one pile, and all of their good works in another. Then they should flee from them both to Jesus!”

*“For the wages of sin is death, but **the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Rom 6:23). “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God**” (John 1:11,12).*

“IT IS FINISHED!”

We cannot earn this precious gift of eternal life --and we don't need to. It costs us nothing. When Jesus said ***“It is finished”*** on the cross, the price of our salvation was paid – **IN FULL!**

SET FREE BY SALVATION

- **THROUGH A NEW COVENANT**
- **FREE FROM LEGALISM**
- **FREE FROM CONDEMNATION**
- **FREE TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST**
- **FREE TO “WALK IN THE LIGHT”**

THROUGH A NEW COVENANT

BIBLICAL COVENANTS

A covenant is **an agreement where two parties vow to fulfill certain promises or conditions.**

A “conditional” covenant is a promise by one party which will be honored only if the other party fulfills certain conditions. “I will do this, if you will do that.”

An “unconditional” covenant is a promise with no conditions attached. “I will do this, no matter what you do, or don't do.”

There are a number of very interesting and important covenants in Scripture between God and man:

1. **EdenicBetween God and Mankind**
2. **Adamic Between God and Adam**
3. **Noahic Between God and Noah**
4. **Abrahamic Between God and Abraham**
5. **Mosaic (old) Between God and Israel**
6. **Davidic..... Between God and David**
7. **New Testament..... Between God and the Church**

The word “testament” means the same as “covenant.” We speak of the Bible as being divided into the Old and New “Testaments”.

In a more specific sense, the “Old Testament” refers to the Mosaic Covenant which was based upon God’s Law. The “New Testament” refers to a new and better covenant which is based upon God’s grace. We shall now study these two covenants in more detail.

THE NEW COVENANT REPLACES THE OLD

To understand salvation, it is necessary to know the difference between the old and the new covenants. Like a sunbeam in the shadows, the contrast is very great. The writer of Hebrews explains it in this way: *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a **better covenant**, which was established on better promises.*

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them,’ says the LORD.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ says the LORD: ‘I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’

“In that He says, ‘A new covenant’, He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:6-10, 12,13).

THE NEW COVENANT: BASED ON LOVE, NOT LAW

The laws and commandments of the old covenant were written by God on two tablets of stone, The Law was holy, but it was cold, hard and heavy to carry. It was always there – on the outside of one’s life – making demands that the “inner man” could not fulfill.

In contrast, the new covenant is a work of God's Spirit, Who writes His will within our hearts and minds,

Furthermore, God's will can be summed up in the royal law of love: *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Mark 12:30,31).

Yes, the motivation behind the new covenant is **love**. Jesus simply said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). And *"we love Him because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

NEED FOR A NEW HEART

One of David's psalms clearly reveals the differences between the old and new covenants. It was written after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba.

Once David truly saw the great grief his sin brought to the heart of God, he repented with deep sorrow. Out of the agony of his heart, he cried out to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness.

His prayer then took on a prophetic note which is well for us to hear. It spoke of the basis of man's salvation which one day would be secured by Christ's death on the cross and written into a new covenant. Listen to these beautiful words:

*"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, **blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.***

"For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

*"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts... **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"** (Ps 51:16,10).*

The prophetic insight which David received concerned the new work that God wanted to do in his life. One version of the Scriptures reads in this way:

“Create in me a new heart.”

David clearly understood that God’s Law was good, but his (David’s) heart was bad. He couldn’t get the two to match up. The Apostle Paul, who knew that his own heart had this problem, cried out, “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death*” (Rom 7:24).

OUR STRUGGLE WITH SIN

I think we can all agree that David and Paul were not the only ones to face this problem. Everyone must deal with the presence, power and habit of sin in his life.

Moreover, we can never find relief in the “stony tablets” of the Law. Indeed, The Law is holy, just and good (Rom 7:12), but our hearts are sinful, and untrue. How well we know these facts from our own personal experiences!

The good law of God judges – but cannot help -the evil heart of man. For this reason, we all with David can cry out for the Lord to do a deep work within our **inward parts**: “O God, create a new, clean heart within me....”

JEREMIAH LOOKS BEYOND THE OLD COVENANT

Some four hundred years after David, the prophet Jeremiah took up the same theme. He clearly foresaw the new covenant as an inward work of God’s grace. Therefore, he plainly drew a sharp line of contrast between the old and new covenants.

We will want to pay careful attention to his words. You will note that they are the same as those which were quoted in the eighth chapter of Hebrews. Let us review them here from the original record:

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.”*

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their

hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer 31:31-33; see also Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

THE OLD COVENANT: WRITTEN UPON TABLETS OF STONE

Jeremiah says that when God, by His mighty power, brought His people out of the land of Egypt to Mount Sinai, He made a covenant with them (Exodus Chapters 18-32).

God promised to make them a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, and a special people – if they would keep His laws and obey His voice.

“The Lord spoke to you,” Moses later reminded them. *“He declared to you His covenant ... the Ten Commandments”* (Deut 4:12, 13; see also – and study carefully – Deuteronomy 5:1-27).

He wrote His Law upon tablets of stone and gave them to Moses. The importance of the covenant was shown through a dramatic display of fire, smoke, thunder and an earthquake.

The Israelites were greatly impressed – but only for a short time. Before Moses got down to the bottom of the mountain, they already had broken God’s Law. They had made idols of gold, like they had seen in Egypt, and were dancing around and worshipping them.

When Moses saw what they were doing, he threw the tablets of stone to the ground – breaking them. The broken tablets at their feet plainly pictured the broken Law in their hearts.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Moses returned to the mountaintop, and God gave him another set of stone tablets upon which were written His commandments. Once again, Moses brought the Law down to the people.

God then designed a safe place where the stone tablets of the Law were to be kept. It was called “The Ark of the Covenant”. This was located in the part of the Tabernacle known as the “Holy of Holies”.

The Ark of the Covenant was a beautiful type or picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the perfect Keeper of the Law. He never once failed. God’s

Law was ever the joy and delight of His heart. *“I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your Law is within my heart”* (Ps 40:8).

For centuries the Law had been on stone. Now, for the first time, the law is found in the heart of a man – the Man Christ Jesus. He was the Chosen One through Whom the new covenant would come.

The Ark of the Covenant was the dwelling place of God among His chosen people, the Israelites. Jesus Christ, however, became the living Ark of God’s presence among the peoples of all the world.

THE FAILURE OF THE COVENANT

The law of the old covenant failed to make men holy. It was made up of a list of do’s and don’ts: “You shall do this you shall not do that!”

Men were to read the Law, and then live up to its demands. Paul makes it very clear, however, that this is an impossible task (see Galatians Chapters 2-4). No man can keep the Law, no matter how hard he tries.

The purpose of the Law is not to make us holy, but to reveal to us how unholy we are. For the Law plainly shows us that we cannot save ourselves - no matter what we do. The Law was given to guide us to our Savior: *“Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Gal 3:24).

No, we cannot become right before God by what we do; only by what we believe. Justification is by faith, not by works! (See Romans 3:21-26.)

The Law of the old covenant was an “external statement” -a word from without – telling us what God willed and wanted.

However, the Law could not impart to us the power to keep the commandments. The Law told us what to do, but gave us no power to do it. It showed us how weak and sinful we are, but provided no ability to fulfill its demands.

The New Testament is different. In the new covenant, God is saying to His people: “I will do for you what you cannot do for yourself. I will take that which has been a law from without, and write it within-upon your hearts.

