

MESSENGER

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Spring 2021

Christ in You -- the Hope of Glory

Why Did God Become Flesh?

The Path to Salvation -- Part 1

MESSENGER Magazine

Issue No. 17 | April 2021

Scripture teaches that the resurrected saints will share in the glory of Christ! What does it mean to have glory or to be glorified in the Biblical sense? Few have really understood. The glory of God signifies the divine splendor, honor and majesty of his person, and the showing forth of his attributes. How is it possible for such glory to be shared with humans? Our article "Christ In You -- the Hope of Glory!" explains. Other articles in this issue address additional important questions bearing on our relationship to God.

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Messenger Magazine is published by the
Messenger Church of God.

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We eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body -- Philippians 3:20-21

Christ In You — the Hope of Glory

by Rod Reynolds

Scripture teaches that the resurrected saints will share in the glory of Christ! "...we are God's children; and if children, then also heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ — if in reality we share His sufferings, so that we may share his glory too" (Romans 8:16-17, Williams Translation). What does it mean to have glory or to be glorified in the Biblical sense? The glory of God signifies the divine splendor, honor and majesty of his person, and the showing forth of his attributes. The glorified saints will share in the divine nature of God (II Peter 1:4), receiving the gift of eternal life (Romans 2:5-10). Yes, unbelievable as it may seem, given our fragile and transitory nature, like a "vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14), we created and limited beings may be given his eternal life.

William Barclay in his book *New Testament Words* in discussing eternal life remarks. "...the word *aionios* [eternal] is the word of eternity in contrast with time, of deity in contrast with humanity, and...therefore *eternal life is nothing less than the life of God himself*" (p. 37, italics in original). The life that God offers us, **God life**, his life, is quantitatively different from our temporary physical existence. Unlike the latter, eternal life is without beginning and without end, as God is, and he shall share that never ending, self-inherent life with the children of his kingdom. But eternal life is also qualitatively different from mere human life, else how could we bear it? The saints shall live eternally in sublime joy and peace. They shall be "in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). David wrote of God, "In Your presence is fullness

of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). As Barclay put it, "Life is only of value when it is nothing less than the life of God — and that is the meaning of eternal life" (p. 41).

Though forever remaining subject to the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-28), the glorified saints shall share many of God's attributes, his power, his honor and splendor, his brilliance. Daniel 12:3 and Philippians 4:21 show that the bodies and faces of the glorified saints will shine forth with supernatural brilliance, just as that of the resurrected, glorified Christ, symbolically described in Revelation 1. There are not a few who might consider such a teaching blasphemous, but that nevertheless is the true teaching of Scripture. David wrote, "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied

when I awake in Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). John wrote, "...we know that when he [God] is revealed, we shall be like Him..." (1 John 3:2). Your destiny, if you are or become a true Christian, and if you remain faithful, is to become like God, sharing in his glory for all eternity.

What assurance do you have that this magnificent, astounding purpose will be fulfilled in you? What is the basis for your hope of glory in God's Kingdom? Paul said he was made a steward of "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (Colossians 1:26-27).

As this Scripture points out, the purpose of God is largely hidden from the world. To most it is a mystery in the sense that the term is commonly used in English. But the Greek term *mysterion*, as used in the Scriptures, actually means spiritual truth hidden from the world in general but revealed to the elect of God. *Mysterion* comes from the word *mueo* which means to initiate into the mysteries, or secret knowledge. (See *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 424). The secret of God's purpose for mankind, hidden from the world through unbelief and disobedience (Proverbs 1:7, 23; Isaiah 66:4-5; Romans 1:18-22; 2 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12), is revealed to his special people, chosen through believing the truth and receiving the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:15-16; John 1:12; Acts 2:38; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 2:7-9).

Both one's destiny as a true Christian, and the means of its accomplishment, is reflected in the phrase, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Your destiny, if you are a true Christian, is to be glorified with God. And that can be accomplished only by Jesus Christ living in you through the Spirit of God. If Christ is living in you, and as long as Christ continues to live in you, you

have the hope and the promise of glory with God.

To receive the Holy Spirit, one must surrender to God's will, believe the gospel, God's word, genuinely repent of sin, and begin to strive diligently to obey God. This includes obeying the command to be baptized upon repentance (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; 5:32).

Assuming you have believed the true gospel, repented and received the Holy Spirit, what can you do to assure that Christ will abide in you, dwell in you, to the end, so that the hope you presently have is fulfilled? I want to discuss briefly just two things you can do to assure that your hope of glory is fulfilled. Jesus Christ does not now dwell in everyone. There are certain conditions to his dwelling in a person. This does not mean that we — through our own efforts — "qualify" ourselves for salvation. We are to give "thanks to the Father who **has qualified** us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through the blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12-14). Salvation is a gift which we could never "earn" regardless of how much effort we might expend. Nevertheless, effort is required to fulfill our part in the covenant with God. We must "fight the good fight of faith" to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12, 19). Lacking that effort we become subject to sin and deception, and may become *disqualified* for the inheritance reserved for the faithful (compare 2 Corinthians 13:5; Titus 1:16; 2:11-15; 3:8).

There are more tools to help us remain steadfast than the two I will discuss. But they will point you in the right direction and help assure that Christ remains in you. They are: study and obedience. The Rabbis taught that "it is in the power of each wholly to overcome sin, and to gain life by study and good works" (See *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2.5).

Standing by itself, this assuredly is misleading. Without Christ, without God's Spirit, all the study and good works in the world are to no avail, as far as eternal salvation is concerned. At the same time, Christ will not continue to abide in someone who never studies or hears his word and does not obey it.

Bible Study

To assure that Christ continues to dwell in you, study God's word diligently, daily, consistently. One need not be a great Biblical scholar to be a Christian. Most of what one needs to know is plain enough to anyone *willing without reservation to believe and act on God's word* (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 15:32).

Bible study of itself does not produce true spirituality. But it can produce spiritual literacy. It can provide necessary food for nurturing the spirit. The Scriptures are a "who, what, how, and why" book for the works of God. They are also a "how to" book for real Christians. Bible study can make a difference in salvation, but only if we practice what the Scriptures teach. James wrote that "the implanted word...is able to save your souls." The word of God is like a "mirror" that can show us what we look like spiritually, and what we need to become (James 1:21-25). God communicates his will to us through the Scriptures, Jesus Christ having loved the Church and given himself for it, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the **washing of water by the word**" (Ephesians 5:26).

You can't be like Christ if you don't know what Christ is like. Study the Scriptures to learn what God is like, and strive to imitate him, to follow his thinking, his teaching, his way of acting. You can't have real, genuine faith and belief in God if you don't know him and what he's about. You can't follow Christ's teachings unless you know what they are. You can't obey God if you don't know what he requires. So study God's word to learn who he is, what he is like, what he is doing for you and with you, what

he wants you to do. *Jesus Christ will live in you only if his words live in you.* Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). He said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). If you want to indeed be a disciple of Christ — a real Christian — and not one in name only, you must abide in God's word, and it in you (compare John 15:7). Study God's word with the view in mind of making it a part of you, the guide to your thoughts, your words, your deeds.

Obey God's Commandments

Another thing you can do to assure your hope to the end is commit yourself to obeying God's commandments. Many who claim to be Christian have stumbled at the commandments of God, either collectively, thinking the law of God is done away, or individually, thinking they can selectively obey God, keeping some commandments but rejecting ones they don't like, such as the Sabbath, or tithing, or perhaps other commandments.

"This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 6-7). Notice that love is walking in the Father's commandments. God is love (1 John 4:8). That is, love is the epitome of his nature and character. The commandments of God are intended to give practical definition to God's way of love. Jesus said the "first and great commandment" is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And the second, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." All the law hangs on, or is summed up in, these two commandments (Matthew 22:34-40). Jesus also said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Love

towards God is expressed through spiritually motivated obedience to his commandments (compare Deuteronomy 11:13, 22; 13:3-4; Joshua 22:5; Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4). Love is the motive force behind God's law, and it in its full intent and purpose shows us how to love. Hence, love should be our motive for obedience.