“No longer will you look outwardly upon the Law, and carry its heavy burden in your hands. I will imprint it upon your ‘inward parts’, and cause you to faithfully do My will and go My way. My Law will now govern and empower your lives from within, rather than making demands from without.

“Moreover, My new covenant has no conditions. The only part which you can play is to believe it, and receive it. It is My gift of grace and love for you.”

NEED FOR A NEW SPIRIT

How can God keep such a wonderful promise? How can He take the Law from lifeless tablets of stone and write it within the heart and mind of man? We must turn to the prophet Ezekiel to find our answer. It is important that we do, for without Ezekiel’s added revelation, the new covenant will be only a theory, and never a reality in our lives.

David prayed that God would not only give him a clean heart, but would **renew a right spirit within him**. Now notice the wording of Ezekiel’s prophecy:

*“I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

*“**I will put My Spirit within you** and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek 36:26, 27).*

THE NEW COVENANT RATIFIED

In order for a covenant to take effect, it must first be **ratified**, or **established**. The new covenant could be ratified (established) only by the death of Christ. At the time of man’s fall, the law of sin and death began to take effect.

The result for all mankind would have been a timeless tragedy apart from God’s grace. That grace was revealed in the cross of Christ on Calvary. Only He could put the final seal upon our salvation through God’s new covenant.

Let us follow this thought further. When a man writes his last will and testament, the laws of most nations decree that it cannot be enforced until after his death.

God also set forth His will in the form of a new testament or covenant. It could not be put in force until the One Who wrote it died.

This is the reason God the Son came to this earth as the Son of Man. He came to die so that the new covenant -His will and testament -could be put into effect.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE EXECUTOR OF THE NEW COVENANT

When a will or testament is written, and the man who wrote it dies – he needs someone who is still alive to enforce the provisions of the will. Someone must execute (or implement) those provisions.

The person named to do this is called “an executor” because he executes (or enforces) the provisions of the will.

Christ not only died, but He rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father. By doing so, He could become “the executor” in Heaven of His will, of His Testament. He could thus legally establish the provisions of His Own will, of His Own (new) covenant.

Once the new will and testament was established in Heaven, it was necessary to execute or put it into effect -here on earth. For that reason, God sent His Holy Spirit from Heaven on the day of Pentecost.

The Spirit of God is the divine “Executor” of Christ’s will and testament. He is the One Who enforces the new covenant with its blessings and benefits. *“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek 36:27).*

The role of the Holy Spirit as the Executor of the new covenant is confirmed by the words of Christ Himself.

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for His departure. He was going to leave them, and they would soon be on their own. However, He promised them that He would not leave them as orphans; He would send Someone to take His place:

“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16,17).

The Greek word for “helper” is *parakletos*. It has a much wider meaning than just “one who comforts or consoles”. This word comes from the combination of two Greek words: *para*, meaning “beside”, and *kaleo* meaning “to call”. When these words are placed together, they mean “called to one’s side”. This word, ***parakletos***, signifies many things in the New Testament. It is used for “intercessor”, “comforter”, “helper”, “advocate”, “counselor”. This word was also used in a technical meaning of an attorney who goes to court on another’s behalf. We see this type of usage in 1 John 2:1: “*If any one sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*”

Now an “advocate” is a legal counselor or lawyer. He serves to plead his client’s cause before a court of law. The advocate stands by his client’s side, to provide counsel and speak on his behalf. It is the advocate’s duty to see that his client has the full benefits of the law.

To enforce His will – the new covenant -God the Father decided to appoint two Advocates for us. (That should give us a measure of “comfort”!) One of them is at the Father’s right hand. As we have already seen, He is the Lord Jesus Himself. Therefore, if we sin we have a “Lawyer” in Heaven to plead our cause – and He has never lost a case! It is also very important to remember that God the Father, as Judge over all, is totally on our side as well! God is for us (Rom 8:31-39). But He must also uphold His perfect justice by demanding a payment for sin. He upheld His justice because He “*did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*” (Rom 8:32).

Justice demanded that the Judge of all the earth pass sentence on sin; and that sentence is death. This is what man deserved and justice required.

But God, Who is perfectly just, is also perfectly merciful. Perfect justice required payment for sin, yet perfect mercy could only respond by doing for man what man could not do for himself. “***But God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them***” (Eph 2:4-10). Thanks be to God for His great love!

We also have an Advocate here on earth. He is the Holy Spirit our divine Counselor and Advocate. This is what Jesus meant when He said that the Father would send to us, another **Parakletos**. Let us further consider the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and daily lives.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE INNER CONTROL FOR OUR LIVES

Now what is our Advocate, the Holy Spirit, going to do for us? Ezekiel answers that question: *“I will give you a new heart... I will put My Spirit within you, and **cause you to walk in My statutes**”* (Ezek 36:26, 27).

In other words, God is placing His “law of love” in our hearts and minds through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is then that the Holy Spirit begins to *“teach you all things”* (John 14:26) and *“guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). It is through the Spirit of God within us that we begin to live out our salvation in our daily lives.

It is of great importance to remember that the Holy Spirit does not replace the Word of God. **The Holy Spirit has come to explain and apply the Word to our lives.** The Spirit and the Word work in partnership together to reveal God’s will and give us the power to be transformed into the image of Christ. **The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives will always agree with the truth of God’s Word.**

Moreover, the Holy Spirit will not only reveal to us the Father’s will; He will also enable us to fulfill the Father’s will. If we will submit to His control in our lives, the Holy Spirit will not only show us what to do and where to go; He will also move us in the right direction.

Now this “inner law of love” – linked with the Holy Spirit of truth-is very exacting. It covers every detail and every moment of our lives.

Actually, the Spirit-ruled life is even more demanding than the Law of Moses. However, there is a difference. In this new life in Christ, we are moved by the inner power of God’s love, and directed by His Spirit revealing His truth written in His Word. The Spirit filled life is not one of grim duty, but of loving obedience.

However, please do not think that being led by the Holy Spirit frees us from the demands of the Law. The presence of God’s Spirit within us has set us free from the laws written on stone; but He has freed us to obey the law

written on our hearts. No law written on stone tablets could ever completely cover every situation we face in life; only the Holy Spirit illuminating the truth of God's Word could do that.

Our freedom in Christ is not so that we can do whatever we want. We are freed so that we can do what we ought to do – obey God in every situation we face!

The power of God's love in our hearts is much more than just a warm feeling. This "law of love" can be very convicting when we act or speak in some unlovely way. It will work in all kinds of situations, many of which aren't specifically covered by the Ten Commandments.

We all need a kind of "inner control" to rule over the affairs of our everyday lives. This is how Christ lives His life through us.

A great tragedy is this: Many of us don't rely upon the Holy Spirit **within our hearts**. Instead, we look outside of us to the "tablets of stone". We try to keep God's laws by our own weak efforts. We somehow think we can become holy from an external or outside source. But it won't work.

Now perhaps we can better understand the difference between the two covenants. In the old covenant, the law was outside of us -written on tablets of stone. In the new covenant, the law is within – written upon our hearts and minds. The **Law** could force an **outward conformity** that would last only temporarily. But **the indwelling of the Spirit** can transform us **from the inside** permanently.

God has given us His Holy Spirit so that we might know His will in our minds, and be moved to do His will with our hearts – by the power the Spirit gives. In this way, the right and holy life which the Law demands is fulfilled in us. For **we no longer walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit**. Truly, He is the inner control of our lives!

FREE FROM LEGALISM

NO LONGER BOUND

Unfortunately, many sincere Christians are tempted to go back under the **outer** control of the Old Law: This was true of some Jewish Christians in Paul's day.

They were being tempted by legalistic leaders to forsake the grace which was theirs in Christ Jesus. Paul made a direct reference to this kind of danger in his letter to the Romans:

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?”

“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.

“So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.”

*“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through, the body of Christ, **that you may be married to another – to Him Who was raised from the dead**, that we should bear fruit to God” (Rom 7:1-4).*

MARRIAGE: A PICTURE OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Paul uses the laws of marriage to illustrate relationship with Christ under the new covenant (testament).

As sinners, we were “married” to the Law and bound by its demands. When we accepted Christ as Savior, we were “baptized” (placed) into His Body (1 Cor 12:13). We thus became identified with Him - in both His death and His resurrection (see Roman 6).

When Christ died on the cross, we were “in Him”. When He was raised from the dead and ascended into Heaven ···· “in Him” we also rose and ascended, and are enthroned with Him in the heavens (see Ephesians 2:1-6).

By our death on the cross (in Christ), we were not only set free from the power of sin, but also set free from our “marriage-bondage” to the Law. Now we are free to many “Another” - Christ.

When Christ a rose, we also became alive in Him. In that resurrection, He became our heavenly Husband, and we became the Bride of Christ.

We are no longer under the rule of the Law -our “old husband”: Now we are under *the* loving rule and law of our “new Husband” – the Lord Jesus.

SPIRITUAL “ADULTERY:” A PROBLEM FOR MANY SINCERE CHRISTIANS

Now a problem for many sincere Christians is the temptation to again come under the control of the Law. In Christ, God set them free from their “old husband” (the Law) so that they might be wedded to their “new Husband” (the Lord).

Yet they seem drawn back into a “friendly” relationship with one to whom they are no longer married. Clearly, they do not realize what they are doing. Such Christians are “flirting” with the Law, and this can lead to spiritual adultery.

They are not totally trusting in the “finished” work of Christ upon the cross. Therefore, they feel they must “add something” to fully satisfy the demands of the Law. They do not understand that when they look back to the Law in that way, they are really being “unfaithful” to their new Husband, the Lord Jesus. We cannot put our faith in the Law and God’s grace at the same time.

LEGALISM: A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN THE GALATIAN CHURCH

This same problem was faced at an earlier time by the Galatian church. Certain legalistic teachers had come up from Jerusalem and tried to bring the Galatian Christians back under submission to the Law.

These Jewish teachers told the Galatian believers that they were not really saved from sin and separated to Christ unless they were circumcised. They taught the Galatians that this was something they had to do in addition to trusting in Christ.

In submitting to the dictates *of* the Old Testament law which required circumcision, they were like a married woman submitting to someone other than her husband. This is wrong in marriage. A wife submits only to her husband.

In the same way, it is wrong for people who say they are fully (and only) trusting in Christ – to put their trust in other things such as religious medals, penance, and other religious exercises.

In returning to their old “husband” (the Law) the Galatians were being unfaithful. Christ had set them free by His death on the cross. Now they were going back into bondage under the laws of the Old Testament.

LEGALISM: AN ONGOING DANGER

The danger of being drawn back into an unfaithful relationship with the Law was a great concern of the Apostle Paul. He warned the Galatian church with these strong words:

*“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and **do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage**. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.”*

“And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole Law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal 5:1-4).

In Paul’s mind, there is nothing more tragic than the Christian who turns from the freedom he has in Christ to the slavery of a legalistic system. Sadly, there have been Pharisees in every age who have sought to bring God’s people back into that kind of bondage.

A DARK SHADOW OF FEAR

The spirit of legalism is very powerful and very deceptive. The sincere Christian who does not understand the true basis of his salvation can be easily seduced or misled. Such a person truly wants to please God and have His approval. Trying to live up to the demands of the Law seems like such a right way to do it. It may seem right, but it is wrong!

The basic force behind legalism is fear. The Law strictly says we must do or die. But once that path is taken, it soon becomes very clear that one can never do enough. A dark cloud of condemnation, therefore, hangs over the believer’s head. A dark shadow of fear fills the believer’s heart. Only the light of God’s love – the “light of the Gospel” – can dispel that darkness.

And it has!

Salvation – if we accept it fully as a **free gift** -sets us free from the bondage of legalism.

FREE FROM CONDEMNATION

BRIGHT WORDS OF HOPE

Listen to the Apostle Paul's words of hope and encouragement in the first verse of the eighth chapter of Romans: "*There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION to those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

The rest of the verse – "*who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*" -is not in our best and most reliable Greek texts. It is possible that this portion of verse 4 was accidentally added here as a copyist's error.

Perhaps, however, some of the later translators could not accept such a statement without some conditions. Surely, they may have felt, there was something we have to "do" to get out from under condemnation. So they took a part of verse four and added it to verse one.

Now why did they do this? Possibly because they were still living by the outward Law themselves. They did not fully understand the provisions of the new covenant. Therefore, they added some conditions of self-effort: "In order to come out of condemnation, you must not walk in the flesh; you must -walk in the Spirit."

Adding these words to the Bible distorts the pristine beauty of our new covenant. These words falsely teach us that any failure on our part will at once bring us under condemnation. This is the opposite of what Paul was trying to say and teach. However, as was pointed out earlier, we have been set free to obey God. We are not to use our freedom to satisfy fleshly desires.

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another ... I say then: Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:13,16).

We are not under condemnation (God's banishing judgment) if we are in Christ. But if we violate His Lordship and the law of love which the Holy Spirit has placed in us, we should feel conviction.

There is a difference between conviction and condemnation. Conviction will draw us to Christ to seek His forgiveness and cleansing. A sense of condemnation will drive us from God and make us try harder in our own effort to be religiously perfect.

Some people get a strange sense of satisfaction from a ministry of condemnation. If people aren't "flogged" and "beaten" by the Law, they haven't had a good meeting. One senses an element of self-righteous pride in such a legalistic attitude.

That was why Jesus boldly and sternly confronted the Pharisees. They placed legalistic burdens upon the backs of the people which the people could not bear (Matt 23:4; Acts 15:10,11).

FOREVER FREE FROM THE LAW

We are free from condemnation because in Christ, the penalty to our sin has already been paid. He took upon Himself our sin — and the penalty of our sin — when He died upon the cross. He was condemned in our place. Therefore, we are free from the law of sin and death — — and the condemnation which it brings.

This is exactly what Paul tells us in the very next verse: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

The meaning of this verse can be better understood if we substitute the word "control" for the word "law." It would then read: "For the control of the Spirit... has made me free from the control of sin and death."

"Sin and death" represent the results of the law written in stone. So Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit has a greater control over our lives within us than the Law does outside of us. The higher authority dwells within, not without.

FREE TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST

THE RULE OF TRUTH AND LOVE

The Holy Spirit's control within us frees us from the control of sin and death. The inner authority of the Holy Spirit is a higher power than the power of the Law. In fact, the Law never could produce the righteousness which it demanded. Only the power and authority of the Holy Spirit can do that.

Paul enlarges this thought in the next two verses: "There is therefore, now no condemnation to those

Who are in Christ Jesus...”

“For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the Law might lie fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:1-4).

Our old sinful nature is also called the “flesh”. To live “in the flesh” is to live by our own efforts- apart from the Law-keeper within (the Holy Spirit).

To do so brings us back under the Law and its condemnation. Paul plainly tells us that this will lead only to failure and feelings of guilt. We are again bound by the law of sin and death!