Next we find in 2 John 6-7 a very interesting statement. Those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh are deceivers and anti, against or in place of (the meaning of the Greek prefix), Christ. What does this mean? It's much deeper than one might think, and goes to the very heart of our subject.

The Greek word translated "confess" is *homologeō*. It means much more than an empty statement of belief. One might think that just "confessing" or stating that Christ came in the flesh makes one a Christian. But that is emphatically not what John is teaching. The original meaning of the word, as pointed out in *Vine's Expository Dictionary* (under "confess," p. 120) is "being identified in thought or language." *Homologeō* literally means to same-think (by the concept of thought as internal speech) or same-speak.

In this verse both the Greek word for "confess," or as we have learned to "same-think, same-speak," and the Greek word for "coming" are in the form of the *present participle*. The present participle in this instance implies present and continuing action. As the Greek scholar A. T. Robertson notes, the sense of the phrase is that of "treating the Incarnation as a continuing fact" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. VI, p. 253). The meaning is that deceivers are not now and continually thinking the same and speaking the same Jesus Christ who is right now and continually coming in flesh. The flesh being spoken of is *the flesh of every true Christian now living*.

This thought is repeated in a slightly different form in 1 John 4:1-3. There it

says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4:1-3). The New King James, as other translations of these verses, does a rather poor job of reflecting their real meaning. First, the translators have added some words not in the Greek which tend to somewhat distort the meaning. "Jesus Christ" appears twice in these verses and in both instances the translators have misleadingly preceded the name with "that." "The" is supplied before the word "flesh," leaving a narrower implication than John intended. Most importantly, the English translations I have consulted do not effectively reflect the full implications of certain *perfect participles* used in the Greek. And there are some other nuances of the Greek which enrich the meaning when properly understood.

The Greek perfect indicative and perfect participle as a general rule (there are exceptions) emphasize an existing state. The perfect is called the "long tense" because it commonly expresses *past action with results extending into the present*. Often the sense expressed by the perfect tense is *virtually indistinguishable* from that of the present tense (see remarks on the tenses in the *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. xii).

With this background let's consider the verses in question. "Confesses" (*homologeō*) is in the present tense, implying present and continuing action. "Come" (*erchomai*), with respect to Jesus Christ being in the flesh, is in both instances in the form of the perfect participle (the most accurate translation of which is "having come"). The emphasis is not on the past, but on the present, *here and now*.

The true Spirit of God inspires one to think the same thoughts — speak the same words — and by implication — do the same deeds — as Jesus Christ dwelling in the flesh. Because the true Spirit of God is **Jesus Christ dwelling in our flesh!** But the spirit of anti-Christ does not believe, speak and act according to Jesus Christ dwelling in the flesh. The “confession” John and other writers of the New Testament speak of is not a mere acknowledgment — but a **conviction compelling commitment, surrender, and obedience.**

True Christians think the same, speak the same, act the same as Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ — through the Spirit of God — dwells in their flesh. This is the message of God’s word. Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Galatians 2:20). Yes, those of genuine faith have been justified — that is, deemed free of guilt — through the blood of Christ. But having been thus reconciled to God, “we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:9-10). **Christ living in us is the key to salvation and eternal life!** (compare for illustration Galatians 2:20; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 10:38; Ephesians 5:1-7; 1 Peter 2:21; 4:11; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:1-4). Churches, ministers, people who do not think, speak and act as Christ are of another spirit, the spirit of deception and anti-Christ. If then, Christ agreed with God’s law — and he did (John 4:34; 5:30; 8:29) — if he taught God’s law — and he did (Matthew 19:16-19; Luke 10:25-27) — and if he obeyed God’s law — and he did (John 14:31; 1 Peter 2:22) — then he is now doing the same thing in the flesh of the people of his Church. He is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 10:8).

How can one know for sure if Christ is living in him? Scripture answers: “Now **by this** we know that we know Him, **if we keep His commandments.** He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps

His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3-6).

Christ dwelling in you empowers you to obey his law (Romans 8:4, 13; Philippians 2:13; 4:13; Ephesians 3:14-21). As long as we are in the flesh we will have to contend with its sinful nature. But Christians do not reject God’s commandments. They are no longer hostile to them. They don’t try to reason around them. They hold fast to them and struggle to obey them in the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12). And as they grow spiritually they exercise through Christ’s power greater control over their minds and actions, and become more like him as they mature spiritually (Colossians 3:1-11; Philippians 4:13; Galatians 5:16-25; Romans 13:11-14; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6; Ephesians 4:13-24). When they sin Christians will in heartfelt repentance acknowledge their sin and sinfulness, and they will be forgiven and cleansed by our merciful God (1 John 1:8-10). We can’t, of ourselves, obey God’s law (Romans 8:7). Only Christ dwelling in us can! — if we constantly submit to his will and earnestly seek his help to obey. Study God’s word, and obey him. Let Christ live in you, your hope of glory.

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Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. -- I John 3:2-3

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness -- Psalms 17:15

Whom He foreknew [foreknows], He designates beforehand, also, to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be Firstborn among many brethren -- Romans 8:29 Concordant Version

And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. -- I Corinthians 15:49

[Jesus Christ] will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. -- Philippians 3:21

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever. -- Daniel 12:2-3

As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. -- II Peter 1:3-4

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. -- Revelation of John 3:21

So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. -- I Corinthians 15:42-44

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not
comprehend it.....
The Word became flesh and dwelt
among us (John 1:5, 14).

WHY DID GOD BECOME FLESH?

By Rod Reynolds

Each Spring in the Church of God we begin again the cycle of the festivals of God through which we review and hopefully gain a greater understanding of God's great plan for mankind. The first annual feast of God is the Passover, through which we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ. This same Jesus Christ is the spiritual "Rock" who led Israel out of Egypt (1 Corinthians 10:4). He is the One who – under the divine name "Yahweh," the Eternal or Self-existing One – spoke the ten commandments out of the cloud at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:2; cf. Exodus 3:14; John 1:1, 18; 5:37; 8:58; Revelation 1:8). Have you ever stopped to think why God – an eternal Being who existed before time began (as we count time) – would become flesh and blood? Does that not seem a bit peculiar, when you think about it, that the very Creator, the Being

whose power sustains the entire vast Universe, would be changed into a mere human, infinitely weaker and limited by comparison?

Most often when Christ is pictured by the world He is dead, or a babe in a manger, or He is depicted as a powerless, effeminate, long-haired creature who allegedly died of a "broken heart." According to the doctrine of many, Christ's work was finished on the cross. Anything happening after that is seen as anticlimactic. Oh yes, perhaps He was resurrected and ascended to heaven (though many modern theologians have rejected the idea of Christ's resurrection), but if so He's been "retired," since the work of redemption was supposedly finished on the cross. Many professing Christians would consider it heresy – if not blasphemy – to assert that Jesus Christ is not

only alive, but that His work is not finished, and that He's going to return to earth in power and glory, punish a wicked world in righteous indignation and wrath, and then rule the world with supreme authority, producing universal peace and joy for mankind. It's interesting that the Jewish Sanhedrin, when Christ told them He would return in power, accused Him then, too, of blasphemy! (Matthew 26: 64-65).

The Passover emphasizes Christ's suffering, humility and death. But to properly understand, we must put the Passover in its proper perspective. The Passover was the culmination of Christ's ministry as a flesh and blood human being, and that's pretty much where the world leaves Him, as it were, hanging on the cross. At least that's how He's generally perceived. But the death commemorated by the Passover wasn't the end of God's

work of salvation – it was the beginning. Because God's Church keeps all of his feasts, we understand that. When we link the meaning of the Passover with the rest of God's plan, then it takes on its true significance, and is much more meaningful than anything grasped by most of the world's people, even those who consider themselves Christian.