To walk in the Spirit is to exercise the self-control which comes as a fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22) and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

To walk in the Spirit brings life. We walk and live in the Spirit by giving ourselves to His control. He will always rule our lives in truth and love. While He will never condemn us, He will be very quick to convict us of sin. He will faithfully let us know whenever we break God’s holy law of love. He will also give us the power to live out that law so we need not fail.

What a beautiful gift of God’s grace the Holy Spirit is to our hearts! No wonder He is called the blessed Comforter -our ever-present Counselor and companion.

AN INNER DESIRE AND POWER

At this point, we want to make two things clear so that we will not be misunderstood.

Caution 1. We are NOT saying that the Holy Spirit has come to replace the Word of God (the Bible). There are some who teach this, but it is not true.

The Holy Spirit has come to explain and apply the Word to our lives. Without the Scriptures, He has nothing to explain. The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives

will always agree with the truth of God's Word. His desire is to relate that Word to the details of our daily affairs.

The Holy Spirit converts the written Word into the Living Word within our hearts. He makes it the vital focus for our faith. The Lord Jesus is our model Brother. He totally relied upon both God's Word and God's Spirit to fulfill the will of His Father here on earth. We should do no less.

Caution 2. Another important point concerns our freedom in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit does NOT release us from the demands of the Law so that we can live unlawful lives. He has set us free from the law written on stone, so that we might obey the law written upon our hearts.

This is a higher law or control; and this higher law of the Holy Spirit within us will govern every area of our lives. No law written on tablets of stone could ever cover all of the different situations we face in life. Only the Holy Spirit can apply God's inner law of love in such a way.

No, we are NOT being loosed to follow the lusts or desires of our flesh. In fact, if we fall short of God's will for us in Christ, the Holy Spirit will convict and correct us at once.

It is His purpose to make us like Jesus -to conform us into His image. As the Spirit of Christ, He becomes for us our inner Law of life. We are no longer controlled by an outer law of do's and don'ts, but by an inner desire and power to become like the Lord Jesus.

"We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18).

FREE TO "WALK IN THE LIGHT"

FOREVER FREE!

The glory of the Lord is a glorious light, and *"in Him is no darkness at all"* (John 1:5). Nor, dear fellow saint, should there be any darkness in your walk with the Lord.

The cloud of condemnation has been lifted. The dark shadow of fear has been dispelled.

If you have submitted your spirit to God's Spirit, and your mind to His Word, you truly need not fear. You may make some mistakes, but God will be faithful to work even these together for your good and His glory. He will **lovingly** train and discipline your life day by day if you allow Him.

Praise God, we have been given a **new** heart, a **new** spirit and a new covenant.

We have been set free – and our freedom in Christ is forever secure!

GOD'S WAY OF PEACE AND JOY

Dear fellow saint, God desires for you to enjoy the blessings and benefits of His new covenant. It is a gift of His grace in Christ Jesus. His Holy Spirit now dwells within you, and *“where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty”* (2 Cor 3:17). It is a freedom from the law of sin and death.

God's law of love is written plainly upon your heart. The Holy Spirit – your Comforter and Counselor -will apply that Law to every detail of your life. He will faithfully correct and direct your life in the ways of the Lord. This, is God's way of peace and joy for you.

And you can have peace and joy dear friend! If you are ever tempted to fall back under the bondage of legalism, repeat these words of assurance found in Romans 8:1,2:

*“There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION to those who are in Christ Jesus, for **the law of the spirit of life has SET ME FREE**”* – free to *“walk in the light, as He is in the light”* (1 John 1:7), the glorious light of God's love and grace.

SENT FORTH BY SALVATION

- **CALLED TO GO!**
- **FULFILLING GOD'S END TIME PLAN**

CALLED TO GO!

You must not only walk in the light; you have been called, like John the Baptist, to bear witness of the light (John 1:7).

The Lord Jesus has *“called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Pet 2:9). But in giving you the gift of salvation, He didn’t just call you to come out of darkness; He called you to GO out to those who still sit *“in darkness”* (Matt 4:16) – to tell them the Good News of salvation and *“turn them from darkness to light”* (Acts 26:18).

You have the light of the Gospel. You have the *“light of life — eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (John 8:12; Rom 6:23).

Many do not.

Multitudes around the world remain in the shadow of death – eternal death, the *“wages of sin”* (Matt 4:16; Rom 6:23). They have not yet seen the light. So it’s up to you.

Show them the light. Let the light of the Gospel that shines on you shine on them. Heed Christ’s command: ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven”*** (Matt 5:16).

For did He not say, in Matthew 5:14, *“YOU are the light of the world”*? Jesus did NOT say you are the light of your church only or your town only, or even your nation only - He said THE WORLD.

It’s true: Jesus, *“the true Light”* (John 1:9), wants you and me to *“shine as lights in the world”* (Phil 2:15); He wants us to shine the light of the Gospel on ALL the world:

“I have set you as a light to the Gentiles [nations] that you should before salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

Jesus said *“Go... and make disciples of all the nations”* (Matt 28:19); He said *“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel”* (Mark 16:15).

ONE CAN WIN THOUSANDS

Now of course you cannot go in to all the world yourself to preach the Gospel.

But you can, if you are a pastor, encourage the members of your church to preach to those outside your church. If there are members of your church who have ministry and leadership abilities, you can send them forth to plant new churches – and they can send forth others to plant even more churches.

You can, if you are an evangelist, go to the next town or village to preach the Gospel and win souls for Christ -and then train these new believers to go to a town or village farther away to win even more souls for Christ and send those new believers even farther away to win many more....

In this way, the ministry of just one church leader – YOU! – can win dozens, hundreds, even *thousands* to Christ....

In this way, the light of the Gospel that dawned in your heart can shine all the way to the ends of the earth....

And in this way, dear fellow laborer in the Gospel, you can play a vital role in...

FULFILLING GOD’S END-TIME PLAN

“THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE”

Jesus told His disciples that at the end of the age the world would face a time of great distress and difficulty (2 Tim 3:1). Fear, hatred and greed would cause the nations of the world to war against one another. The “last days” will be dark days indeed (see Matthew 24; Luke 21).

There is a bright hope, however, for the Christian Church:

It shall be in the last days, says God, ‘that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh... and it shall come to pass, that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Acts 2:17, 21).

These verses, quoted from Joel 2:28-32 in Peter’s sermon signify the Church age starting on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This age will end in the climatic events of the apocalypse.

This teaches us that more people are going to hear the Gospel and be saved in the last days than at any other time in history. There is going to be a great end-time revival as the light of the Gospel shines into the darkness of a dying

world. God always brings a “warning” and a “witness” before times of great judgment.

For this reason, God desires to unify the Church in Her worship, work, warfare and witness. Revival will come only as Christ’s power and glory are revealed by His Body throughout the world.

“I pray ... that they all may be one ... that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20, 21);

“...and this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14).

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...”

“Reconciliation” is a beautiful and wonderful word. It means “to bring together in peace those who have broken fellowship with each other”. When man sinned, he opposed God and came under the control of His enemy – Satan.

To disobey God is sin. And sin separates us from God and makes us His enemies.

God, in His grace, wants to forgive us our sins and bring us back into His family. In short, He wants us to be “reconciled” unto Himself and be at peace with Him. That is why He sent His Son in to the world to die for our sins. God wants to be our Father; He wants to be our Friend!

Yes, reconciliation is a word filled with holy wonder. It is spoken from the very heart of God Himself. It tells us of His love and grace for all mankind. It speaks of His desire to bring all the nations of the world unto Himself.

Nations are made up of people, and God loves people -even people who have sinned and sought their own will and way. Through sin, man lost his way with God and became His enemy. Through Christ, God seeks to bring the whole world back into a right relationship with Himself.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST”

God revealed to the Apostle Paul His great love for the nations of the world. Moreover, He set that same love in Paul's own heart. Listen carefully to these words written to the church at Corinth:

“Now all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing [reckoning] their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:18-20).

Truly, this is God's plan for the nations – that they be reconciled to Himself. He wants ALL people to know, love, worship and serve Him with all of their being. He has never changed His mind; it is still the deep desire of His heart.

THE FIRST AMBASSADORS

It was the deep desire of Peter's heart. It was the deep desire of Paul's heart. And Philip's. And all the New Testament apostles, prophets, elders, deacons — the whole Church.

They had seen the *“true Light”* -Jesus. They believed in the light (John 12:36). They received the gift of salvation. The light of the Gospel shone in their hearts.

They didn't keep the gift a 'secret. They didn't hide the light *“under a basket”* (Matt 5:15). They *“let it shine”* before men and women in Judea, Samaria... and beyond.

A MIGHTY START

They had witnessed the Light. Now they went forth as witnesses of the Light – preaching the Gospel of salvation to as many as they could.

And they witnessed so faithfully, and preached so fearlessly – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – that within just two months of the Resurrection, thousands received God's free gift of salvation through Christ Jesus (Acts 2:41).

It wasn't yet *“all the world”* (Mark 16:15) -but it was a mighty start!

“WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE ...”

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

This may have seemed like an impossible task. But the Lord had assured them that *“with God ALL things are possible”* (Matt 19:26).

So they stepped out in faith, and went to work witnessing in a sin darkened world. The Holy Spirit lit the way. He inspired and empowered them to play a vital role in fulfilling God’s end-time plan.

He can do the same for you.

GOD COMMANDS...REPENT!

*“God...now commands all men everywhere to **repent**”* (Acts 17:30)

THE FIRST MESSAGE OF JESUS

The very first experience upon which a Christian life can be built is **Repentance**. Jesus’ very first preaching of the Gospel – this wonderful Good News of salvation in Christ – is “Repent”. The second is “Believe”:

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel’” (Mark 1:14,15).

John the Baptist’s first message was *“Repent”* (Matt 3:2). The first message of Jesus Christ was *“Repent”* (Matt 4:17). The Risen Lord Jesus commanded His disciples that **“repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations”** (Luke 24:47). Thus repentance was Peter’s first message (Acts 2:38). The Apostle Paul preached, *“God... now commands all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30). Thus we see the extreme urgency of God’s command to all men everywhere – “Repent”

WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

Repentance is not conviction of sin – the feeling of guilt and shame for sin. The conviction that we have sinned against the Holy God of the Bible and broken His commandments will always come before repentance, but it is not repentance. No one repents until he sees his sins; but not all who see their sins go on to repent.

Repentance is not being sorry when we are caught doing wrong. Repentance is not reforming our lives, or trying to make it fresh start. Repentance is not being religious.

Repentance is not holding an opinion. Multitudes of people are deceived because they believe with their minds some creeds, or doctrines. They have “head faith.” Having accepted some teachings and traditions, they believe they are in good standing with God – but they have never repented of sin, asked the Lord Jesus to come in to their hearts, and exercised “heart faith” which; alone gives salvation. The Bible says you must accept and “*Believe in your heart*” (Rom 10:9).

WHAT TRUE REPENTANCE IS

Repentance involves the total personality, the whole man. It is a complete change of mind, heart and will, particularly concerning sin, and our relationship to God and His Son Jesus Christ.

In the change of mind, our intellect is involved. The way we think about sin, and about the Lord Jesus Christ, changes.

In the change of heart, our emotions are involved. The way we feel about sin, and about the Lord Jesus Christ, changes.

In the change of will, we want to turn from sin to God, and receive His salvation.

Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, changed his mind, but not his will. He hanged himself, and went out into eternal night.

In the beginning, man was perfect. His mind was always towards God’s Word, God’s will, God’s way. But man chose to disobey God; and through disobedience to the Word and will of God, man’s mind, heart and will turned against God. Thus the need today to “Repent” – to change. To turn from our own way. To turn from our own will. To turn about, and return to God.

There are some reading these lines who have never repented. Just now, as you sit in the presence of God, you feel guilty and ashamed of your sin. But be encouraged. God loves you just as you are. If you will repent -if you will change the attitude of your mind, heart and will to God -He will come into your life and save you from your sin.

KNOWING JESUS PERSONALLY

The second word of this Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ is “*Believe*” (Mark 1:15). Now you must repent, and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because “*repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” will make you a child of God (Acts 20:21). This is not believing about Jesus Christ in your mind. You may know about Jesus. But do you know Him personally? I know about many famous people in this world. But I do not know them personally. Do you know Jesus personally?

Turn to God now, with your whole mind, heart and will, and be truly sorry for your sins. Accept Jesus into your heart as your personal Lord and Savior. He will wash your sins away by the power of His blood, which flowed from His body when He died on the cross. No matter who you are, Jesus loves you. He is knocking at the door of your heart. Repent, open your life to Him, and let Him in today!

NO “BORN” CHRISTIANS

I have traveled extensively in many countries of the world. Whenever I meet someone who calls himself a Christian, I often ask: “When did you become a Christian?” I always get one of two answers: Either a joyful testimony of salvation or a look of surprise, as if to say: “What on earth are you talking about?”

More often than not, I am told: “What do you mean, when did I become a Christian? I was born a Christian! My mother was a Christian. My father was a Christian. My uncle was a pastor! I’ve always been a Christian.”

Being born in a Christian home does not make you a Christian any more than being born in a motor garage makes you a motorcar! I was born in a hospital, but that does not make me a doctor!

The Bible does not say one word about “born” Christians. On the contrary, Jesus said: *“You must be born again”* (John 3:7).

How many are christened, confirmed, or join a church – and then, feeling that on Judgment Day their good deeds will be weighed against their bad ones, somehow hope that the good deeds will outweigh the bad ones. But Jesus said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again [or from above], he cannot see the Kingdom of God,”* let alone enter into it! (John 3:3).

HOW TO REPENT

“How can I take the first step?

How can I repent?”

1. Repentance Is A Gift From God

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance. . . and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30,31).

Repentance and forgiveness of sins are gifts of God. They are in a Person, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. To receive the gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins, you must receive the Person in Whom are the gifts.

Receive Jesus into your heart and life, as a conscious act.

2. Godly Grief for Sin

“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor 7:10).

As you think of your sin, you feel guilty and ashamed. You feel sorrow and grief for your sin. It is this godly grief alone which produces repentance.

3. Confess Your Sin To God

“God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13).

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

If you will confess your sins to God, He will forgive and cleanse you -right now! What wonderful love and mercy this is.

4. **Forsake Sin**

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but he who ever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov 28:13).

After you have confessed your sins and transgressions to God, forsake them – give them up, turn away from them, and never come back to them.

5. **Make Restitution**

After we have confessed our sin, experienced God’s forgiveness, received Christ as Savior and Lord, and forsaken our sin, there is one thing left to be done; To make restitution – to restore money or goods that are not ours to their rightful owners; to write and apologize to people we have hurt because of our sin. Read the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and see how he made restitution after meeting the Lord Jesus.