Why did the Eternal become flesh and blood, weak and subject to death? The Bible gives us *at least* seven specific reasons. They are as follows:

(1) To save the world. Jesus said that He came "to save the world" (John 12:47). In John 3:17 we are told: "...God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." What is it the world was to be saved from? All humans have sinned (Romans 3:23). The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The Son wasn't sent to condemn the world. The world, each person in it, was already condemned to death when He came! As John wrote, "...he who does not believe is condemned already..." (John 3:18).

Jesus Christ came to make it possible for human beings to be delivered from the death penalty, so they "should not perish but have eternal life" (verse 15). His death was a necessary step toward the fulfilling of God's plan of salvation. Through the death of Christ repentant humans guilty of sin may be "justified by His blood," opening the way to salvation (Romans 5:9-10).

But if Christ's work of saving the world was **completed** on the cross then He failed, because **the world isn't saved yet!** While Christ's death opened up to us the possibility of salvation, the completion of work of saving the billions of Israel and the rest of mankind is yet future. Notice Paul wrote: "...all Israel **will be** saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob...'" (Romans 11:26). As the Holy Days reveal, salvation for most won't be fully accomplished until after Christ returns in power. Even

those who through faith have already been qualified to inherit eternal life will not receive it in its fullness until Christ's return. So in that sense salvation for them, too, is yet future.

(2) To overcome sin in the flesh. In order for God to fulfill His master plan for mankind the problem of sin had to be dealt with. The penalty of sin for human beings is death, as God warned Adam and Eve while they were yet in the garden (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12; 6:23). Because of his own sin, each human has fallen under the condemnation of the death penalty, as mentioned already. God does not compromise with His perfect, spiritual law. The penalty must be paid!

The solution that would enable us to share eternal life with God, He decided, is for God Himself to pay the penalty for our sins. Thus would God redeem us from death. But God is an eternal Spirit Being incapable of dying. To pay the penalty God had to provide a perfect, sinless sacrifice. Only a human being without any sin could pay the penalty for our sins. Otherwise in dying he would only be paying the penalty for his own sins. But no human, beginning with Adam, had lived without sinning (Romans 3:23). Only God, living in the flesh, having the Holy Spirit without measure from the moment of conception, was found to be capable of living a perfectly sinless life. Thus it had already been determined even before the foundation of the world that the Word – whom we know as Jesus Christ – would become flesh, a human being subject to death (John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

Jesus lived a perfect life in the flesh without sin (Hebrews 4:15). In so doing Jesus Christ overcame the world – this world – this present evil age characterized by sin and rebellion against God (John 16:33). Because He lived a perfect life without sin in the flesh he was the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins – "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). In overcoming sin He also set for us a perfect example of overcoming the flesh (1

Peter 2:21-24; Revelation 3:21).

(3) To condemn sin in the flesh. "For what the law [the Old Covenant system] 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..." (Romans 8:3).

The sins that stand condemned are the sins of mankind – your sins and mine. It is not Christ's sin for he had none, it is our sin that was condemned in the flesh of Jesus at the crucifixion. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament one of the words for sin is *chata*. It means to miss the mark, to fall short, and hence to sin, to be blameworthy or guilty. The noun of this very same word is also used of the sin offering – because in the sacrifice of the sin offering sin itself was symbolically condemned. When Jesus was dying on the cross as the sin offering he became to God the embodiment of sin – our sins, the sins of the world. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us..." (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus, "...Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..." (1 Peter 2:24). Through him our sins, if we repent in genuine faith, have been condemned and destroyed, and no longer have any power to destroy us. This brings us to the next reason:

(4) To put away sin. "... now, ...He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). This purpose is reiterated in Hebrews 1:3.

Those who through faith in Jesus Christ confess their sins and repent, in other words, forsake their sins, are forgiven (Proverbs 28:13; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9). "... God set forth [Jesus Christ] to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:25-26).

Putting away sin includes helping us to overcome sin and put it out of our lives. One who is living by genuine faith in Jesus Christ – having the very faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20) – is no longer enslaved to his fleshly lusts, but with Christ working in him through the power of God's Spirit, can overcome them and live righteously (Romans 8:1-14; Ephesians 4:17-24). "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not [practice] sin. Whoever [continues practicing] sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:5-7). The present indicative and present participle of the Greek *hamartano* (to sin) used in verse 6 implies one who "lives a life of sin, not mere occasional acts of sin" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. VI, p. 222, A. T. Robertson).

Christ through His death, and the life that He lives in us, puts away sin. He will appear a second time apart from sin – having put our sins away – to bring us salvation (Hebrews 9:28).

(5) To reconcile us to God. "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and **by Him to reconcile all things to Himself**, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. **And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death**, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard..." (Colossians 1:19-23).

Through Christ Jews and Gentiles may be reconciled to God in one body (Ephesians 2:16-17). We see in the world today so many seemingly insoluble controversies. How can Serbs and Muslims be reconciled. Or Jew

and Arab, or white and black, and the list could go on and on with tribal, racial, ethnic, national, regional, religious, and all kinds of other divisions, hatreds and hostilities. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross makes possible not only our reconciliation with God, but it makes possible our reconciliation with one another.

Of course, while the death of Christ makes that reconciliation possible, it will not be accomplished on a universal scale until after Christ's return, as is pictured by the Day of Atonement. Nevertheless, since we are in Christ now, we should be right now – continuously – cultivating that spirit of reconciliation toward God and toward one another.

Reconciliation is not accomplished, however, by compromising the truth, or participating in or approving of sinful behavior in order to "get along." We are not to be partakers of the sins of others, or have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Psalm 50:18; Ephesians 5:7, 11; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 John 1:9-11; Revelation 18:4). By its nature rejecting falsehood and lawless conduct will separate you from others. But ultimately, being faithful will produce the fruit of peace and reconciliation.

We must seek reconciliation and fellowship with God first and foremost, by walking in the light of truth (1 John 1:2-7). We must love other people, including even our enemies, and seek to live at peace with others as much as is possible without compromising the faith (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:17-21).

(6) To destroy Satan and his works. "Inasmuch then as the children [who will be in God's Kingdom] have partaken of flesh and blood, He [Jesus Christ, the author of their salvation, verse 10] Himself likewise shared in the same, 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).

Satan is the ruler of this present evil world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the instigator of sin and death (Ephesians 2:1-3). He is the one responsible for the reign of death spoken of in Romans 5.

Satan is already judged (John 16:11). His judgment is written in God's word (Leviticus 16:21; John 12:31; 2 Peter 3:10; Jude 13; Revelation 18:2; 20:10). Christ's coming in the flesh ensures that the judgment of Satan will ultimately be consummated and his works of sin and death will themselves be destroyed. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

(7) To confirm the covenant. "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27).

Jesus ministry began, according to some accounts, in the fall of 27 A.D., at the beginning of the seventieth prophetic "week" [on the principle of a day for a year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6)]. This was 483 years after the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem (verse 25; Ezra 7:6-28; cf. Ezra 4:1, 12-13, 16, 21). Others dispute this reckoning, but in any case, Jesus public ministry lasted three and a half years.

To confirm means to verify, to strengthen, to validate, to assure beyond all doubt. For the three and one-half years of his ministry Jesus confirmed the covenant with his disciples (cf. Luke 1:54-55, 68-75). His very presence was a confirmation of the covenant (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8). In a sermon to a crowd in the temple after Jesus had ascended back into the heavens, Peter explained how Jesus had come to them confirming the covenant made to the patriarchs, blessing them in turning them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:25-26).