Friend, *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out”* (Acts 3:19). Accept Jesus into your heart as your Savior, and trust Him to blot out your sins by the power of His blood. The Holy Spirit will do a miracle in your heart – and you will be born anew. Only then will you have *“faith with a pure conscience”* (1 Tim 3:9).

THE FRUIT OF REPENTANCE

The Bible commands us to *“Therefore bear fruits worthy of [consistent with] repentance”* (Matt 3:8).

“A tree is known by its fruit” (Matt 7:15-20; 12:33-37). The fruit of a tree will only be according to the root of the tree, which is not seen, being hidden under the earth. So is true repentance. Fruit that is consistent with repentance is continual outward evidence that demonstrates your change of heart.

Because our hearts and minds and wills have been changed, so our words and way of living change. Bad habits stop. The beautiful fruit of the Holy Spirit, Who has given us new birth, show forth – *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Gal 5:22,23). The

whole character is changed, and the life starts to become Christ-like. For “Christ-like” is the real meaning of the word “Christian.”

Also, the Bible commands that those who would give their lives to Christ “*should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*” (Acts 26:20). While fruit speaks of the manifestation of inward, unseen growth, works speak of what we do. Works are the outward manifestation. If there is true inward repentance, it is demonstrated in the life by works performed.

True repentance produces a complete change in the whole life, and way of living. Not a sad, strict set of rules and regulations – “I must do this, I must not do that” type of life -but rather a joyous expression of the life of Jesus Christ within us. Before, we pleased ourselves. We followed our own minds. We went our own way. But now we have repented. We have turned around. We have believed in Jesus Christ and received Him as Savior and Lord. Now “*we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor 2:16). He lives His life in us. So, then, we do only the things Christ does. We think His thoughts. We speak His words.

These fruit and works are visible in the life of the person who has truly repented.

FOR BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS TOO

The command to repent is not only for those who have never personally received Christ as their Savior. Many born-again Christians need to repent also.

Surely, the weakness of our love for Christ demands repentance. Our lack of compassion for those who yet do not know Christ, our making idols of possessions, titles, position -all need to be repented of. We need to repent of our stealing. We do not break a shop window and steal goods from the shopkeeper, true -but we rob God without feeling sorry at all! One tenth of all we earn is God’s. How dare we use it for ourselves! Any offerings we may give to the Lord are over and above the first tenth of our income that belongs to Him (Mal 3:8,9).

To the Ephesian church, the Lord said: “*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left [abandoned] your first love*” (Rev 2:4). This is possibly the most prevalent sin among those who have truly turned to Christ for His salvation. The thrill and glow of that love we had for the Savior when we first

accepted Him in to our lives is there no longer. If I love my Lord any less today than I did yesterday, then I too must hear the Lord's command: *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent"* (Rev 2:5).

May God help us to obey His command today! May our hearts be gripped with the urgency of our need to repent!

THE FOUNDATION DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is a foundational doctrine. In Hebrews 6:1 we are commanded: *"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection [maturity], not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God..."* Of course, this does not mean we stop teaching and experiencing these blessed elementary doctrines. The writer to the Hebrews is simply saying that they should be studying deeper truths from the Word of God. But, he says: *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk, and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [mature], that is, those who by reason of use (habitual practice) have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Heb 5:12-14).

If the writer to the Hebrews were living today, I wonder what he would write to most of our churches. So few of us know anything about the first principles, let alone the solid food of God's Word! The first principles are listed for us in Hebrews 6:1, 2:

1. The foundation of Repentance from dead works
2. Faith towards God
3. Doctrine of baptisms
4. Laying on of hands
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgment

From these we are exhorted to go on unto:

7. “Perfection” (maturity)

(This list is taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.)

Do you know about these fundamental principles of the doctrine of Christ? We must leave this blessed study for another time and place. However, notice particularly what is written about repentance *“Laying ... the foundation of repentance”* (Heb 6:1). It is established that repentance is the first part of the foundation for the Christian life.

REPENT – OR PERISH

We are living in the last of the Last Days. The signs of the end times given us in the Bible are being fulfilled at an alarming rate.

Jesus is coming again in power and great glory *“to judge the living and the dead”* (1 Pet 4:5). No one will escape that judgment. Every one of us will be there. *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”* (Rom 14:10).

By what standard shall we be judged? By whether we have repented or not, and by the standard of Jesus Christ. Our lives will be compared to His life, and we will be judged according to the measure we have allowed Him to live His life in us. The Bible warns us: *“God... now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] Whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30, 31).

Do you have that assurance that you are ready to stand before Him on Judgment Day? If not, then now is the time for you to repent from your sins, and accept the Lord Jesus Christ into your life. The Bible commandment is “now”

There is only one alternative to repentance – the awful judgment of God. For Jesus warns us, *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:5).

SPECIAL BONUS SECTION OF DEFINITIONS

IMPORTANT SALVATION CONCEPTS

The “Foundation of the Church” rests firmly on our great Savior, Jesus! There are several other terms regarding salvation that have been used in this issue. These and others will be used in future issues of ACTS Magazine. Because of their importance, it would be good to list and define them at this time.

1. SALVATION

This refers to the work of God’s grace in Christ by which we are:

1. Saved “from” the penalty, power and future presence of sin.
2. Saved “for” God’s purpose, and placed in His family in which we express the likeness of His Son.

When Christ died on the cross for our sins, He became our Savior. He died in our place and paid the price (penalty) for our sin. When we by faith receive Him as our Savior, we also receive the power of His resurrection life. As this new life flows into us, it brings wholeness (healing) for our spirit, soul and body.

To be “saved” means to be forgiven, healed, released, made whole (or complete) and restored. We are safe, sound and set free. We are free to become everything God has called us to be as His royal and beloved sons and daughters.

2. REGENERATION

The term “generates” means to create or produce life. Regeneration, as we learned above, refers to the return or restoration of life after death.

We are “dead” in our sins. Therefore, we must have a “new input” of spiritual life (be born again) to be brought back into the family of God.

There is only one way we can be born into an earthly family. That is by the impartation or input of natural life. This occurs through the process of biological reproduction. The germ or sex cells bring together the life that is needed to produce a new little baby boy or girl.

The same is true when it comes to being “born” into the family of God. There must be an input of spiritual life – a Divine seed. That “Seed of Life” is a Person – and that Person is Jesus Christ. When we receive Christ into our heart, He is the Life which brings us to birth in God’s holy family. Therefore,

every Christian has had two births: a natural birth and a spiritual birth. This is what it means to be “born again.”

3. ATONEMENT

The word “atone” means to become “at-one” with another (at one-ment). It speaks of agreement and peace which is the result of making wrongs right.

Sin is a wrong against God. Therefore, it separates or “alienates” us from God. We need to be “reconciled” or brought back into fellowship with Him.

The only way the results of sin can be made of no effect is by “justification” (counting a sinner righteous). Justification is not the act (as some suppose) of overlooking sin or blindly ignoring transgression. A holy and just God cannot overlook sin.

Sin can be canceled, covered or put aside only if the penalty of sin has been paid. Only then can justice be satisfied and the sin be blotted out. When the penalty for the wrong has then been fully paid, fellowship can be restored.

The penalty for sin is death. Jesus, in His grace and mercy, paid that penalty for us when He died on the cross for our sins. In this way, we can say that His blood has covered and canceled our sin. (“Cancel” means to make of no effect.) Atonement, then, is God’s action – through Christ’s death – by which our fellowship is restored. We are made “at-one” with God.

4. RIGHTEOUSNESS

This refers to the holy character of God. He is ever “right” in thought, word and deed in attitudes and actions. He is right, good and true in all ways and in all things.

This is the “righteous” standard of the Law. Whatever is not righteous is wicked, evil and wrong – in short, sinful. For this reason, sinful man can never stand before a holy God. Righteousness and unrighteousness are forever against one another. There is no basis for fellowship.

For this reason, God sent His Son to “atone” for our sins. When we accept Christ into our hearts as our Savior, our sins are covered and canceled. God no longer sees us in our sins, but in the righteousness of His Son. Not only is He in us, but we are in Him.

This is called “imputed” righteousness. The word “impute” is a legal term. It means that something has been put to our account by another. What is theirs now also belongs to us. Their position and possession becomes our position and possession. It is a joint account. The righteousness of Jesus has become our righteousness. The position of Jesus at the Father’s right hand has become our position (see Ephesians 1:20-22; 2:4,5).

Besides “imputed” righteousness, which is our legal position, there is an “imparted” righteousness. “Impart” means to put something in. When we became Christians, something was “put into” our lives. Not *only* are we “in Christ” in the legal sense, but Christ is “in us” in a personal and practical sense.

In receiving Jesus, we also receive His holy, righteous nature. We have a new nature – a new source of inner power – by which we can now begin *to* live a “righteous” life. Our “old nature” died with Jesus on the cross, which gives us the right and freedom to express our “new nature” (see Romans Chapter 6).

5. JUSTIFICATION

To “justify” means to make right before the Law, and therefore make free from guilt or condemnation.

To “condemn” means to judge someone guilty before the Law. Sin is breaking the laws of God. Therefore, all sinners are guilty before God. The penalty for our sin is death. The demands of the Law cannot be satisfied without the penalty for sin being paid “Justice” cannot overlook sin as if it didn’t happen.

In God’s plan of redemption, mercy and justice can join hands in only one way. And it is this: the Judge (God) not only passes the sentence, but also pays the penalty (Christ’s death) Himself! The guilty party is now “justified” and made right before the Law.

The sinner can now go free because his Judge was not only just (which required Him to enforce the penalty of the Law) but also full of mercy (since He paid the penalty that His justice required Him to impose upon the sinner).

This is what God did for us in Christ’s death upon the cross. Sin was judged. The penalty was paid. And we were forgiven and set free! We were thus JUSTIFIED.

THE CHURCH: FAMILY LIFE AND KINGDOM POWER

The phrase “family of God” describes human and heavenly relationships of life and love. It is not only a “beloved” family, but also a “royal” family. Christ is not only our Redeemer-Brother, but also our Royal-Brother – the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We were born not only into the family of God, but into His Kingdom as well. In God’s “family” we have life; in God’s “Kingdom” we have power and authority.

The Church of Jesus Christ includes the concepts of both the “family” and the “Kingdom.” Christ is the royal Son of God. His life and His authority will be expressed through us as we become “one” with Him. The Apostle Paul teaches us that *“by one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body – whether Jews or Greeks... and have all been made to drink of one Spirit”* (1 Cor 12:13).

The term “baptize” means to be placed into or become one with something. We have been placed into Christ and have become one with Him. At salvation, the Holy Spirit puts us into Christ (imputed righteousness) and Christ into us (imparted righteousness). We truly become members of His Body. He is the Head of that Body, and that Body is the Church. (See Colossians 1:18.)

The first time we find the word “church” in the New Testament, it is from the lips of Jesus Himself. Peter has just spoken out and confessed Jesus as *“the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”* Jesus tells him that *“the Father”* had blessed him with that revelation.

Then, calling Peter by name, Jesus told him: *“Upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven...”* (Matt 16:18,19; see also – and think about -verses 13-17).

The “rock” upon which the Lord would build His Church is the revelation, given by God to Peter, that Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the Living God”* (v. 16).

Jesus assures Peter -and all believers – that His Church, founded on that firm “rock” of God’s revelation, will be so strong spiritually that the very defenses of hell will not be able to withstand the Church’s victorious assault against them.

The “keys” in verse 19 represent the authority of the Kingdom of Heaven.

A CHIEF CORNERSTONE AND A SURE FOUNDATION

Jesus was telling the disciples that He was going to build His Church upon a sure foundation. He would be the Chief Cornerstone, but there would be other foundation stones as well. (See Ephesians 2:20.)

They would be men who, like Peter, had a “relationship” with the Father – and a “revelation” from the Father.

The relationship with the Father would come “through” Jesus: *“No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6).

The revelation from the Father would be “about” Jesus: *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar – Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in Heaven”* (Matt 16:17).

The Apostle Paul explains these truths with much feeling in his letter to the Ephesians:

“Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in Whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in Whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:20).

What a holy wonder and marvel it is! Our heavenly Father has chosen us to be a part of His eternal plan. By His grace, we have a special place in His family, in His Kingdom, and in the Church of His Son. We too, therefore, can join Paul in these beautiful words of worship: *“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named Now to Him Who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* (Eph. 3:14, 15, 20, 21).

HOW TO LEAD SOMEONE TO CHRIST

In leading someone to Christ, we must be aware of several key principles. We could possibly be leading someone astray, or giving false assurance that they

are saved, if we do not use these principles. This is not to suggest that there is a particular technique or formula. However, to ignore what the Bible teaches about this subject could mean spiritual disaster for those we are trying to lead to Christ.

The following principles could easily be a lengthy teaching, but have been stated in brief here for your reference.

ROAD TO REDEMPTION

As you seek to lead people to Christ, it is helpful to have a “planned route” in mind. These scriptural pathways will help you keep moving forward in the right direction. Being very familiar with these simple steps can give you great confidence in leading someone to salvation. It is strongly recommended that you memorize the scriptures used in each step.

One of the simplest of the scriptural pathways to salvation is called the “Roman Road”. It is called this because the relevant Scriptures to each step were taken from the Book of Romans in the New Testament.

1. Romans 3:23: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory [standard] of God.”*
2. Romans 6:23: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the (free) gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
3. Romans 10:9,10: *“That if you confess you’re your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

Here is another simple set of guidelines that can help you lead someone to Christ by helping them realize:

1. **ALL MANKIND ARE SINNERS** *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory [standard] of God”* (Rom 3:23).
2. **THE PENALTY OF SIN IS ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD** *“The wages of sin is death [separation from God]”* (Rom 6:23).
3. **GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANYONE SHOULD PERISH** *“The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9).

4. **JESUS CHRIST HAS PAID THE PRICE** “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*” (1 Cor 15:3).
5. **WE MUST BELIEVE AND CONFESS THIS TRUTH** “*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*” (Rom 10:9).

As you can see from looking at these sets of guidelines, they both deal with sin first. This is because often people may not know they are sinners in need of salvation. In other words, the Good News of the Gospel may not be “good news” until they have heard the “bad news”! The bad news is that they are sinners who will spend an eternity separated from God if they die without Christ as their personal Savior.

So, the first thing that must be dealt with in leading someone to Christ is their sin.

1. Sin

Sin is not a popular subject these days. Modern man prefers to refer to sin as “social indiscretion”, “personal preference”, “genetic traits”, or “personality defects”. Many other people refuse to concede that there is any such thing as sin at all. This kind of notion must be challenged and defeated with the Word of God. The Bible clearly teaches, from its earliest chapters, the reality and penalty of sin. Unless one is ready to agree with the Bible on this basic subject, the whole matter of salvation is out of the question. If there were no such thing as sin, there would be no need for salvation or a Savior. That means that the whole plan of redemption would be irrelevant and unnecessary.