After three and one half years – in the middle of the prophetic week – Jesus was "cut off" (Daniel 9:26) through the death of the crucifixion. His death

brought to an end the era of the physical temple and its sacrifices (Hebrews 10:5-10). It was destroyed by the Romans along with the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The covenant that Jesus Christ confirmed was the New Covenant, which being prefigured by the Old, was to supersede it as a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 8:6-13). In reality, the "New Covenant" itself actually preceded the "Old Covenant" (the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai), because its essence — salvation by grace through faith in and of the Messiah — was contained in the covenant with Abraham hundreds of years before the time of Moses (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:5-18). Paul, in harmony with common

usage of his time, often uses the term "the law" when referring to the Old Covenant, as he does in Galatians 3 (cf. Galatians 4:21-24).

The covenant that came with the giving of the law to Israel did not annul the covenant that came before (Galatians 3:17). Israel was not faithful to the Old Covenant and came under its curse as a result (Galatians 3:10; Hebrews 8:9). Yet that did not abrogate the promise of grace through Christ made to Abraham.

Jesus preached a message of repentance and faith (Mark 1:14-15). To those who believe and obey Him He promises not only the forgiveness of sins, but the Holy Spirit, to help them overcome the flesh, engraving His laws in their hearts and minds, as

they become more like him (John 14:15-17; Romans 8:12-14; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 8:10-12).

These are some of the reasons God came in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. But we need to keep in mind, as the feasts of God teach us, that the work of salvation was not finished with Christ in human flesh. It was not finished but only begun when they took Christ's body off the cross.

The Bible is full of the message of hope in the salvation which Jesus Christ will bring with Him at His second coming. He will finish the work He's begun (Romans 9:28). That's why He will come again.

Do Faithful Christians Suffer?

By Rod Reynolds

Some believe that if one has enough faith and simply "claims God's promises," that his life will be blessed with happiness, abundance, good health. Is this what the Bible REALLY Teaches?

Some — perhaps a great many — who profess to be faithful Christians find that when faced with trials, setbacks, or disasters their faith wavers. Some have turned completely against God and denied him altogether, because of failing health, the death of a loved one, marital problems, or some

other serious crisis in their lives.

Some professing Christians have reasoned that because they are trying to practice obedience to God, or exercising faith by "claiming God's promises," God will "protect" them from serious problems in their lives. They assume that they will be "blessed" with financial prosperity, good health, and success and happiness in their family relations and other aspects of their lives.

When they see another Christian suffering, they may suppose it's because of some secret sin, or character flaw, that has led to the person being cursed or punished. Or perhaps it may be assumed that the person just doesn't have "enough faith" to be free of suffering.

Such thinking has especially been promoted by proponents of what is sometimes referred to as the "prosperity gospel." Followers are taught that faith, "positive confession," and giving money to the ministry doing the teaching will lead to God delivering on perceived promises of prosperity, good health, security and personal happiness.

It shouldn't be surprising that when life turns out to be less than ideal, then, an individual with such perceptions might experience a crisis of faith. He or she might believe God has not lived up to his promises, that God is to be blamed for allowing such afflictions, or for not granting immediate deliverance.

However, one who has a mature understanding of how God works in our lives will see through such deceptions. The fact is, anyone or any Church teaching that obedience to God means you'll be free from trials,

setbacks, and being victimized by evil, is teaching false doctrine. Godly faith is not based on men, or what men say, or what a Church teaches, but on God's word, which teaches nothing like that.

Did God protect "righteous Abel"? (Genesis 4:4, 8; Matthew 23:35; Hebrews 11:4). Did God protect Lazarus? He was a diseased beggar who was laid at the gate of a rich man, having nothing, who died in that circumstance, having been neither healed nor blessed with abundance, though judged worthy of God's kingdom (Luke 16:20-22, 23, 25; for more on this parable see our article "Lazarus and the Rich Man" at cogmessenger.org). Did God protect Christ from being crucified? Did God protect Stephen, "full of faith," from being martyred? (Acts 6:8; 7:59-60). What about the faithful mentioned in Hebrews 11:36-38?

It's certainly not wrong to pray for God's deliverance, protection, blessings, guidance and healing. Indeed we should, along with giving thanks, be praying for all these things for others as well as ourselves (Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:1; James 5:13-16).

And the truth is, God does protect us, often without our realizing it. God does intervene at times to heal miraculously, and bless us in other ways. But in accordance with his purpose and will, which does not always correspond with our desires or preferences (cf. Matthew 26:39, 42).

Also, God gives us his laws to promote our well-being (Deuteronomy 5:31-33), and it's not his fault when people break them. And he doesn't keep anyone from breaking them. And God doesn't guarantee we'll always be protected and never afflicted. Indeed just the opposite (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12).

What if close friends, family members, your own husband or wife forsook you? Would that cause you to forsake God? What relationship is more important to you, your marriage, family,

friends, or your relationship with God? Christ requires that we put our relationship with him above any other. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27; "hate," [Greek: *miséō*] in this context means to love less by comparison, cf. Adam Clarke's *Commentary*; Matthew 10:35-39). What if a loved one dies, or you are a victim of disease, or become impoverished through no fault of your own, or are persecuted? Would that cause you to question God, or forsake him altogether?

What interests you more, manipulating God to do your will or finding out what his will is and submitting to it? Jesus Christ, facing death on the cross, said, "not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). How do the trials you've experienced stack up against what many have endured, such as, like Lazarus, long-term illness and poverty, or being forsaken by mates or other family members, beatings, loss of homes and virtually every material possession, being driven to a strange land, torture, imprisonment and martyrdom?

Yet, sometimes trials that are trifling by comparison overwhelm us, because we are weak in genuine faith and spiritual understanding. We become upset, disoriented, confused, because God doesn't play by our rules. As one person commented to me in reference to this subject, "Even God's people can get side-tracked when he refuses to read the script we have prepared for him. Odd that he does not see the wisdom of our ways."

Understanding and knowledge begin with the fear of God (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7). In order to have spiritual insight and deeper understanding into life's questions we need to work on developing a proper fear or reverence toward God.

Job, although he never turned aside from God, in the midst of his suffering questioned God's judgment and fairness (Job 34:5-9). In his mind, he was more righteous than God (Job 32:1; 35:2-3). In their own self-righteousness, people often want to call God to account, as Job did (Job 35:2-14). But God is not accountable to men (Job 33:12-13; Isaiah 45:9; Daniel 4:35), nor are we his judges, but he is ours (Proverbs 16:2; 21:2; Hebrews 12:23; 1 Peter 4:5). God never perverts justice, and his judgments are always just (Job 34:12; Revelation 15:3).

Our physical lives, including the trials that we are allowed to suffer, are given to us to be "exercised" (afflicted, chastened, humbled) thereby (Ecclesiastes 1:13; 3:10). Paul wrote, "...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

None of us is unique in suffering affliction. Everyone of us has or will suffer afflictions of various kinds in this life (Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-10). They are permitted or given to us not only to humble us, but to test our faith, to help us learn patience, to perfect us, and as a witness to others (Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9; Romans 8:35-37; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5; Hebrews 5:7-9; James 1:2-4; 5:8-11; 1 Peter 1:6-7). To be disciples of Christ and to share in his glory we must be willing to suffer whatever God requires of us (Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 14:27; Romans 8:17-18; Matthew 26:39, 42; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 4:19).

In due time, his time, not necessarily ours, God will deliver us from every trial (Psalm 34:17-19; Isaiah 49:8; Hebrews 10:35-39; 1 Peter 1:3-6; 5:6). But God decides in each case when that time is (Ecclesiastes 3:3). We must learn to submit to God's will and wait on him with faith and patience (Job 35: 14; Psalm 27:14; 37:1-11, 16-20, 27-29, 34-40; Proverbs 20:22; Isaiah 40:31; 49:23; Lamentations 3:24-26).