We must understand that sin is what separates man from God. Initially, in the biblical picture, it was Adam and Eve’s disobedience that constituted the first sin. Their disobedience caused the whole human race to become separated from God. So, in the first instance, men and women are sinners, not because of anything they do or don’t do, but because of Adam and Eve’s transgression. We inherit our sinful status from our original forebears. We are therefore sinners by inheritance.

Romans 3:23 puts it as simply and plainly as possible: “*For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory [standard] of God.*” (For additional information on this subject, please see the article on “Salvation” in this issue of ACTS.)

This teaches the universality of sin. All people, everywhere are sinners. It teaches the nature of sin; i.e., to fall short of the glory (standard) of God.

When we endeavor to show someone that they are a sinner. In the sight of Almighty God, we are not singling them out for criticism, or suggesting that we think that their personal behavior or standards are worse than the average person. We are simply stating that they, together with all of mankind, come short of God's required standards.

Next, they must be told that there is a final and ultimate accountability to God for our lives. As part of this accountability, there is a penalty for sin.

2. The Penalty Of Sin

Romans 6:23 says: "*The wages of sin is death.*" Not just physical death, when the human spirit leaves the physical body; but spiritual death, which means continuing and everlasting separation from God. This is the penalty about which God warned Adam and Eve. He told them that if they disobeyed Him, "*in the day that you eat of it [the forbidden fruit] you shall surely die*" (Gen 2:17).

Through their transgression, physical death began to work in them. They became mortal (death doomed) beings. Physical death and its symptoms began immediately to work in their lives, the consequence of which was that one day they would die (see Genesis 3:17-19).

But the greater tragedy is that dying in sin means that one will be separated from God eternally; that is what the Bible calls hell. This is an absolute judgment without exception or excuse; and it is eternal, not temporary.

By this time, the person we are talking to may be ready for the Good News of salvation through Christ.

3. Salvation

The latter part of Romans 6:23 introduces a positive aspect when it states: "*But the Gift of God is eternal Life in [through] Jesus Christ our Lord.*" We emphasize that salvation is not through works, self -effort, good living or kind deeds; it is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We must show the people their absolute need of a Savior. If one is not aware of one's need, then there is no motivation to look for a Savior.

We must further show them that Jesus Christ is the Savior. *"For unto you is born a Savior, that is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:11).

He is the Only Savior. *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

He is a Complete Savior. *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him"* (Heb 7:25).

He is a Powerful Savior. *"That through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Heb 2:14,15).

He is a Universal Savior. *"Who is the Savior of ALL men ... who believe"* (1 Tim 4:10).

They must next be directed to how they can actually have Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

4. Salvation is through faith in Christ

"Believe on [in] the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). These powerful words were spoken to the Philippian jailer in response to his pointed question, *"What must I do to be saved?"* They are applicable to all men everywhere, and constitute the only way of salvation available.

Romans 10:9 says "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, **YOU WILL BE SAVED.**"

To answer their question – "What do I have to do to be saved?" -we must give a complete answer. This would include:

1. Realize you are a sinner, and sincerely repent of your sins (see 1 John 1:8; 2 Corinthians 7:10 and the article on "Repentance" in this issue).
2. Confess those sins to God and ask for His forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9).

3. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for you as payment for your sins, and that God raised Him from the dead as proof of Christ's deity and accepted His payment for your salvation (see Romans 5:9,10; Titus 2:14).

They must also understand that this salvation comes by faith. Faith is the decision to believe what God says. It is activated by "*hearing ... the Word of God*" (Rom 10:17). Something deep within you tells you that God is speaking to you. You decide and determine to believe and accept what God says. You agree with God – that is faith. Your faith may often move ahead of your mind. You do things by faith that your mind cannot yet understand or accept. You often accept things by faith before your emotions have time to respond.

The next and ultimate step is for a person *to* receive Christ as his Lord and Savior.

5. We must "receive Christ" into our life

John 1:12 says-. "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right [authority] to become children of God, to those who believe in His Name.*" What does it mean, to "receive Christ", and how do we accomplish this?

What the Scriptures teach is very simple and straightforward. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus compares our life to a house and says: "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*" When we show someone this verse, we can ask them: "If someone knocked on your door, how would you get the person inside?" They will likely answer: "Well, I would open the door." Then you can ask: "And then what would you do?" Invariably they will say, "I would invite them in."

It is just that simple, and most people will realize what they must do to receive *Christ*. The Lord Jesus is knocking at the door of their lives. But He will not break the door down and force Himself on them. They must open the door to Him and invite Him in. They can do this in their own words in prayer. And they have His promise that He will come in and be with them for eternity.

So, when a person receives Christ, they receive Him by faith, irrespective of natural thoughts or feelings. He enters their life through their spirit, but He wants to function through their thoughts and feelings too. He wants their whole person *to* surrender to His compassionate rule and enjoy the blessings and benefits of His presence in every area of their life.

Having received Christ as Savior, the next step is a practical working out of that decision. To confess Him before men may seem not as important as the other steps on the salvation pathway. But it can be a crucial part of keeping a new convert in a relationship with their new-found Savior.

6. We must confess Him before men

Paul said: *“Confess with your mouth... and believe in your heart.... For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”* (Rom 10:9,10).

Jesus Himself said: *“Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father Who is in Heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father Who is in Heaven”* (Matt 10:32,33)

Having believed in Jesus as Savior and Lord, it is obvious that the need to acknowledge and confess Christ openly before men is vital and indispensable to the process of being saved. A person's confession of this fact is often a definite factor in their receiving a personal assurance of salvation. On occasion some would say, “I have believed on Jesus, but I do not seem to have any assurance.” So ask them, “Have you confessed your belief to anyone yet?” The answer is invariably “No.” To that, our response must be: “Go and tell someone what you have done, and confess that you have received salvation through trusting in Christ.” The result will almost always be that once they have done this, the inner assurance has come.

We should also strongly encourage them to begin to tell all their unsaved friends about receiving Christ. Their joyful enthusiasm can be a powerful tool to win their friends for Christ. Their changed lifestyle will be a point of curiosity and interest to their friends from the “old way of life”. People will want to know what it is that has so changed the new convert's way of living. It is never too soon to begin to share our faith (see John 4:1-42; Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:14,15).

Finally, no committed, sincere Christian leader would want to lose that newborn “baby believer” in Christ. We must teach them how to grow in their new life with Christ to help secure them in God's Kingdom.

7. We must grow in Christ

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

How can we simply and dearly tell a new convert how to grow in their faith and relationship with Christ? Here is a simple plan based on the word “G-R-O-W-T-H”.

G – Go to God every day in prayer (1 Thess 5:17).

R – Read your Bible every day like the Bereans; search the Scriptures diligently (Acts 17:11); like Timothy, know the Scriptures thoroughly (2 Tim 3:15,16).

O – Obey the Lord and His Word in your daily Life (1 Sam 15:22).

W – Worship regularly with other believers in a local church (Heb 10:25; 13:15).

T – Tell others about your new faith in Christ (Matt 5:13-16).

H – Help serve God and His people in your church (Eph 4:16).

This is a very simple pattern for personal spiritual growth for both the new believer and someone who is older in the faith. Much more could be said about how to grow, but if they will do these things daily, they will be grounded in their salvation and alive in Christ.