Are You Committed?

by Rod Reynolds

Today we live in an age often characterized by lack of commitment. As a result, individual lives are destroyed. Needless misery, unhappiness, poverty and crime proliferate. Society is disintegrating, and the entire world is on a path to catastrophe. Both personal salvation and the survival of mankind demand the right kind of commitment. Are you committed to God and his way of life?

A widespread lack of commitment to sound values and in personal relationships in today's world is manifested in many different ways. One of the manifestations of this is that just a century ago divorce was a relatively rare phenomenon in the United States, and much of the rest of the world. Now half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce.

The percentage of children born out of wedlock has skyrocketed in a num-

ber of nations around the world in the past several decades, especially in France, the United States, Great Britain and Northwest European countries. For the past several years (2008 – 2013), the percentage of out-of-wedlock births in the United States has exceeded 40 percent, according to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)¹. The percentage has more than doubled since 1980, when 18 percent of births were out-of-wedlock. Fewer than 5 percent of children

were born out of wedlock in the United States in 1940.

Tragically, the statistics are even worse in some other western nations. A report issued by NCHS in 2009² indicated the following statistics for out-of-wedlock births in 2007 for the following countries:

Iceland 66%; Sweden 55%; Norway 54%; France 50%; Denmark 46%; United Kingdom 44%; Netherlands 40%; Ireland 33%.

Think of the lack of commitment implied in such statistics between the individuals involved in the sexual liaisons leading to pregnancy, as well as the lack of commitment, particularly on the part of many of the fathers involved, to the children. The disintegration of the traditional family, with a married father and mother, and their children, living together as a family unit, is largely the result of a wholesale abandonment in these nations of societal values founded on Biblical principles of morality.

Lack of commitment manifests itself all too often among nominal Christians, as well as those who do not profess to be Christians. Apostasy, corrupt ministers and Churches encouraging lawlessness, discouragement, bitterness, being consumed with the affairs of this life, a corrupt educational system hostile to Biblical Christianity, hedonistic entertainment and media, along with other factors, has over the years led to a very large percentage of people abandoning their commitment to the truth of God's word, if there was any to begin with (Luke 8:12-14; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

By Jewish tradition the book of Ruth was read at the Feast of Pentecost. The book's setting is at the time of the spring harvest of barley and wheat (Ruth 1:22; 2:23), which in Palestine corresponds with the time between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. The Jews perceived the theme of Ruth as *chesed*, which can be summarized as meaning "loyalty or faithfulness arising from commitment" (*Harper-Collins Study Bible*, "Ruth," p.

408). *Chesed* combines into one word the ideas of strength, steadfastness and love (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Loving-Kindness," p. 142). It implies willing devotion and commitment which transcends and extends beyond legal obligations. The theme of *chesed*, faithful devotion, or commitment, runs throughout the book of Ruth. Both their husbands having died, Ruth expressed her devotion and commitment not only to her mother-in-law, Naomi, but also to the true God, the God of Israel (Ruth 1:16-17). And she remained faithful to her commitment.

This subject is particularly appropriate for the Feast of Pentecost, which, among other things, pictures the "firstfruits" of God's Kingdom being gathered in this age. One of the great lessons associated with Pentecost is that attainment of the resurrection into God's Kingdom requires commitment, or a willing devotion to God and to his worship and service. But, of course, commitment is a subject we can focus on not just at Pentecost, but at any time.

Besides the book of Ruth there are countless other examples of commitment in the Scriptures. Think about Abraham, for example, leaving everything to go where God told him to go and do what God commanded and required of him. Joseph remained committed to God even while unjustly imprisoned in a strange land. David refused to lift his hand against Saul even though Saul was pursuing him to kill him without cause. These are just a few of many examples, the greatest being the example of Jesus Christ's commitment to his Father in heaven.

What is commitment? "To devote oneself unreservedly." Are you committed — without reservation — to God? Or is your devotion to him weak, hesitant, doubtful?

Israel in ancient times failed because she as a nation lacked commitment. Israel made an agreement, promising to obey God's word (Exodus 24:7).

Time after time God blessed Israel and showed them favor, yet they persistently rebelled against him (Nehemiah 9:16-17; 28-29). They honored God with their lips but not their hearts (Isaiah 29:13). The example of ancient Israel is a lesson for us, as today's nations are headed down a similar path to destruction (1 Corinthians 10:5-11).

If you have been genuinely converted and immersed in a valid baptism, you then entered into a sacred covenant with God. You gave yourself over to God unreservedly — or should have. Christ is committed to us. He laid it all on line for us (2 Corinthians 8:9; John 10:10-15).

The Apostle Paul, following in Christ's footsteps, set a sterling example of devotion and commitment to God and to the people he served (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:15).

God is totally committed to us, and he demands our commitment to him. At stake is eternal life (Hebrews 10:32-39). The trials that we face test our commitment. Endurance despite trials and tribulation proves our commitment and devotion to God.

Commitment and perseverance are attributes of the Philadelphia Church of God (Revelation 3:8, 10-11). Devotion to God must come before devotion to anything or anyone else, including our own lives (Matthew 10:34-39; 16:24-27).

Serving God requires that we be faithful in handling the money God entrusts to us, and that our primary motivation is toward serving God, not getting rich (Luke. 16:10-13). An unreserved love toward God is the foundation of the law for his covenant people (Matthew 22:37-38).

We need to continually evaluate our own attitudes and conduct, and ask ourselves if they really reflect unreserved commitment to God (2 Corinthians 13:5). To the extent that we lack single-minded devotion to God, we will be unstable (James 1:5-8). Once we see what the obstacles are

to the kind of commitment we should have, we need to act to remove them through repentance.

Key areas in which we both exercise and strengthen our commitment to God include Bible study, prayer, and fasting.

If you are weak in faith studying God's word can strengthen your faith (Romans 10:17). To have a genuine relationship with God we must abide in his word (John 8:31; 15:1-8). We are to be able to rightly divide, or correctly understand, God's word (2 Timothy 2:15). You can't rightly divide the word of God, that is, properly understand it, if you are not studying it regularly and diligently, asking God for understanding and applying it in your life (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 2:1-7). We should avoid getting into fruitless arguments, but we also need to be able to give a sensible and Biblically sound answer to those who ask about our beliefs (1 Peter 3:15).

You should also examine critically your own assumptions. Are the things you believe true? Can they be proven from the Scriptures or other reliable, trustworthy sources? Have you taken into account **all** of the Scriptures on a given subject before reaching a conclusion? We should be guided in our thinking and actions by a sound and thorough understanding of God's word, not ignorance, false traditions, unsound logic or assumptions, human "philosophy," rumors, superstitions, and unfounded speculation. Commit yourself to studying God's word, and that commitment will drive other aspects of your life as well to the extent that you apply what you learn (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Now let's briefly discuss prayer. We don't know when Christ is going to return, and for that very reason we are told to watch and pray (Mark 13:33). Prayer helps us direct our devotion to God, and avoid temptation (Mark 14:38). Scripture admonishes us to pray "without ceasing," or daily (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Regular fasting can help us draw near to God and strengthen our commitment to him (James 4:7-10; one way we humble ourselves is through fasting, Psalm 35:13). Paul, as mentioned earlier, was a man whose life exemplifies commitment to God, and he said he fasted often (2 Corinthians 11:27).

Our commitment is also measured in part by how much our hearts are in God's work (Luke 12:35-48). We are told to pray that God will provide open doors for the preaching of the gospel, and, to pray for those doing the preaching (Ephesians 6:18-20; Colossians 4:2-4). To pray for God to send laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38). To pray for the coming of God's kingdom (Matthew 6:10).

Another measure of your commitment is your love of God's way of life as opposed to that of the world, and the sense of kinship with others who are genuinely committed to God's way of life (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:15-18). Being committed to God means we're going to love his people, and we will share a bond with them that we do not share with people not of our fellowship (1 John 1:3). We should love all people and get along with them as well as possible, but we need to be aware the wrong kind of relationships with people can draw us away into sin (1 Corinthians 15:33). That does not mean we should be self-righteous or condescending in our treatment of others, but don't get yourself into compromising situations where you are committed to other people in place of God (John 2:23-25).

In summary, we need to be growing toward total commitment to God and his way of life, as we prepare for His Kingdom. We can build that commitment through faithfully studying God's word daily, daily prayer, regular fasting, applying God's word in our everyday lives, being committed to the work of the gospel, and developing a kinship with one another through our mutual fellowship with Christ and the Father. If we do this, we can be assured of being among the firstfruits harvested in the resurrection of the

saints when Jesus Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

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Image for "Are You Committed" article title page:

Ruth in Boaz's Field. Painting by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. Courtesy National Gallery, UK.

Description from www.nationalgallery.org.uk: "The subject of this painting is taken from the Old Testament Book of Ruth. The youthful widowed Moabite Ruth is gleaning (gathering up corn left after the harvest) to support her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi. The landowner Boaz has heard of her situation, and impressed by her devotion has instructed his workers to leave lots of corn for her to gather. Ruth and Boaz eventually married, and King David, Mary, Joseph and Jesus were among their descendants.

"The picture was painted in Munich, based on drawings Schnorr von Carolsfeld had made a few years earlier in Italy. He had spent ten years in Italy, and was a leading figure in a group of German and Austrian artists named the Nazarenes who sought to return modern painting to the purity of form and spiritual values that they saw in Renaissance art. The colours here are pure and clear and the painting is very highly finished, giving it a porcelain-like quality."

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The Path to Salvation (Part 1)

by Rod Reynolds

The Bible teaches that God has a plan of salvation for mankind. What does that mean, and why is a plan of salvation necessary? What is it that human beings need to be saved from? If there is a “plan of salvation,” what is it? Are there specific steps to be followed on the path to salvation?

In this article, I want to begin the process of answering these questions, and others, relating to the path leading to salvation for human beings. This article, part one of a series, will address the first two of the following questions relating to salvation:

(1) What is “salvation”?; (2) Are “good” people saved even if they don’t know about Christ, or are unbelievers?; (3) Are infants and babies saved, even though they know nothing

of Christ and lack the capacity to choose good or evil?; (4) Does the Bible teach “Universal Salvation”?; (5) Who qualifies you for salvation?; (6) Can one, after making a profession of faith in Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit, be disqualified from salvation?; (7) Are those who do not attain salvation in this age eternally condemned?; (8) What is the path to salvation?

Questions:

(1) What is “salvation.”

One question we need an answer to is what is spiritual salvation, from the standpoint of Scripture? The answer has to do with the fact that God is the arbiter of life. He is the supreme law-giver, and the supreme judge of all creation. His laws define what is right and wrong, what is good and evil. And

he has the authority to pass the death sentence on those who violate his law. In the Bible, the violation of God’s law is called sin. And God has decreed that the penalty for sin, is death.

The word for sin in the Greek New Testament is ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*). *Hamartia* is a noun form of a Greek verb which means to miss the mark, and hence to miss out on sharing the prize. The “mark” that is missed when one sins, is obedience to God’s law. The prize that is forfeited by sin consists of the blessings of obedience. Any transgression of God’s law is sin. “Whoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, AKJV).

God is the giver of life, and of every blessing. Acts 17:24-25 “God, who

made the world and everything in it, gives to all life, breath, and all things.

God is the supreme Lawgiver and judge:

"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (James 4:12).

"For the Lord is our Judge, The Lord is our Lawgiver, The Lord is our King; He will save us" (Isaiah 33: 22).

"For the Lord will judge His people And have compassion on His servants" (Deuteronomy 32:36).

"Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. For I raise My hand to heaven, And say, 'As I live forever, If I whet My glittering sword, And My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, And repay those who hate Me'" (Deuteronomy 32:39-41).

"...For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10-12).

God has power over life and death. "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up" (1 Samuel 2:6).

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

To some, it may seem harsh that God would condemn to death anyone who sins. Yet, the penalty is just, because of the gravity of sin, and what it leads to in terms of anguish and suffering.

For just a few of the more obvious examples, consider the victims of murder, who are deprived of life, and their families who suffer grief and the potential blessings accruing from the

companionship and support of the one who was murdered.

War, with all of its evils, is a result of sin. "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:1-3).

Consider the victims of fraud and theft, who suffer the loss of property that is rightfully theirs. In 1 Kings 21 we read of Ahab, king of Israel, who coveted a vineyard belonging to an Israelite named Naboth. Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, plotted to frame Naboth with false charges of blasphemy, murdered him, and seized his vineyard.

"Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?'" And you shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours'"' (1 Kings 21:17-19).

So we see the judgment of God on Ahab for his crime of murder and theft. The root of sin is in the heart, in the inner man. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:19-20).

Any major sin, or violation of God's law, invariably involves the transgression of multiple specific laws. Note that Ahab's sins in the incident we just examined included covetousness, lying, murder and theft. In principle other sins were included, such as id-

olatry.

While they were in the wilderness we read of the Israelites falling into the sins of Idolatry and adultery. "Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods" (Numbers 25:1-2).

God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel concerning the unfaithfulness of Israel while they were in the wilderness, having been delivered from slavery in Egypt. "So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, 'flowing with milk and honey,' the glory of all lands, because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness" (Ezekiel 20:15-17).

Note that their Sabbath breaking was coupled with idolatry.

Paul tells us in Colossians that covetousness is a form of idolatry: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience" (Colossians 3:5-6).

James tells us that if we break one of God's commandments, we, in principle, are breaking them all, because behind every one of the commandments is the same authority, and the penalty for breaking any one and for breaking all is the same.

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So

speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:10-12).

While God condemns sin, and has decreed the death penalty for sin, at the same time, God understands our frame, our weaknesses, and our inherent tendency to sin.

God wants us to have life, not death. He wants us to have the gift of eternal life, with him in his kingdom. So God has offered us a means of salvation from the just penalty of death for our sins.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:8-18).

So **what we need to be saved from is death**. Salvation, in Scriptural terms, means the penalty of death, for sins you have committed, is remitted. **Salvation means instead of death, you are given an inheritance of eternal life in the kingdom of God.**

There are **many deceptions about salvation, and the path to salvation**, for Satan is the great enemy of God and of mankind ("Satan" is from a Hebrew word which means adversary), and the great deceiver.

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who **deceives the whole world**; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9).

Let's briefly examine some of the common questions or assertions related to salvation.

(2) Are "good" people saved even if they don't know about Christ, or are unbelievers?

In the last couple of centuries it has become an increasingly popular idea among Christians that a person may be "saved," no matter his background, even if he is an idolater, and has no knowledge of Jesus Christ or the gospel, or is an unbeliever for some other reason.

This is certainly not a teaching of all professing Christian Churches or ministers, perhaps not even the majority, but it is believed by many, nevertheless.

Some teach that those who "do good," even having never heard the gospel, but only believing that there is a God based on the "general revelation" of nature (Romans 1:19-20), will "be saved" or "go to heaven" if they have done "good."

"...there are enough hints to suggest that it is possible for the heathen to be saved, so we can't accuse God of being unfair to people who have never heard. They have been given general revelation and are responsible. They have no excuse" ("Can Heathen Who Have Never Heard the Gospel Be Saved?," Ralph F. Wilson, jesuswalk.com, retrieved 3-2-2018).

Others teach that it's not really necessary to actually "do good," but simply to believe that one cannot on his own account merit salvation, even if you believe in some other god as the means of your salvation:

For example, the following quotation is from "How can those who never heard about Christ be saved?" by

Ernest Valea, comparativereligion.com:

"There have been many spiritual masters who recognized the necessity of grace and the impossibility of attaining salvation by one's own efforts. Ramanuja and Madhva are brilliant examples in the Hindu tradition, as is Shantideva in Mahayana Buddhism. The spiritual trend called prapatti in Hinduism and the Pure Land school of Buddhism focus on grace as the only solution for attaining liberation. According to them, the whole merit for being saved belongs to the god (in Hinduism) or bodhisattva (in Buddhism) they worship. There are also many cases of tribal religions in which grace plays a key role in salvation.

.....

"Such spiritual trends in other religions prove that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world, convincing people of their sin and limitations and turning their hearts toward God's grace. According to the character displayed by the God of the Bible, we can expect that he will save such people, by the grace available for all in Jesus Christ. They will be saved not through their native religions, but despite them, not because they didn't hear about Christ, but despite the fact that they didn't hear about him, as a reward for their humility and recognition of the need for grace. In other words, it is not Vishnu or Amida who saves them, but Christ through his grace, as a result of their need for grace expressed towards Vishnu or Amida" ("How Can Those Who Never Heard About Christ Be Saved," Ernest Valea, comparativereligion.com, retrieved 3-2-2018).

A Catholic who styles himself a "theologian" declares the following: "The proposed doctrine of Mystical Baptism... asserts that adults who have not received a formal Baptism might attain a mystical Baptism, at anytime during their life, if they respond wholeheartedly to God's grace by choosing a substantially selfless act of love and mercy (or a set of such acts) in accordance with God's will. In

this way, they are united to Christ's preeminent selfless act of love and mercy in His suffering and death on the Cross, and they receive a mystical Baptism from Christ on the Cross" ("Catholic Teaching: Mystical Baptism and Limbo," Ronald L. Conte, Jr., catholicplanet.com, 10-24-2016, retrieved 2-15-2018).

This "Mystical Baptism," he goes on to explain, might apply to people who have never heard of Christianity, or barely heard of it, and, also, to people who have rejected Christianity and baptism, if they have done a selfless act or acts at some time in their lives. In this case, the persons in question would not go directly to heaven, but first to "Purgatory."

The Vatican itself proclaimed in a document associated with the second Vatican Council of 1964 the following: "Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience" ("*Lumen Gentium*," 2.16, vatican.va. Retrieved 3-2-2018).

There are far too many errors in these statements to deal with in detail presently. Some of them we will deal with in due time, as we proceed, but no human being merits salvation on account of his own goodness.

"Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments'" (Matthew 19:16-17).

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, who had been Gentile worshipers of false gods, characterized their condition before they heard the gospel: "And you He made alive, who were **dead in trespasses and sins**, in which you

once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

He went on to say of them before their conversion as a result of the preaching of the gospel: "...that at that time you were **without Christ**, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13).

John wrote to the Church: "We know that we are of God, and **the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one**. And we know that the **Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true**; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:19-21).

Satan has blinded the world: "But even if our gospel is veiled, **it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded**, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Only through Jesus Christ is salvation possible, according to Scripture. "For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' **How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?** And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:13-14).

"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).

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the **futility of their mind**, having their understanding darkened, **being alienated from the life of God**, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19).

The truth is that idolatry is sin, the world is deceived, and those who are steeped in a false religious system embracing idols do not have salvation.

But don't misunderstand. Does God want all men to be saved? Yes. "[God] ... **desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**. For there is one God and **one Mediator between God and men**, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, **to be testified in due time**" (1 Timothy 2: 4-6).

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**, as His divine power has given to us **all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which** have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having **escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust**" (2 Peter 1:2-4).

Note that the things that pertain to life and godliness come through the **knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is no salvation apart from that knowledge. Salvation is accompanied by a knowledge of the truth**, the truth about the true God, **to be testified in due time**.

Does that mean those who have not heard the gospel in this age are eternally damned, as many have taught? No. God's plan is a **plan of salvation**, and **everyone** will ultimately be given ample opportunity for salvation. "... **they shall all be taught by God**" (John 6:45). See our article "Are the Lost Predestined to Hell?" (cogmessenger.com) for an explanation of how God intends to make salvation available to all people in due time. If you would like to have print copy of the article, call or write to us and ask for it by title. Be sure to give us your address if you want it mailed to you.

In the next article in this series, we will pick up with the answers to additional questions regarding the path to salvation.

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. -- John 3:16-17

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. -- I Timothy 1:15-16

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. -- II Peter 3:9

[God]... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. -- I Timothy 2:4-6

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. -- Romans 10:1

And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. -- Ephesians 2:17-18



When God set his hand to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, he commanded a Passover sacrifice to be offered, and afterward, it was to be offered yearly on the fourteenth of the first month of the sacred calendar. Only those who were ritually clean were, under ordinary circumstances, permitted to partake of the Passover sacrifice.

To be ritually clean, one had to know what that meant, what measures had to be taken to meet the standard of cleanliness required. To do that implies that one had to examine his behavior, and his condition, based on certain standards.

Faithful Christians baptized into the body of Christ, having learned to keep his festivals as he commands, are also expected to examine ourselves, especially as we approach the Passover, not only at this time of year, but on a continual basis. Let me explain from the Scriptures what that means and how to go about it.

When Hezekiah became king of Judah about 726 B.C., he instituted reforms to rid the land of idolatry and restore the worship of Yahweh at the Temple in Jerusalem. The work of cleansing and repairing the Temple and restoring the worship of the God of Israel was begun in the first year of Hezekiah's reign, in the first month (2 Chronicles 29:3; the first month of the sacred calendar is in the Spring in the northern hemisphere).

Now Passover was to be kept in the **first month**. But God allowed that in case of Levitical uncleanness, or other circumstances that prevented

keeping the Passover at the usual time, it could be kept the **second month**. God instructed Moses, "If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the Lord's Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it" (Numbers 9:10-11).

So Hezekiah and the faithful leaders among Jews agreed to keep the Passover that first year of his reign in the second month. Moreover, he sent invitations to all the tribes of Israel in what had been the land of Canaan who had not yet been taken captive, to join in keeping the Passover. This was more than two hundred years after the United Kingdom of Israel had been divided into the separate kingdoms of Israel (ten northern tribes), and Judah (southern kingdom consisting primarily of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi). A portion of the people of the northern kingdom at this time had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and in a few years the Assyrians would take captive those who remained.

"And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests **had not consecrated themselves**, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner. Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: 'Children of Israel, return to the Lord

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him.' So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they **laughed at them and mocked them**. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun **humbled themselves** and came to Jerusalem. Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord. Now many people, a very great assembly, gathered at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month" (II Chronicles 30:1-13).

We find that at the time of Jesus, "And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem **before the Passover, to purify themselves**" (John 11:55).

However, because of the circumstances, many of the people who participated in the Passover observance during Hezekiah's first year **had not been cleansed** through the usual means of purification under the Old Covenant. "For there were many in the assembly who had **not sanctified themselves**; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the Lord. For a multitude of the people,

many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had **not cleansed themselves**, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people [meaning in this context that he forgave them, or accepted them as sanctified]" (II Chronicles 30:17-20).

What these Scriptures reveal is the **significance of sanctification, holiness, spiritual purification, in order to have the kind of relationship with God that he wants us to have**. Sanctification is defined in the 1913 *Webster's Dictionary* as, "The act of sanctifying or making holy; the state of being sanctified or made holy; esp. (Theol.), the act of God's grace by which the affections of men are purified, or alienated from sin and the world, and exalted to a supreme love to God; also, the state of being thus purified or sanctified."

Sanctification under the Old Covenant was accomplished by **washings and sacrifices**. For example, regarding corpse uncleanness the law of the Old Covenant states the following: "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall **purify himself** with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. **Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord**. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him. This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword

or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. And for an **unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean**. But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean" (Numbers 19:11-20).

In the case of the uncleanness resulting from the flow of blood associated with childbirth, a woman who gave birth was required to offer a sacrifice in order to be cleansed. "When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female. And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons--one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (Leviticus 12:6-8).

Similar laws applied to other circumstances that resulted in impurity under the ritual laws of the Old Covenant. So to partake of the Passover the requirements for Levitical cleanliness, or purification, had to met, whatever might have been the cause for ritual uncleanness.

These laws were given as object lessons, not so much for the cleansing of the flesh, but of the Spirit. **They were given that we might learn from them the importance of spiritual sanctification, or purity of heart and mind.**

"It was **symbolic** for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances **imposed until the time of reformation.** But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. **For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"** (Hebrews 9:9-14).

The Greek word translated "conscience" in verses 9 and 14 is *συνείδησις* (*suneidesis*). It means "moral consciousness" (*Strong's*). The Greek word *συνείδησις* is derived from the word *συνεῖδω* (*suneido*), which means to see completely, to understand, become aware, to be conscious or informed of (*Strong's*).

What is important to God, and what the Old Covenant rituals we have discussed point to, is **purification of our minds, the rectitude of our moral consciousness. It has to do with purity of mind, and a proper understanding of right and wrong along with a devotion to doing what is good in God's sight.**

So how is it that our minds are cleansed of spiritual defilement? One element we just read about in spiritual purification is **forgiveness through**

the blood of Jesus Christ, who gave his life as a sacrifice to cleanse us from the guilt of sin. The other elements, all of which are essential to spiritual purity, are found mentioned in many Scriptures. One such Scripture is the following: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through **sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth**" (II Thessalonians 2:13).

God's purpose, not just for some but for all mankind from the beginning is to have salvation, but salvation requires cleansing, being made holy, pure, through a process of sanctification by: (1) Coming to understand and believe the truth; (2) having our sins forgiven through Christ's sacrifice; (3) receiving and being motivated, guided and empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Spiritual purification involves **obedience to God**, which comes with **knowing what is sin, confessing your sins, and resolving to put them out of your life, to overcome them, with God's help.**

By God's word comes the knowledge of right and wrong, what is righteousness and what is sin. Paul wrote to Timothy: "But you must continue in the things which you **have learned and been assured of**, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the **Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:14-17).

The Scriptures inform and enlighten our conscience, our minds. Jesus said, in a prayer to the Father, speaking of his disciples, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). He said, "If you abide in My

word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

God knows the truth. And he wants us to know the truth. God knows what sin is, because he's the one who, as the Eternal Creator, the all wise God, **defines sin and righteousness through his laws.** "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4).

"Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us" (Deuteronomy 6:25). "My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalms 119:172). "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18).

So the standard of truth is the Word of God, and the definition of sin and righteousness is contained in his commandments, properly understood and applied. Breaking God's commandments is sin. Obeying God's commandments is righteousness.

With that understanding then, we have a proper basis or standard by which we can examine ourselves. Now **God examines us constantly.** Speaking of God, Scripture says, "For His eyes are on the ways of man, And He sees all his steps" (Job 34:21). "For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17). "You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 32:19). "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And

there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

God knows us perfectly. There is nothing hidden from God. The question for us is, do we know ourselves? We should want to know how God looks at us, because that's the basis on which we are judged, by how he sees us.

A psalmist wrote, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart" (Psalms 26:2). Implied in this prayer is a desire for God not only to examine the supplicant, but to reveal to him what God knows as he is tested. This is expressed in another Scripture: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And **lead me in the way everlasting**" (Psalms 139:23-24).

David wrote: "O Lord, **You have searched me and known me.** You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And

that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Psalms 139:1-17)

Verse sixteen in the New King James, as in some other versions, is poorly translated. "And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them." This might lead one to believe, as some have falsely claimed, that God has mapped out your life beforehand, and everything you do was according to a preordained plan, and you have no real control over your decisions or the outcome of your life. That idea is a lie, and is contrary to the plain truth of God's word, that he has made us free moral agents with the power to make choices, and the certainty that we will be judged by the choices we make (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19-2).

A better translation is the King James Version: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalms 139:16, KJV).

Two other similar translations are:

"Thine eyes did see my unformed substance, and in thy book all my members were written; during many days were they fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalms 139:16, Darby).

"Thy eyes saw my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all [my members] were written, [which] in continuance were fashioned, when [as yet there was] none of them" (Psalms 139:16, Webster).

Adam Clarke's commentary explains the verse as follows: "All those mem-

bers lay open before God's eyes; they were discerned by him as clearly as if the *plan* of them had been *drawn in a book*, even to the least figuration of the body of the child in the womb."

The idea is that as a child develops in the womb it is according to a plan, as though written in a book. And indeed we know that the pattern for the development of the child is there in the first cells joined together at the very moment of conception. Books, literally, are now being coded and stored in artificially synthesized DNA, which can store an enormous volume of information in a very small amount of space.

There are various ways of calculating the storage capacity of DNA, but the human genome, a copy of which is in every cell, can store an amount of data at least equal to more than 800 *Britannica* size encyclopedia volumes. However, information in a human cell is not only contained in the DNA, but also in RNA, proteins, and the cell structure itself. Concerning all the activity in a living human being, involving the genome, science writer Yevgeniy Grigoryev states, "I think it would be virtually impossible to calculate the data actually expressed at any moment, taking into account any all [sic] the possible promoter states and epigenetic events" ("How Much Information is Stored in the Human Genome?," Yevgeniy Grigoryev, comments section, unlimitedcomputing.no, March 16, 2012).

The point of the Psalm is that God knows us intimately, far better than we know ourselves.

God wants us to examine ourselves by the standard of truth, which is his word. Paul, in the context of the Passover, wrote the following instructions: "But **let a man examine himself**, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For **if we would judge ourselves, we**

would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (I Corinthians 11:29-32).

We are warned in Scripture about thinking too highly of ourselves, which is what humans naturally tend to do quite often. On the other hand, some have an inferiority complex, or an unhealthy kind of self-loathing, which is destructive.

We need to understand that our nature is inherently corrupt, and we must fight it constantly. "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

We should examine ourselves honestly, knowing there will be flaws in our character. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:1-5).

We are to strive to live in such a way as to, when possible, help those who are sinning, realizing we're all subject to temptation. This takes a degree of discernment and judgment, because effectively helping someone who is overtaken with sin requires that they want to be helped, and are willing to cooperate in helping themselves. But if a person in such a state is willing, he who is able and in a position to do so should bear the burden of helping to restore the person.

Then the Scripture goes on to say, "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one

examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:3-5).

We can be deceived about ourselves, and how we measure up spiritually. "Also He [Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'" (Luke 18:9-14).

We should not compare ourselves with others. Paul wrote, "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Corinthians 10:12). The standard for us is Jesus Christ. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: **Who committed no sin**, Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (I Peter 2:21-22).

How do we measure up to his standard of righteousness? If we can see that we are not perfect, and have a long way to go toward perfection, but that we are striving to overcome, then we can rejoice in that, with an awareness of our need for further effort and progress.

Paul wrote that he sought "... the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being con-

formed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. **Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected;** but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, **I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Philippians 3:9-15).

We are admonished: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? --unless indeed you are disqualified" (II Corinthians 13:5).

In Lamentations, writing of a people being punished for their sins in a national calamity, Jeremiah wrote: "**Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the Lord**" (Lamentations 3:40). Our nations today are headed for just such a calamity. Each of us needs to make sure that we, as individuals, are not part of the problem.

If we keep our eyes focused on the goal of God's Kingdom, and on Christ our Savior and High Priest who intercedes with the Father for us, we can be assured that as our faults become known to us, and we seek to correct them with God's help, that he will deliver us in the end.

"Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, And does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water; But You brought us out to rich fulfillment" (Psalms 66:8-12).

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